Last week we offered the Republicans yet another opportunity to debate. It is my hope they will agree to this debate on Wednesday morning.

I appreciate very much the Republican leader voting for cloture. We are going to finish that bill tomorrow.

It is my hope they will agree to this debate so we can complete this important work; that is, the 9/11 bill, and then turn our attention to the war.

America is losing about 20 soldiers a week, about 3 a day, and spending $280 million a day in Iraq. It is a downward spiral that will continue unless the Senate joins the American people in demanding a new direction in Iraq.

The war hangs over all we do in the Senate this year. Even if we debate this week, we will not be done. We are getting something from the House on the supplemental and we will return to this issue of the supplemental, very likely, and we will continue until there is a change of course. There is very much work to do—the priorities everyone knows about, such as immigration, stem cell; we have the budget ahead of us. There are also issues such as the crisis in the judiciary and the intelligence authorization bill, that will demand our attention in the weeks ahead. I hope we can promptly complete action on the 9/11 bill tomorrow, and I am confident we will do that. We have so much to do.

There is a lot of negativity about what we do here in the Senate, but when you sort through all of it, and I recognize the war in Iraq is hanging over everything we have done—but when you look at what we have done these past few weeks in the history of the 110th Congress, we have done OK. We have been able to do the work on ethics and lobbying. We have done the minimum wage bill. We completed the continuing resolution and we are going to complete 9/11 legislation soon. It appears we are going to be able to do the reform of the Attorney General's problems that have been so much in the press recently. We have confirmed the only appellate court judge who has been brought to the floor. We hope to do another one within the next week or so. We now have another one on the calendar, so we will do that. The Judiciary Committee has three over there they are looking at now. I know the distinguished Republican leader is very concerned about moving appellate judges. We are going to do our best to cooperate with him in that regard.

Simply in closing my remarks today, I recognize we have a difficult situation with Iraq. Sometimes we need to sort through all that and recognize we have been able to accomplish a lot, and it has been done—the only way it can get done—on a bipartisan basis. We have had a few bumps in the road, but if we are patient and willing to recognize there will be bumps in the future, even having both sides not hold any grudges—legislative grudges, at least—I think we have the ability to do a lot more in this Congress.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

WAR ON TERROR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we are fortunate it has been almost 6 years since we have been attacked here at home. There is only one reason for that: We have been on the offense in Afghanistan and in Iraq. A lot of the terrorists who murdered over 3,000 of our innocent civilians in New York on that fateful day are dead. Others of them are incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay, and many others are on the run and dodging our military. That part of the war on terror has been an extraordinary success.

Iraq has not come together in terms of the Government as quickly as we had hoped, and Afghanistan is still a challenge. But I wonder if our good friends on the other side of the aisle have any answers to the question: What happens if we precipitously leave? I gather the most recent—in fact, the 17th—different version of Iraq resolutions we are going to see later this week anticipates basically telling the enemy a date on which we will depart. I can remember when most of our friends on the other side of the aisle thought that was a bad idea, but I gather their views must be evolving as to what kind of strategy might be helpful. One thing is clear: If we announce to the enemy when we are leaving, they will come back on that day.

So we will have another Iraq debate this week, and as the majority leader indicated, there will be yet another Iraq debate when the supplemental is before us in a few weeks. This is a debate we are more than willing to engage in.

I would say to the majority leader, as I indicated last week, it would have been possible, I think, to have gotten a unanimous consent agreement to deal with the stem cell issue in a rather short period of time had we chosen to take up another issue that was in the six in 2006 list of commitments the new Democratic majority made to the American people. Having said that, I will be in discussions with the majority leader today and tomorrow about how we might go forward on the Iraq debate. It is certainly his prerogative as the leader of the majority to determine what issue we proceed to, and he and I will meet later today and be discussing that today and tomorrow.

As far as the 9/11 bill is concerned, I supported cloture on that bill. We are anxious to go on and finish it and we should be able to do that after lunch tomorrow.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 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. KYL. 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. KYL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak in morning business for about 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WEBB). Without objection, it is so ordered.

PROGRESS IN IRAQ

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, for weeks, I have been coming to the floor to discuss the signs of progress we are beginning to see as the military implements our new strategy in Iraq. Recent developments are encouraging. They include the following:

First of all, the Iraqi Cabinet approved a national oil compact, which is the beginning of a resolution of what to do with the revenues that are produced from the oil that is produced in Iraq. It is a vital step in ensuring a united Iraq, and Prime Minister Maliki called it a ''gift to all of the Iraqi people.'' This is expected to be approved by the Iraqi legislature this spring.

Next is the capture recently of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq, the successor to al-Zarqawi, in the western outskirts of Baghdad. This represents a continuing increase in the number of terrorist chiefs who have been killed or captured.

Just last week, the Iraqi neighbors meeting was held. It generated a lot of press because both U.S. and Iranian representatives were present. It involved all 16 nations involved in the conflict. It was the neighbors of Iraq, as well as countries such as Great Britain and the United States. It was the largest meeting of foreign countries in Iraq since the summit meeting of the Arab League members in March of 1990. There were working groups established to work on various problems all the countries had—for example, refugees from Iraq who have gone into Syria or Jordan. A special working group was created to try to deal with that issue.

This represents a step forward, all of which illustrates the fact that not only is the new strategy being implemented a military one but it involves diplomatic and economic and political factors as well.

It was interesting that the Prime Minister toured Baghdad to illustrate the security part of the new strategy that is beginning to work. He had been largely confined to the relatively safe Green Zone, as it is called, but on Sunday, he was able to go outside the wire to tour a power station, visit with police, and shake hands with ordinary Baghdad citizens. He attributed his newfound freedom of movement to the success of the Baghdad security plan, and he committed to redouble his efforts, saying: This operation will be accelerated at all levels in numbers and weaponry; we will not back down.

You have also seen successes in places such as Sadr City, where it is pretty clear that the Shiite militias have decided to stand down and not contest the Iraqi and American forces.

In fact, at the conclusion of my remarks, I will have printed in the RECORD two newspaper articles. One was written for the Washington Post on March 11, called ''The 'Surge' is Succeeding,'' by Robert Kagan. While the leaders in Iraq are not yet willing to publicly say the surge is succeeding, clearly evidence of that is on the ground, and at least the media—journalists—are entitled to conclude from what is happening that it is succeeding.

I was in Iraq a couple of weeks ago and was briefed by General Odierno and General Petraeus, as well as others. They all were cautiously optimistic that things were looking better on the ground. They just wanted to caution that there would be good days and bad; that the enemy has a say in this and they will strike back, certainly, all they can. And if the administration were to claim too much in the way of success too early and there was some kind of event that resulted in a lot of violence, there might be a suggestion that the administration was trying to put too nice a gloss on it. So the administration is trying to downplay the successes. But the reality is that there is news of success.

I think that makes all the more distressing and puzzling the effort by a lot of our colleagues not only to downplay the potential for success there but to develop strategies to undercut that success with resolutions that would micromanage the war from the Senate and, indeed, bind the hands of our commanders and our military as they begin to implement this program.

It is hard for me to fathom the amount of time and energy that has been put into the development of these various resolutions—at last count, some 17 different resolutions—that would, in one way or another, criticize the President's plan or try to find some way to stop it from occurring.

What is further puzzling and distressing is the degree to which this appears to be resulting from political considerations. Another one of the pieces I am going to ask to print in the RECORD is an article from March 12—that is today's Roll Call magazine—in which leaders on the Democratic side are quoted as referring to the political aspects of this strategy to try to get resolutions adopted.

The article talks about the Democratic leader's ''abandoning efforts at crafting a bipartisan deal'' and ''instead look to directly tie Republicans to the unpopular conflict. . . .''

The articles goes on to talk about ''the decision to ratchet up their partisan rhetoric''—''their'' meaning Democratic partisan rhetoric—by a resolution that sets ''specific dates for a mass redeployment of troops in Iraq and creating new restrictions on the war effort,'' and, indeed, that is what the latest resolution of the majority leader would do.

But the article goes on to talk about this ''more aggressive push to tar vulnerable Republicans up for re-election in 2008.'' That is not what we should be all about in debating the war in Iraq and designing solutions to ensure that war can be resolved successfully. It should not be about trying to tar vulnerable Members of the opposition party to diminish their reelection prospects in the year 2008.

The chairman of the Democratic Campaign Committee, the distinguished senior Senator from New York, has, according to this Roll Call article, ''warned that Democrats would use the issue as a bludgeon on Republicans up for reelection next year,'' and they quote him as saying:

> The heat on these Republican Senators that are up in '08 is tremendous.

Adding:

> . . . this is a campaign . . . we are going to keep at [it].

To me, that is an illustration of something very wrong with the Democratic Party's approach to this war. Reasonable people can differ about whether we should be there and how we should conduct the operations once there. But we ought to be able to agree that our responsibility is to provide the funding or to cut it off. The President's responsibility as Commander in Chief is to do his best to see that the mission is achieved. That is what we are sending the troops over there to do. That is what General Petraeus was sent there to do. He was confirmed unanimously by this body a month or so ago.

When I was in Iraq, General Petraeus told us: Please see to it that we have what we need to fulfill our mission. Pass the supplemental appropriations bill to fund our effort and don't tie our hands with micromanagement from the Senate.

This is the message from the person we sent over to do the job. It seems to me this would be the wrong time to pull the rug out from under him and pull the rug out from under the troops just as there are signs of success, as I discussed earlier.

It is interesting, too, that there seem to be so many different approaches to this effort to criticize the President and his plan. I mentioned that at last count there are some 17 different resolutions. Somebody called it the ''Goldilocks'' strategy, with the Democratic leader searching for a solution that is neither too hot nor too cold. The real question is: In the House of Representatives, are they going to lose people on the left or the right or did they get it just right, with sufficient numbers of projects in the supplemental appropriations bill to appeal to those who may not like the end result with respect to the Iraq part of the resolution?

Some have labeled it a ''slow bleed'' because it appears to be a solution that doesn't cut off all the funding for the troops at this moment but, rather, over time makes it impossible for us to succeed.

The resolution, as I understand it, says we have to begin withdrawing our troops by a specific date and complete the withdrawal by another specific date. In the past, there has been a fairly good bipartisan consensus for the proposition that is the worst of all worlds, that you don't want to set a timetable for withdrawal because it gives the enemy precisely what they need to calibrate how long they have to hang in there until you are gone and then they can move in and take over and fill the vacuum. So it is a bad proposition, even apart from the political motivation behind it.

It is worth, taking a look at some of the iterations.

We started with S. 2, a nonbinding resolution, that it wasn't in the national interest of the United States to proceed. That was criticized as being nonbinding.

Then we move on to S. Con. Res. 7 that expressed disagreement with the plan. That didn't have sufficient support, so that was replaced by S. 470, the Levin bill. It expressed disagreement with the strategy but in a form the President would be forced to veto.

Then we moved on to the Reid-Pelosi proposal, S. 574. Not surprisingly, this approach had no more support than the others, and so we then moved on to the Biden-Levin proposal. That bill never even saw the light of day. It wasn't even debated.

Now we are down to S. J. Res. 9, a nonbinding resolution encouraging the President to redeploy all, or almost all, of the troops by the end of 2008. This has been described as a goal, and yet the resolution itself provides that it is much more than that; that the troops would, in fact, have to begin being redeployed and be fully redeployed by the end of March of 2008. I don't think this resolution will pass either because, as I said, most people agree setting a timetable for withdrawal is absolutely the worst thing you want to do, even if you don't agree with the troops being there in the first place.

As I said earlier, the amount of time and effort consumed in trying to craft the perfect Iraq resolution is difficult to square with all the other important business we have to do. The majority

leader, the chairmen of the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees, and other important Members of this body have devoted hours and hours to making grammatical edits to this legislation, even though none of it is going to pass.

Frankly, it is a good illustration of why wars should not be micromanaged by Congress. We are not good at conducting wars. That is why we have a Commander in Chief, that is why we have a Joint Chiefs of Staff, that is why we have our military commanders, such as General Petraeus, in whom we have placed a great deal of confidence, who have the experience to conduct these kinds of operations.

I daresay, there are not many of us who have the experience of the distinguished Presiding Officer, and it is important for us not to be armchair quarterbacks when lives are on the line.

Iraq is perhaps the most critical issue facing our country at the moment, and my comments are not meant to suggest that Iraq deserves anything less than a full and fair debate on the floor. It is one thing, however, to have a debate and let each side make its position known and then vote on competing proposals. It is quite another to devote this kind of energy to attempts which appear to be purely political attempts to undercut the President and undercut the mission in Iraq.

I believe the President has chosen a course that has the potential for success. That is why I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks some of the events which have been reported in the media that demonstrate early success. I, frankly, urge my colleagues to turn their energies to find ways to amplify these successes rather than to undercut them.

It is interesting that Lee Hamilton, the chairman of the Baker-Hamilton commission, who has been cited many times by Members on both sides of the aisle, in testimony before the Congress has been insistent that now that the President has laid out a plan, that strategy should have a chance to succeed, that we should give it a chance to succeed.

By the way, even though the President at the time did not indicate what he would be doing specifically, since that report has come out, several of the recommendations have, in fact, been a part of what the administration strategy is following. For example, the strategy of meeting with people in the neighborhood is a followup on one of the Baker-Hamilton recommendations.

I agree with cochairman Lee Hamilton that we should give the strategy in Iraq a chance to succeed and not undercut it at the very moment it appears there are early signs of success with a resolution which, as I said, there had been a bipartisan consensus for that we shouldn't be setting a timetable for withdrawal since that simply plays into enemy hands.

The final document I will ask unanimous consent to be printed in the RECORD when I conclude is a piece from the L.A. Times, dated today, March 12. Headline: ''Do we really need a Gen. Pelosi?'' It refers, of course, to the distinguished Speaker of the House of Representatives, who is supporting the plan that has been put forth in the House of Representatives by the Democratic leadership there. To quote from this L.A. Times.com piece:

> After weeks of internal strife, House Democrats have brought forth their proposal for forcing President Bush to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq by 2008. The plan is an unruly mess: Bad public policy, bad precedent and bad politics. If the legislation passes, Bush says he'll veto it, as well he should.

This comes from the Los Angeles Times, no particular friend of this administration. The Times goes on to say that this kind of micromanagement ''is the worst kind of congressional meddling in military strategy.''

They go on to say:

> By interfering with the discretion of the commander in chief and military leaders in order to fulfill domestic political needs, Congress undermines whatever prospects remain of a successful outcome.

Then they go on to criticize the Speaker and others for trying ''to micromanage the conflict . . . with arbitrary timetables and benchmarks.''

Concluding:

> Congress should not hinder Bush's ability to seek the best possible endgame to this very bad war.

So a paper that does not like the war or support the administration generally, nevertheless, recognizes it should not be micromanaged from the Congress; that if there are any possibilities for it to succeed, we should be following those possibilities.

To sum it up, I simply say this: There is a chance for this strategy to succeed. We should give it a chance to succeed. Early signs are positive. We should not try to micromanage the war from the Congress. Therefore, when these resolutions come before us, we should reject them and allow our military commanders the opportunity that we have asked them to engage in to bring a successful conclusion to this war.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the articles to which I referred be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Washington Post, Mar. 11, 2007]

THE 'SURGE' IS SUCCEEDING

(By Robert Kagan)

A front-page story in The Post last week suggested that the Bush administration has no backup plan in case the surge in Iraq doesn't work. I wonder if The Post and other newspapers have a backup plan in case it does.

Leading journalists have been reporting for some time that the war was hopeless, a fiasco that could not be salvaged by more troops and a new counterinsurgency strategy. The conventional wisdom in December held that sending more troops was politically impossible after the antiwar tenor of the midterm elections. It was practically impossible because the extra troops didn't exist. Even if the troops did exist, they could not make a difference.

Four months later, the once insurmountable political opposition has been surmounted. The nonexistent troops are flowing into Iraq. And though it is still early and horrible acts of violence continue, there is substantial evidence that the new counterinsurgency strategy, backed by the infusion of new forces, is having a significant effect.

Some observers are reporting the shift. Iraqi bloggers Mohammed and Omar Fadhil, widely respected for their straight talk, say that ''early signs are encouraging.'' The first impact of the ''surge,'' they write, was psychological. Both friends and foes in Iraq had been convinced, in no small part by the American media, that the United States was preparing to pull out. When the opposite occurred, this alone shifted the dynamic.

As the Fadhils report, ''Commanders and lieutenants of various militant groups abandoned their positions in Baghdad and in some cases fled the country.'' The most prominent leader to go into hiding has been Moqtada al-Sadr. His Mahdi Army has been instructed to avoid clashes with American and Iraqi forces, even as coalition forces begin to establish themselves in the once off-limits Sadr City.

Before the arrival of Gen. David Petraeus, the Army's leading counterinsurgency strategist, U.S. forces tended to raid insurgent and terrorist strongholds and then pull back and hand over the areas to Iraqi forces, who failed to hold them. The Fadhils report, ''One difference between this and earlier—failed—attempts to secure Baghdad is the willingness of the Iraqi and U.S. governments to commit enough resources for enough time to make it work.'' In the past, bursts of American activity were followed by withdrawal and a return of the insurgents. Now, the plan to secure Baghdad ''is becoming stricter and gaining momentum by the day as more troops pour into the city, allowing for a better implementation of the 'clear and hold' strategy.'' Baghdadis ''always want the 'hold' part to materialize, and feel safe when they go out and find the Army and police maintaining their posts—the bad guys can't intimidate as long as the troops are staying.''

A greater sense of confidence produces many benefits. The number of security tips about insurgents that Iraqi civilians provide has jumped sharply. Stores and marketplaces are reopening in Baghdad, increasing the sense of community. People dislocated by sectarian violence are returning to their homes. As a result, ''many Baghdadis feel hopeful again about the future, and the fear of civil war is slowly being replaced by optimism that peace might one day return to this city,'' the Fadhils report. ''This change in mood is something huge by itself.''

Apparently some American journalists see the difference. NBC's Brian Williams recently reported a dramatic change in Ramadi since his previous visit. The city was safer; the airport more secure. The new American strategy of'' getting out, decentralizing, going into the neighborhoods, grabbing a toehold, telling the enemy we're here, start talking to the locals—that is having an obvious and palpable effect.'' U.S. soldiers forged agreements with local religious leaders and pushed al-Qaeda back—a trend other observers have noted in some Sunni-dominated areas. The result, Williams said, is that ''the war has changed.''

It is no coincidence that as the mood and the reality have shifted, political currents have shifted as well. A national agreement on sharing oil revenue appears on its way to approval. The Interior Ministry has been purged of corrupt officials and of many suspected of torture and brutality. And cracks

are appearing in the Shiite governing coalition—a good sign, given that the rock-solid unity was both the product and cause of growing sectarian violence.

There is still violence, as Sunni insurgents and al-Qaeda seek to prove that the surge is not working. However, they are striking at more vulnerable targets in the provinces. Violence is down in Baghdad. As for Sadr and the Mahdi Army, it is possible they may reemerge as a problem later. But trying to wait out the American and Iraqi effort may be hazardous if the public becomes less tolerant of their violence. It could not be comforting to Sadr or al-Qaeda to read in the New York Times that the United States plans to keep higher force levels in Iraq through at least the beginning of 2008. The only good news for them would be if the Bush administration in its infinite wisdom starts to talk again about drawing down forces.

No one is asking American journalists to start emphasizing the ''good'' news. All they have to do is report what is occurring, though it may conflict with their previous judgments. Some are still selling books based on the premise that the war is lost, end of story. But what if there is a new chapter in the story?

[From Roll Call, Mar. 12, 2007]

REID TO ATTACK ON IRAQ

(By John Stanton and Susan Davis)

With the GOP maintaining a unified front against Democratic efforts to end the Iraq War, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and other party leaders are abandoning efforts at crafting a bipartisan deal on the issue and will instead look to directly tie Republicans to the unpopular conflict, senior leadership aides said Friday.

The decision to ratchet up their partisan rhetoric followed Thursday's announcement of a joint resolution by House and Senate Democrats setting specific dates for a mass redeployment of troops in Iraq and creating new restrictions on the war effort. Reid is expected to bring the resolution to the floor this week following completion of the 9/11 bill, aides said.

According to Democratic leadership aides, Reid, Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Chairman Charles Schumer (N.Y.) and other party leaders hope that a more aggressive push to tar vulnerable Republicans up for re-election in 2008 with the prospect of an open-ended commitment to the war will force enough defections to pass legislation forcing Bush to begin bringing the war to an end.

''If they want to follow Bush over the cliff, that's fine with us,'' one Democratic leadership aide said, adding that Democrats will continue to push the issue between now and the 2008 elections in the hopes of eventually forcing a change in the administration or Congressional Republicans.

Saying Democratic Members ''are close to unanimity in both Houses,'' Schumer accused Republicans of being torn between ''their president who says 'stay the course,' and the American people who demand change'' and warned that Democrats would use the issue as a bludgeon on Republicans up for reelection next year.

''The heat on these Republican Senators that are up in '08 is tremendous,'' Schumer maintained, adding that ''this is a campaign . . . we are going to keep at'' until Reid has enough GOP defections to pass a bill.

According to leadership aides, Democrats have thus far tried to walk a careful line of criticizing GOP opposition to efforts to end the war while not being so harsh as to alienate potential GOP allies. But over the past several weeks ''it's become evident that Republicans have decided to march in lockstep with the president'' and that, at least at this point, a bipartisan solution is unlikely.

As a result, Reid, Schumer and other leaders have decided to pivot to a more confrontational—and partisan—approach starting this week and will attempt to portray opposition to the joint resolution as de facto support for Bush's war plans.

''They have made a politically perilous decision to stand with the president,'' a Democratic aide said, and Reid will attempt to use Bush's low poll numbers and public concern with the war to pressure Republican Members to break ranks.

Senate Republicans, meanwhile, will continue to make the case that Democrats are in disarray on the war and that any efforts to bring about an end to the war amount to a dangerous micromanaging of the war by Congress.

One GOP leadership aide noted that despite early jitters within the Conference, Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has done an excellent job of keeping his Members together and in reasserting Republicans' vaunted discipline. ''Part of our strength in this debate has been staying on message'' and not being dragged in to fights over specific Democratic proposals or process questions, the aide said.

But despite their successes in recent weeks, McConnell and other Republicans acknowledge Iraq is a politically perilous issue for them because of its unpopularity with voters.

In an interview with Roll Call reporters and editors Friday, McConnell said Democrats appear intent on keeping the focus on the war, arguing that Democrats' success with the issue in 2006 has convinced many in the new majority that it is ''the gift that keeps on giving.''

He also said that Senate Democrats appear intent on making it a cornerstone of their 2008 campaign strategy. Pointing to the fact that Democrats have proposed some 17 different Iraq resolutions or bills since November, McConnell maintained ''the best evidence of that is that they keep moving the goal post'' on how they want to deal with Iraq.

''Would I like the election to be about something else? You bet,'' McConnell said, arguing that Republicans would have much better terrain in a fight over the economy.

''We are the economic engine of the world in many ways'' but that fact has become lost in public concern over Iraq, McConnell argued. Iraq has ''just put people in a kind of funky mood,'' he lamented.

But even McConnell—one of the White House's staunchest supporters on the war—acknowledged that conditions on the ground must change and that Iraq will need to demonstrate improvements.

''This is the Iraqis' last chance to get it right. . . . They need to show they can govern right now. Not next year. Not this fall. Now. Right now,'' a clearly upset McConnell said.

Meanwhile, unburdened by having to craft their own policy on funding the Iraq War, House Republicans appear to be unified against the supplemental in its current form.

''There is nearly unanimous opposition in the Republican Conference to any proposal that undermines the troops' ability to fight and win the war on terror,'' said Brian Kennedy, a spokesman for Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio). ''Our Members are committed to sustaining a united front against anything short of full and unqualified funding for the troops.''

The House Republican Conference held a special meeting Friday morning to discuss the spending bill. Multiple Members and aides in attendance said almost all of the chamber's 201 Republican lawmakers are prepared to take the potentially risky vote against a war-funding bill.

House Republican leaders are united in opposition, and Appropriations ranking member Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.) also told the Conference he would vote against the measure.

Much of the rank and file are looking to veteran Rep. Bill Young (R-Fla.) for guidance on how to vote. Young is Rep. John Murtha's (D-Pa.) counterpart on the Appropriations subcommittee on Defense and the most senior Republican in the House.

Young told his colleagues Friday that he was—at that point—prepared to vote against the measure. He said he was reluctant to vote against any funding bill for the military, but that the Democratic bill was unacceptable.

However, Young left open the possibility that he could ultimately support the bill if Democrats remove date specific provisions on troop withdrawal. That appears unlikely, as doing so would result in anti-war Democrats voting against the bill.

Rep. Sam Johnson (R-Texas), a Vietnam War veteran and former prisoner of war, gave the most stirring speech at Conference, attendees said. ''He said, 'We need to call this what it is—a piece of crap,' '' recalled a GOP leadership aide.

House Minority Whip Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) was unusually candid in his whip count last week, stating that he expected all Republicans who voted against the mid-February Iraq resolution to oppose the supplemental, ''give or take one or two.''

There were 17 Republicans who voted with Democrats on that resolution, and two Democrats who voted with Republicans. Of those 17 Republicans, several already have indicated they are likely to oppose the supplemental, including GOP Reps. Tom Davis (Va.), Mark Kirk (Ill.) and Howard Coble (N.C.), and GOP leaders are confident they can whittle that number into the single digits if the underlying bill is not substantially changed before it hits the House floor.

[From the Los Angeles Times, Mar. 12, 2007]

DO WE REALLY NEED A GEN. PELOSI?

After weeks of internal strife, House Democrats have brought forth their proposal for forcing President Bush to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq by 2008. The plan is an unruly mess: bad public policy, bad precedent and bad politics. If the legislation passes, Bush says he'll veto it, as well he should.

It was one thing for the House to pass a nonbinding vote of disapproval. It's quite another for it to set out a detailed timetable with specific benchmarks and conditions for the continuation of the conflict. Imagine if Dwight Eisenhower had been forced to adhere to a congressional war plan in scheduling the Normandy landings or if, in 1863, President Lincoln had been forced by Congress to conclude the Civil War the following year. This is the worst kind of congressional meddling in military strategy.

This is not to say that Congress has no constitutional leverage—only that it should exercise it responsibly. In a sense, both Bush and the more ardent opponents of the war are right. If a majority in Congress truly believes that the war is not in the national interest, then lawmakers should have the courage of their convictions and vote to stop funding U.S. involvement. They could cut the final checks in six months or so to give Bush time to manage the withdrawal. Or lawmakers could, as some Senate Democrats are proposing, revoke the authority that Congress gave Bush in 2002 to use force against Iraq.

But if Congress accepts Bush's argument that there is still hope, however faint, that

the U.S. military can be effective in quelling the sectarian violence, that U.S. economic aid can yet bring about an improvement in Iraqi lives that won't be bombed away and that American diplomatic power can be harnessed to pressure Shiites and Sunnis to make peace—if Congress accepts this, then lawmakers have a duty to let the president try this ''surge and leverage'' strategy.

By interfering with the discretion of the commander in chief and military leaders in order to fulfill domestic political needs, Congress undermines whatever prospects remain of a successful outcome. It's absurd for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D–San Francisco) to try to micromanage the conflict, and the evolution of Iraqi society, with arbitrary timetables and benchmarks.

Congress should not hinder Bush's ability to seek the best possible endgame to this very bad war. The president needs the leeway to threaten, or negotiate with, Sunnis and Shiites and Kurds, Syrians and Iranians and Turks. Congress can find many ways to express its view that U.S. involvement, certainly at this level, must not go on indefinitely, but it must not limit the president's ability to maneuver at this critical juncture.

Bush's wartime leadership does not inspire much confidence. But he has made adjustments to his team, and there's little doubt that a few hundred legislators do not a capable commander in chief make. These aren't partisan judgments—we also condemned Republican efforts to micromanage President Clinton's conduct of military operations in the Balkans.

Members of Congress need to act responsibly, debating the essence of the choice the United States now faces—to stay or go—and putting their money where their mouths are. But too many lives are at stake to allow members of Congress to play the role of Eisenhower or Lincoln.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this morning I held a hearing in Chicago at the University of Illinois, Chicago medical campus. It was a hearing to discuss the challenges we face with returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. It was clear from the turnout at that hearing there is an intense interest in this subject. Much of it was brought on by the Washington Post front-page story of a few weeks ago about the now infamous Building 18 at Walter Reed Hospital.

Like many Members of Congress, I have visited Walter Reed many times to see Illinois soldiers and to check in to see how things were going. None of us were ever taken across the street to Building 18. I didn't know it existed. But the graphic images of the building, which was worse than a flophouse motel with mold on the walls and rat droppings and evidence of roaches and bugs, where we were housing men and women who had just returned from battle with their injuries, has really struck a nerve across America and here on Capitol Hill. It has caused us to ask important and difficult questions about whether we are meeting our obligations to our soldiers and to our veterans, also to ask whether Walter Reed's Building 18 was an isolated example of neglect or symptomatic of a much larger problem and a much greater challenge.

Today in Chicago we talked about the returning vets and soldiers from our perspective in the middle of the country. With the Hines VA Hospital being one of the larger VA hospitals, and with a lot of veterans heading back to that part of the country, we have a real interest in this issue.

It goes without saying we all support our troops. In fact, it is said so often on the Senate floor it becomes an almost empty cliche. Those soldiers, the families, the voters, people of this country have a right to ask each of us: Great. If you support them, what are you doing for them?

We can talk—and I might at the end of these remarks—about our policy in Iraq, but for a moment I want to focus on those who serve our country overseas and come home injured and need a helping hand.

Many of the soldiers who were featured in the Washington Post exposé on Walter Reed had been living in deplorable conditions for months, sometimes years. They have lived in that condition waiting to receive a disability rating to begin rebuilding their lives. So after they fight the enemy, they come home to fight the bureaucracy. Papers are thrown at them. Some of them are in compromised positions because of their physical or mental weakness and they have to become advocates in a system that is not always friendly.

The Washington Post brought to light poor conditions at Walter Reed, but we have to ask the larger question: What about the rest of the hospitals? What about the rest of the soldiers and the veterans?

I joined several of my Democratic colleagues last week in cosponsoring the Dignity for Wounded Soldiers Act of 2007. Our new colleague, Senator CLAIRE MCCASKILL from Missouri, who has become a leader on this issue, joined with Senator OBAMA of my State in introducing a bill that calls for more homes for service members who are still recovering, less paperwork for recovering service members, better case management to cut through the red-tape, better training for caseworkers, better support services, including meal benefits, for recovering service members and their families, and job protections for husbands and wives, moms and dads of wounded service members who have come to stay with and help take care of their loved ones while they are recovering.

Mr. President, you served in Vietnam. At the time of your service, the men and women in uniform were much younger and usually single. Now the soldiers, guardsmen, and reservists who serve in Iraq and Afghanistan are older and usually have a family. So when they come home, their misfortune, their illness, and their injury turn out to be a family concern.

This bill says we should be sensitive to the family needs of these returning service members. Many of the returning troops who are injured need medical attention long after they are discharged. In fact, more of our service members sustain serious brain injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan than in any recent conflict we have known. I have seen several figures about how many Americans serving in the Middle East have suffered head and brain injuries that require a lifetime of continual care. The estimates run from 2,000 to 3,000. When you think of over a million service men and women who have served in that theater, it appears to be a small number but it is a dramatically larger number than we have seen in any previous conflict.

In Vietnam, in previous wars, brain injuries accounted for 1 out of 8 or 12 percent of the injuries. In Iraq and Afghanistan, brain injuries account for 22 percent of the injuries—almost 1 out of 4. Of course, we understand why, with the roadside bombs, the blasts, and the concussions to which these service men and women are subjected. It takes its toll. As many as 2 out of every 10 combat veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are returning with concussions in varying degrees of intensity, and 1.6 million vets have served already in the war. That means 320,000 people require some sort of screening and treatment for traumatic brain injury or head-related injury. That number grows with every new soldier, sailor, marine, and airman deployed.

I am working on legislation now, and I will invite my colleagues to join me, to focus on brain injury because I think that is the significant wound of this war that we cannot ignore. The bill which I am preparing will, among other things, speed up medical research so we can do a better job of diagnosis and treatment. I might add parenthetically that treatment will inure to the benefit of many other people across America dealing with brain injuries or brain-related problems.

We also in this bill encourage the VA to do more outreach to find veterans whose brain injuries may have caused problems in their lives and help bring them back into a system of care and support. The bill requires the Department of Defense and the VA to work more closely together to capture and track returning troops with combat-induced brain trauma and to put money into better equipment for VA medical centers to improve their testing and treatment.

During Vietnam, one in three Vietnam service members who were injured died. In Iraq and Afghanistan, it is one in seven. Battlefield medical care is