

about one-third of Iraq's territory. Yesterday, just 1 month after this strategy became fully manned, Democrats are declaring it a failure and asking us to rally behind a 1½-page alternative that raises more questions, frankly, than it answers.

We have been down this road before. When the President decided to change course in Iraq last year, Democrats said his new strategy wouldn't work. They called it a failure before it began. Now just 1 month after that strategy became fully manned, they are calling it a failure again, even as it has started to show signs of military success.

The Iraq Foreign Minister told us what would happen if America walks away from this fight right now: a sharp increase in violence, thousands of civilian deaths, and a regional conflict that could involve several other countries in that area. Yet the Democratic leadership has yet to address the consequences of withdrawal. Here is their response to concerns about a victory by al-Qaida, genocide, and a regional war in the Middle East: Blame Bush. That may work on the stump, but it is not a very sophisticated foreign policy, and it is not going to solve the great problems we face in Iraq and in the broader Middle East.

Fortunately, many brave people are facing this problem head-on. Our top commander in Iraq says he can win this fight. He told us he wouldn't risk a single American life if he didn't think he could. All he is asking for is time. Can we at least give him what we agreed to in May?

This amendment is not a responsible alternative to the Petraeus plan. It is a page and a half of vague proposals.

Now, look, all of us are frustrated with the war, but we have committed to listen to General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker. We did so through legislation. We need to listen to our top commander in the field. He deserves 60 days. More than 160,000 American soldiers and marines are fighting in Iraq right now. They believe in this mission. They are executing the plan, and they have a leader. He is asking for more time. Let's be fair and honor the legislation we passed in May. Let's wait for the report.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Levin-Reed amendment requires the President to take steps to responsibly end the war that the country and our brave men and women in uniform deserve and demand, but it does not set specific troop levels and, certainly, schedules other than what we have already indicated, and that is the House-passed version, similar to ours, 120 days to start redeploying troops; as of April 1, according to the House, and May 1, according to us. There must be a change of mission. That change of mission will be directed toward counterterrorism, protecting our assets in the area, and also training the Iraqis. That is simply what it says.

Senators CARL LEVIN and JACK REED are uniquely qualified to offer this amendment. They have been joined in this amendment by others, including Senator HAGEL. This amendment sets a firm date and an end date to transition the mission to begin the reduction of U.S. forces. I have talked about that. It limits the U.S. mission.

This policy of the President—it is not Petraeus' policy; it is the President's—has, during the last 6 months, caused the deaths of over 600 more American soldiers and cost the American taxpayers more than \$60 billion. The amendment offered by the distinguished Senator from Virginia, Mr. WEBB, was a step in the right direction. It was defeated. We were not allowed to vote on that. It was offered to give our troops the relief they need—15 months in country, 15 months out of country. That is serious and important to our troops.

Our troops are in a difficult position. We are 3,000 officers short. The morning news reports that 13 percent of recruits, even though they are 15 percent down in recruitments, 13 percent of those they have, even though they have lowered qualifications significantly, 13 percent have criminal records and are going into the military.

Of course, the amendment that is offered by Senators LEVIN and REED requires that the reduction in force be part of a comprehensive diplomatic, regional, political, and economic effort.

The votes we have taken on Iraq thus far make two things very clear: First, the Democratic caucus is united in our commitment to changing the course of this Iraq intractable civil war. Our resolve has never been stronger. Second, until and unless the President awakens to his grievous misjudgments, it will take significant Republican support to end the war.

This week's vote on the Webb amendment was not encouraging. The Republican leadership blocked an up-or-down vote on an amendment to support our troops by increasing rest time between deployments. Republicans have every right to vote against bills and amendments they oppose. If they oppose troop readiness, let them go on record voting against it. But to block an amendment like that shows clearly that some Republicans are protecting the President and not the troops. Plenty of Republicans are talking the right way on Iraq now. They are expressing their disapproval for the President's policy, and this is a welcome step. But speeches won't end the war; only votes will.

We have a constitutional obligation. Section 1, article 8 says that we have an obligation to take care of our troops. We have a constitutional obligation. When we return to the Levin-Reed amendment next week, a final vote will come. We hope it is not blocked again procedurally. I hope all my colleagues, Democratic and Republican alike, will embrace this oppor-

tunity to finally end a war that has caused our country so much harm.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of H.R. 1585, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1585) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2008 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Nelson (NE) (for Levin) amendment No. 2011, in the nature of a substitute.

Levin amendment No. 2087 (to amendment No. 2011), to provide for a reduction and transition of U.S. forces in Iraq.

Reed amendment No. 2088 (to amendment No. 2087), to change the enactment date.

Cornyn amendment No. 2100 (to amendment No. 2011), to express the sense of the Senate that it is in the national security interest of the United States that Iraq not become a failed state and a safe haven for terrorists.

Dorgan/Conrad amendment No. 2135 (to amendment No. 2011), relative to bringing Osama bin Laden and other leaders of al-Qaida to justice.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 9:30 a.m. shall be for debate on amendment No. 2135, as amended, with the Senator from North Dakota, Mr. DORGAN, and the Senator from New Hampshire, Mr. SUNUNU, each controlling 10 minutes.

The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, might I inquire again as to the schedule of the vote?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The vote is presently scheduled for 9:30 or, if the speaking engagements end sooner, at the conclusion of those speaking engagements, at the back end of the time. The vote will not be shifted forward in order to accommodate Senators who are counting on the 9:30 vote beginning.

Mr. WARNER. I thank the Chair.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized for 10 minutes. There is 8½ minutes remaining.

Mr. DORGAN. Would the Chair remind me when I have consumed half of that time? I want to yield the remainder of the time to Senator CONRAD.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. I will.

Mr. DORGAN. In about 4 minutes, let me describe an amendment that is very simple. Yesterday, we received a report—it is described in today's paper—