Americans, further evidence that America needs a new direction. Cry as they might, Republicans cannot escape the record. History will record this as the do-nothing Congress of 2006 and it will be forever, most likely, the 1948 do-nothing Congress. No one is happy about this situation, contrary to what Republican leaders say.

We have 15 days left. I respectfully suggest to the other side it is time to get to work on the real problems, not the estate tax.

Mr. DURBIN addressed the Chair.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senator from Nebraska is next.

Mr. REID. I have not yielded the floor. I still have the floor.

I yield for a question.

Mr. DURBIN. I see the Senator from Nebraska, and I will not take much time, but I would ask a question of the Senator from Nevada.

The Senator from Nevada has been in the Congress as long as I have. We came together in 1982. We have seen a lot of things happen. I ask the Senator from Nevada if, in his time in serving in Congress, he has ever seen a worse special interest bill than this bill which would repeal the estate tax which affects about 2 families out of every 1,000, families who are the wealthiest in America, that the Republican leadership in the House and Senate insist we have to reduce their taxes before we can ever consider giving an increase in the minimum wage to 11 million workers who get up every morning and go to work? For 9 straight years, the Republican leadership in the White House and Congress has said to these hard-working Americans, no pay raise. Now—now—comes the deal. The Republicans have finally said: OK, all right, our conscience has finally gotten to us—or maybe it is the fear of losing our congressional pay raise—but now we will consider the minimum wage pay raise as long as you will cut the taxes on the wealthiest people in America as part of the bargain.

Has the Senator from Nevada ever seen a worse special interest bargain in 24 years?

Mr. REID. I say to my friend, the distinguished minority whip, the time we have spent on this Senate floor dealing with estate tax, think what we could have done in energy, health care, education, the debt, but they are spending it on this massive debt increase. Hundreds of billions of dollars we will increase the debt—this year's deficit—the debt over the next 10 years. I have never seen anything like it.

Mr. DURBIN. I would like to ask the Senator from Nevada this—and he goes to the point. It is not just the basic injustice and unfairness of saying you will not give the hardest working, lowest paid Americans any increase in their hourly wage unless you give the wealthiest Americans a tax break that, frankly, only but a few of them have asked for.

I ask the Senator from Nevada, the outcome of this deal—if they pull it off—will increase the debt of America, will increase the money we have to borrow from China and Japan and Korea and Saudi Arabia, will leave a greater debt for our children so the Republican dream of reducing the estate tax for the wealthiest people in America will come true. Does the Senator from Nevada think that increasing America's debt, cutting taxes in the midst of a war, is sound evidence of fiscal conservatism?

Mr. REID. This increases the national debt by hundreds of billions of dollars. I ask my friends on the other side of the aisle, how could you let this happen? I say that. I plead: How can you let this happen?

We will try to stop it. We would like a little help. How can you let this happen? I am really troubled. I cannot understand how they would even have the audacity to bring this up: a $2.10 increase over 2 or 3 years—it is not all at once—and a massive, immediate cessation of the richest of the rich having to pay basically any taxes on their estates.

Mr. DURBIN. Last question I would like to ask the Senator——

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The time of the minority in morning business has expired.

Mr. REID. I will use my leader time.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask the Senator from Nevada to yield for one further question. I thank the Senator from Nebraska for his patience.

We have struggled long and hard over the last several months to ask the Republican leadership in the Senate to bring up the issues, the bills, the laws that people care about: reducing the cost of gasoline for working families and businesses and farmers in Nevada, Illinois, Texas, and Nebraska; working on doing something about the 46 million uninsured Americans; dealing with the issues that we face when people cannot afford to send their kids to college; dealing with the real security of America so we live up to the 9/11 Commission recommendations to make America safe.

I will ask the Senator from Nevada, in closing, as we have asked time and time and time again, to bring up the real issues that count, such as an increase in the minimum wage, is it not a fact that, instead, the Republican leadership has pushed aside the real issues, such as money for our troops, pushed aside the energy program which we need for America, and said, instead: We are going to have a parade of constitutional amendments that are extreme—many of them—and then we have to always come back to repealing the estate tax? It is a higher priority to them than anything I have mentioned.

Mr. REID. Legislative heaven, obviously, for the Republicans in this Congress is the estate tax.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the Senator.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska is recognized.

Mr. HAGEL. Thank you, Mr. President.

MIDDLE EAST—A REGION IN CRISIS

Mr. HAGEL. Mr. President, the Middle East today is a region in crisis. After 3 weeks of escalating and continuing violence, the potential for wider regional conflict becomes more real each day. The hatred in the Middle East is being driven deeper and deeper into the fabric of the region, which will make any lasting and sustained peace effort very difficult to achieve.

How do we realistically believe that a continuation of the systematic destruction of an American friend, the country and people of Lebanon, is going to enhance America's image and give us the trust and credibility to lead a lasting and sustained peace effort in the Middle East?

The sickening slaughter on both sides must end, and it must end now. President Bush must call for an immediate cease-fire. This madness must stop. The Middle East today is more combustible and complex than it has ever been. Uncertain popular support for regime legitimacy continues to weaken governments in the Middle East. Economic stagnation, persistent unemployment, deepening despair, and wider unrest enhance the ability of terrorists to recruit and succeed.

An Iran with nuclear weapons raises the specter of broader proliferation and a fundamental strategic realignment in the region, creating more regional instability. America's approach to the Middle East must be consistent and sustained, and it must understand the history, the interests, and the perspectives of our regional friends and allies.

The United States will remain committed to defending Israel. Our relationship with Israel is a special and historic one. But it need not and cannot be at the expense of our Arab and Muslim relationships. That is an irresponsible and dangerous false choice.

Achieving a lasting resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is as much in Israel's interest as any other country in the world. Unending war will continually drain Israel of its human capital, resources, and energy as it continually fights for its survival.

The United States and Israel must understand that it is not in their long-term interests to allow themselves to become isolated in the Middle East and the world. Neither can allow themselves to drift into an ''us against the world'' global optic or zero-sum game. That would marginalize America's global leadership, our trust and influence, further isolating Israel, and it would prove disastrous for both countries, as well as the region. It is in Israel's interest, as much as ours, that the United States be seen by all states in the Middle East as fair. This is the currency of trust.

The world has rightly condemned the despicable actions of Hezbollah and

Hamas terrorists who attacked Israel and kidnapped Israeli soldiers. Israel has the undeniable right to defend itself against aggression. This is the right of all nations.

Hezbollah is a threat to Israel, to Lebanon, and to all who strive for lasting peace in the Middle East. However, military action alone will not destroy Hezbollah or Hamas. Extended military action is tearing Lebanon apart, killing innocent civilians, devastating its economy and infrastructure, and creating a humanitarian disaster, further weakening Lebanon's fragile democratic government, strengthening popular Muslim and Arab support for Hezbollah, and deepening hatred of Israel's position across the Middle East. The pursuit of tactical military victories at the expense of the core strategic objective of Arab-Israeli peace is a hollow victory. The war against Hezbollah and Hamas will not be won on the battlefield.

To achieve a strategic shift in the conditions for Middle East peace, the United States must use the global condemnation of terrorist acts as the basis for substantive change. For a lasting and popularly supported resolution, only a strong Lebanese Government and a strong Lebanese Army, backed by the international community, can rid Lebanon of these corrosive militias and terrorist organizations.

President Bush and Secretary Rice must become and remain deeply engaged in the Middle East. Only U.S. leadership can build a consensus of purpose among our regional and international partners. To lead and sustain U.S. engagement, the President should appoint a statesman of global stature, experience, and ability to serve as his personal envoy to the region. This individual would report directly to the President and be empowered with the authority to speak and act for the President. Former Secretaries of State Baker and Powell fit this profile.

The President must publicly decry the slaughter today and work toward an immediate cease-fire in the Middle East. The U.N. Security Council must urgently adopt a new binding resolution that provides a comprehensive political, security, and economic framework for Lebanon, Israel, and the region—a framework that begins with the immediate cessation of violence.

I strongly support the deployment of a robust international force along the Israel-Lebanon border to facilitate a steady deployment of a strengthened Lebanese Army into southern Lebanon to eventually assume responsibility for security and the rule of law.

America must listen carefully to its friends, its partners in the region. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and others—countries that understand the Middle East far better than we do—must commit to help resolve today's crisis, and they must be active partners in helping realize the already-agreed-upon two-state solution.

The core of all challenges in the Middle East remains the underlying Arab-Israeli conflict. The failure to address this root cause will allow Hezbollah, Hamas, and other terrorists to continue to sustain popular Muslim and Arab support—a dynamic that continues to undermine America's standing in the region and the Governments of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and others, whose support is critical for any Middle East resolution.

The United States should engage our Middle East and international partners to revive the Beirut Declaration, or some version of that declaration, proposed by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and adopted unanimously by the Arab League in March of 2002. In this historic initiative, the Arab world recognized Israel's right to exist and sought to establish a path toward a two-state solution and broader Arab-Israeli peace. Even though Israel could not accept it as it was written, it represented a very significant starting point—starting point—document initiated by Arab countries. Today, we need a new Beirut Declaration-type initiative. We squandered the last one.

The concept and intent of the 2002 Beirut Declaration is as relevant today as it was in 2002. An Arab-initiated, Beirut-type declaration would reinvest regional Arab States with a stake in achieving progress toward Israeli-Palestinian peace. This type of initiative would offer a positive alternative—a positive alternative—vision for Arab populations to the ideology and goals of Islamic extremists. The United States must explore this approach as part of its diplomatic engagement in the Middle East.

Lasting peace in the Middle East, and stability and security for Israel, will come only from a regionally oriented political settlement. Former American Middle East Envoy Dennis Ross once observed that in the Middle East a process is necessary because a process absorbs events. Without a process, events become crises. He was right. Look at where we are today in the Middle East with no process. Crisis diplomacy is no substitute for sustained, day-to-day engagement.

America's approach to Syria and Iran is inextricably tied to Middle East peace. Whether or not they were directly involved in the latest Hezbollah and Hamas aggression in Israel, both countries exert influence in the region in ways that undermine stability and security. As we work with our friends and allies to deny Syria and Iran any opportunity to further corrode the situation in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, both Damascus and Tehran must hear from America directly.

As John McLaughlin, the former Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, recently wrote in the Washington Post—and I quote Mr. McLaughlin—

Even superpowers have to talk to bad guys. The absence of a diplomatic relationship with Iran and the deterioration of the one with Syria—two countries that bear enormous responsibility for the current crisis [in the Middle East]—leave the United States with fewer options and levers than might otherwise have been the case.

Distasteful as it might have been to have or to maintain open and normal relations with such states, the absence of such relations ensures that we will have more blind spots than we can afford and that we will have to deal through surrogates on issues of vital importance to the United States.''

Ultimately, the United States will need to engage Iran and Syria with an agenda open to all areas of agreement and disagreement. For this dialog to have any meaning or possible lasting relevance, it should encompass the full agenda of issues.

There is very little good news coming out of Iraq today. Increasingly vicious sectarian violence continues to propel Iraq toward civil war.

The U.S. announcement last week to send additional U.S. troops and military police back into Baghdad reverses last month's decision to have Iraqi forces take the lead in Baghdad and represents a dramatic setback for the U.S. and the Iraqi Government.

The Iraqi Government has limited ability to enforce the rule of law in Iraq, especially in Baghdad. Green zone politics appear to have little bearing or relation to the realities of the rest of Iraq. The Iraqis will continue to face difficult choices over the future of their country.

The day-to-day responsibilities of governing and security will soon have to be assumed by Iraqis. This is not about setting a timeline. This is about understanding the implications of the forces of reality. This reality is being determined by Iraqis, not Americans.

America is bogged down in Iraq and this is limiting our diplomatic and military options. The longer America remains in Iraq in its current capacity, the deeper the damage to our force structure—particularly the U.S. Army.

And it will continue to place more limitations on an already dangerously overextended force structure that will further limit our options and public support.

The Middle East crisis represents a moment of great danger, but it is also an opportunity.

Crisis focuses the minds of leaders and the attention of nations. The Middle East need not be a region forever captive to the fire of war and historical hatred. It can avoid this fate if the United States pursues sustained and engaged leadership worthy of our history, purpose, and power. America cannot fix every problem in the world; nor should it try. But we must get the big issues and important relationships right and concentrate on those.

We know that without engaged and active American leadership, the world is more dangerous. The United States must focus all of its leadership and resources on ending this madness in the Middle East now.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. JOHNSON. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

The minority has no remaining time in morning business.

Mr. JOHNSON. I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes as in morning business.

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

HONORING ROGER ANDAL

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to my very close friend, Roger Andal. Last month, Roger died following a long battle with Crohn's disease. His passing is a tremendous loss to our veterans, as well as a personal loss for my family and me. His friendship will be terribly missed.

Roger began his extraordinary service to our country as a combat medic with the Army's Fourth Infantry Division during the war in Vietnam. It was Roger's duty to help his fallen comrades and tend to their wounds, and it was a responsibility that came naturally to him.

He braved enemy fire to ensure the injured were safely evacuated from the battlefield. Roger often did so with little regard to his own personal safety and was ultimately wounded in battle.

He received the Purple Heart, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Campaign Medal, and the Army Commendation Medal for his service to his country. But for Roger what mattered most were not the commendations, but the knowledge that he had helped his fellow soldiers.

After returning stateside, Roger dedicated himself to working on behalf of our Nation's veterans. For the next 30 years, he was active in various veterans' causes, and at the time of his death he was completing his service as the South Dakota commander of the Disabled American Veterans.

The creed of the Disabled American Veterans is ''building better lives for America's disabled veterans and their families.'' I think it's profoundly true to say Roger personified these words and made them his life's mission.

As a former Army medic, Roger understood both the physical and emotional wounds of war. Some soldiers survive the harrows of battle, only to suffer severe injuries including brain trauma and amputated limbs. These veterans required lifelong medical treatment, and Roger was adamant that they receive it.

Roger also recognized that some wounds heal long after the battle is over, if at all. That is why he consistently called upon his congressional Representatives to increase funding for posttraumatic stress disorder initiatives.

Roger fought to make sure homeless veterans were sheltered. He worked to make sure that soldiers returning from war were transitioned back to society with as much ease as possible. But the issue most identified with Roger was mandatory funding.

I have introduced mandatory funding legislation in each of the past three Congresses, and Roger was the bill's most tireless and dedicated champion. If it were possible to pass mandatory funding based on Roger's passion and commitment, enacting this legislation into law would have happened long ago.

Mandatory funding is long overdue, and in honor of Roger, I believe we must redouble our efforts to ensure the VA health care program has guaranteed funding adequate to provide veterans' health care each and every year.

For over three decades Roger never shied away from a fight. He was motivated by his sincere belief that if you make a promise to the men and women placed in harm's way, then you have a responsibility to honor those commitments when they return.

But what Roger valued most was honesty. He was a straight-shooter, and it was one of his most endearing personality traits. If you asked Roger a question, he would give you a straight answer—and he expected one in return.

It speaks volumes about Roger's character that his peers continually elected him to leadership positions within the Disabled American Veterans. In addition to holding every elected position in the Sioux Falls chapter of the DAV, Roger served twice as the State commander, and represented South Dakota on the executive national committee.

On a personal note, Roger had a close working relationship with my staff and in particular with my Chief of Staff, Drey Samuelson. He was an invaluable resource and often provided insight on legislation and veterans' benefits programs. Despite occasional legislative setbacks, Roger always kept a positive outlook on the process.

In the days following Roger's death some veterans have expressed how much more difficult the fight will be without Roger to lead the charge. Without question, Roger's voice will be missed. But we should remember that the best way to honor Roger's life is to fight wholeheartedly for the causes he championed.

Mr. President, my thoughts are with Roger's wife Peggy and their two children during this difficult time. Roger left us much too soon, but his commitment to our veterans and his service to the public and to our Nation will continue to inspire us all.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MARTINEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. MARTINEZ. I rise to speak on S. 3711. My understanding is, through a unanimous consent agreement, I am permitted to speak for 10 minutes on the bill.

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

GULF OF MEXICO ENERGY SECURITY ACT

Mr. MARTINEZ. Mr. President, over the last several days we have been discussing the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act. Today, in an hour or so from now, we will have a cloture vote on this very important legislation. For my part, I have tried to make it clear how important this legislation is to my State of Florida, how important the protection of our fragile environment in our State is to our people. As a young 15-year-old, I came to Florida as many people who have been transplanted from elsewhere, to enjoy a Florida lifestyle. Since that time I have been in love with this wonderful State, what it has to offer to people, to families, and the great traditions Florida has had as a place to enjoy the outdoors. I have on countless occasions enjoyed Florida's beaches, fishing, enjoyed other outdoor pursuits which are such a natural part of what Florida is about.

As the years have gone by, I have passed that on and instilled that in my children, as I did a little bit yesterday, passing it on to my grandchildren when we were enjoying New Smyrna beach yesterday, under that hot Florida sun, but also the beautiful sandy beaches. Part of what this bill is about for Floridians is protecting the future, passing that love on to other generations by ensuring that Florida remains pristine, that it remains the kind of place a visitor from all over the country would choose to come to enjoy year after year and where other Florida families might begin to develop and enjoy their own family traditions, enjoying the great outdoors Florida has to offer, our sandy beaches, the fishing, and other recreational opportunities that come about as a result of this wonderful natural habitat we have.

But also protecting it is important as an economic consideration. It is part of what makes Florida's economy so thriving and important—the tourism. Before there was Disney and Universal Studios, and those types of attractions, it was the beaches and the climate that brought folks to Florida to come and enjoy. At the end of the day, that is our calling card.

Protecting Florida's environment is not something we take lightly. Protecting the environment in Florida is not something that is a Republican or a Democratic issue. That is why Senator NELSON, my colleague from Florida, and I have worked so closely together over the last year or so as this great debate has raged on about what to do to protect Florida, while at the same time yielding ever more increasing pressures to drill and explore in the Outer Continental Shelf.

In the Senate, I maintain another tradition—the tradition of other Florida Senators, Connie Mack, Bob Graham, others who have fought over time to protect Florida's treasures from those who don't share our values. I am proud to be part of that tradition.