

There is no doubt that I and every other Member in this body will do all in our power to protect our troops while they are serving so bravely in Iraq or wherever else their political leaders decide to send them. That is why there was overwhelming Senate support for the Murray resolution, S. Res. 107, which we voted on prior to the Gregg resolution.

I would remind our colleagues that I have fought as hard as anyone in the Congress to ensure that our troops have the equipment and resources they need in Iraq—on some occasions over the objections of the administration and their congressional allies, I might add.

In 2003, the Army identified \$322 million in shortfalls in critical health and safety gear—ranging from body armor, camelback hydration systems, and com-

bat helmets to equipment for deactivating high-explosives—all priorities that the Rumsfeld Pentagon and Bush administration failed to provide for in their initial budgets. I offered an amendment to the emergency appropriations bill to resolve these problems. Unfortunately, the Bush administration opposed this legislation, and the amendment was defeated along party lines with the help of the very same Senators who are now claiming to be supporting our troops.

In 2004, we tried a different approach—requiring the Department of Defense to reimburse military personnel who bought equipment with their own funds for military service in Iraq and Afghanistan that the Rumsfeld Pentagon had failed to provide. This time, despite ardent objections of Secretary Rumsfeld's Pentagon, Congress approved the legislation in October 2004. President Bush signed the bill into law. We approved similar legislation in 2005 to further extend this benefit as troops, their families, and their communities continued to dig into their own pockets to buy needed life-saving equipment for use on the battlefield.

Last year, the difficulties associated with equipment shortfalls posed a far more serious problem. I offered an amendment to address a \$17 billion budget shortfall to replace and repair thousands of war-battered tanks, aircraft, and vehicles. Without these additional resources, the Army Chief of Staff claimed that U.S. Army readiness would deteriorate even further.

That said, still more remains to be done if the men and women on active duty, in the Reserves and National Guard are to be fully equipped and ready to defend our country. We need to make certain that our troops have the resources they need to stay ready to fight wherever and whenever duty calls. Regrettably, the war in Iraq is actually draining these resources and making us less safe. That is why I am going to work to continue restocking our troops' equipment inventories to restore their readiness and assure their protection.

Voting for a resolution expressing support for the troops is not the same as making concrete decisions to actually do so. Making sure they are fully equipped and that the mission they have been sent to do is achievable is a fundamental part of meaningfully supporting the troops. For me and many others in this body, our vote in support of the Reid resolution, S.J. Res 9, was a vote to support our troops by mandating a different direction in the current failed policy in Iraq, namely the phased redeployment of our combat troops from Iraq, and a narrowing of the mission for those who remain.

I will continue to stand up for what I believe is a necessary change in course in Iraq and in American strategy. I will continue to fight to reverse the President's failed policy which has made us less safe, which has created a safe haven for extremists and terrorists in Iraq, and which has undermined the moral and political standing of the United States around the world.

Most important, I will continue to stand up for our brave men and women in uniform. I will continue to fight for increased funding for body armor and other critical needs. I will continue to fight for funding for our military personnel to keep them safe and effective and to ensure they are not forgotten if they come home injured and in need of care.

I will continue to call for meaningful actions in this Congress to redirect funding away from major combat operations, while ensuring that we have the means and tools necessary to continue vital training and equipping of Iraqi security forces, counter terrorism operations, and the diplomatic, political, and economic offensive and strategies that are the key elements to finding a solution to the crisis in Iraq and in the wider region.

I refuse to be cowed or bullied by false choices. It is long overdue that we stand up to unreasonable arguments, conflated logic, attacks against dissent and debate, and most important, failed policies which are making our country less safe, each and every day.

#### HEALTHY FAMILIES ACT

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, on Thursday, March 15, 2007, I proudly joined Senator KENNEDY as a cosponsor of the Healthy Families Act. This legislation will provide full-time employees with up to 7 paid sick days a year so that they can take care of their own medical needs or the medical needs of family members. Part-time employees would receive a pro-rata amount of paid sick leave. All employers—public and private—with at least 15 employees would be covered by the Healthy Families Act.

Today, 57 million workers in the United States do not have paid sick days. Thus, when faced with either a personal or family medical issue, they are forced to choose between caring for themselves or their loved ones and

going to work to keep food on the table and a paycheck in the mail. This is not acceptable. People get sick every day. They should have the right to get medical treatment without jeopardizing their jobs or harming the people around them. The Healthy Families Act would guarantee them that right.

According to Harvard University's Global Working Families Project, 139 nations provide some sort of paid sick days; 177 of those nations guarantee at least a week of annual sick pay. The United States, however, has no such guarantee—the federal Family and Medical Leave Act provides only unpaid sick leave for serious personal or family illnesses. This lack of paid sick leave puts our Nation's workforce, both present and future, at risk.

As ranking member of the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I am extremely conscious of the regulatory burden that our businesses face—particularly our small businesses. I believe that government should avoid weighing down small businesses with unnecessary regulations. However, the more I have examined this issue, the more obvious it becomes that this legislation benefits both employees and employers.

It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that healthy employees are the key to a productive and vibrant economy. Healthy employees are more productive and often more efficient. But, without paid sick days, many employees will go to work rather than take time off to get regular preventative medical checkups or to recover from an attacking illness or to care for a sick child. Thus, they will get sick more often, and their illnesses will spread. Employees who opt to come to work when sick can make their condition worse or even spread their illness to coworkers. For a business, it is far more costly to cope with a depleted staff or to search for a replacement when an employee is suffering from an extended illness than it is to provide just 7 sick days. Providing employees with a small number of paid sick days is a simple and commonsense fix that will save businesses time and money.

In addition, I have heard that small businesses often complain that they want to offer this benefit but are unable to and need a level playing field. This legislation would offer them just that.

Mr. President, I hope my colleagues will take a look at the Healthy Families Act and will join me in cosponsoring it.

#### ASSAULT WEAPONS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, the National Rifle Association leadership has stated repeatedly that a ban on assault weapons is ineffective and unnecessary. They assert that guns labeled as assault weapons are rarely used in violent crimes and that most people use them for hunting. However, despite these repeated assertions, the list of