

spirit of our men and women in uniform, and that of the Iraqi people, was reassuring and inspiring.

While the progress made in Iraq is substantial, it must be viewed in the context of the entire Middle East. Iraq can serve as an example and a beacon of hope, but much more complex issues must be addressed.

During my recent trip to the region for consultation with both U.S. and foreign leaders, there was a consistent expression of concern about the continuing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The lack of progress toward a peaceful resolution continues to fan the flames of discontent across the entire region. The continuing violence breeds more violence that will undermine positive developments anywhere else in the region. We must redouble our efforts to find common ground on this difficult issue, if we are ever to achieve a peaceful world and triumph over terror and violence.

There are more challenges ahead, and there will be disappointments. That is clear. It is equally clear that President Bush and his national security team are up to the challenge. President Bush has provided steady, strong leadership in troubled times and will lead us to a safer, more secure future.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, how much time remains?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Six minutes 40 seconds.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask Senator ALLARD if I could proceed for 3 minutes and then he could finish the balance of the time.

Mr. ALLARD. That would be fine.

Mr. LOTT. I ask unanimous consent that that be so.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE 9/11 COMMISSION

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I stood in this general area a couple years ago and spoke out against the need for the 9/11 Commission. I am not generally an advocate of commissions. I think it is an abdication of our responsibility when we do it repeatedly. As a matter of fact, we in the Senate should do the job of investigating what happened or what didn't happen that perhaps should have been leading up to the events of 9/11 and in the aftermath, as we went into Iraq. That is why we have the Armed Services Committee. That is what Senator WARNER, the chairman, is working on. That is why we have the Intelligence Committee. I serve on that committee. We work assiduously to take a good look at the intelligence, to see where the problems have been and see what the solutions are.

Having said that, I think this Commission has shown a great deal of calm and maturity. The leadership of the two senior members, former Governor

Kean and former Congressman Hamilton, has been thoughtful. Members on both sides of the Commission have asked good and tough questions. I may regret saying this when their final report comes out, but I think they have been doing a good job. It is not an easy job because you are trying to deal with hundreds of witnesses and thousands of pages of evidence.

That leads me to the real point. I have had occasion to watch a number of national security advisers to Presidents over my 32 years in Congress, seven different Presidents and their national security advisers. There have been some good ones of both parties but none better than Condoleezza Rice. This is an outstanding individual with a brilliant mind, tremendous insight into what is going on in the world. I could give some anecdotes of why I believe that. For that reason, I am pleased she is going to come before the Commission. She is going to take every question on and give a thoughtful, complete, thorough, and convincing argument. She will do fine. I think it is unnecessary. Maybe this whole process of whether she would testify has been unnecessary.

From a public relations standpoint, yes, she should have gone from the very beginning. But there are some important separation-of-powers principles involved. Executive privilege is not insignificant. It is something that is woven in the very fabric of this country. We cannot have a process where slowly but surely, in President after President after President, executive privilege and separation of powers have been eroded.

I have watched it. Yes, former national security advisers have waived their executive privilege and gone before Congress. I thought it was a mistake, regardless of party. I have always spoken out against that. So I do think it is important we say this is not a precedent. It should not and cannot be a precedent, or you are not going to have men and women willing to give in confidence the best advice to the President or to give him the information he needs to hear without concern that some day some congressional person will have that person before them testifying.

This is not an insignificant matter. It is very significant. Under these extraordinary circumstances, we need to have everybody we can testify in full, not so we can blame somebody but so we can plan for the future and do a better job next time.

Condoleezza Rice will be the key to that effort.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Colorado.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I thank the Senators from Virginia and Mississippi for their comments. I want to talk a little bit about the economy.

First of all, I want to point out this President inherited a bad economy. When he inherited this bad economy, he could have taken the old solution to all of our problems: You increase taxes and spending and somehow the other things are going to be better.

He took a new approach. The new concept was you need to cut taxes. By cutting taxes, you are going to stimulate productivity and the economy is going to grow. So the President courageously stepped forward, got his tax package passed out of the House and the Senate. The major tax packages were in 2001 and 2003. We did some in other years. We did a little dribbling and working to reduce taxes. The fact is, by reducing taxes during a time when we had taxes at an all-time high, we have helped the economy.

There is a lot of talk on the floor about how bad the economy has been, but that reaches back into the bad economy this President inherited when he moved into the Presidency.

The President's tax package is now beginning to work. Look at the economic indicators put out by the Joint Economic Committee in February of 2004. We talk about the unemployment rate, and that is going down. Employment is going up. Wages are going up. We have a chart that shows real gross private domestic investment going up. Corporate profits are going up. We have another chart here that shows farm income is going up. We have sources of personal income. That is going up. Total output, income and spending, those are going up. Production and business activity is now going up. Common stocks, prices, and yields are all going up in response to the President's economic package.

I went on the Internet this morning to see what was being said there: Consumer spending strong, and business investment rebounding. It had a chart showing how those factors were coming together. That is this morning. Then we see another chart that shows jobless claims continuing to trend downward. It shows an increase in the jobless rate at the time the President inherited this economy, and now we see, as his tax package has had an opportunity to go into effect, the jobless rate is going down.

The President's package for stimulating our economy has worked. It would be a shame if we walked away from that and went back to the old solutions which were to increase spending and raise taxes. That is the wrong solution at the wrong time.

The right solution is what the President has talked about. We need to cut taxes and spending in order that this economy continues to prosper, as we have seen in the figures from the last several months.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nevada.