

today are people who have criminal records.

Because our manpower and equipment is in Iraq, we are not committing the resources to hunt down our No. 1 enemy: bin Laden and his al-Qaida network. Because we are bogged down in Iraq, we are not fully engaged in the global challenge of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and the Middle East, among others.

The moral authority of our great Nation has suffered grave damage, with our former allies refusing to stand with us in even greater numbers.

Has the war in Iraq made America safer? There is no question it has not.

The surge may have provided a temporary window for the Iraq Government to make progress, but it is becoming increasingly clear every day the Iraq Government has squandered that opportunity. Even now, with the war in its sixth year, President Bush has failed to articulate an exit strategy.

A person running for President, Senator MCCAIN, has said we should be there another 50 or 100 years.

President Bush likes to say we will only leave Iraq once victory has been achieved. It is time for the President to be honest with the American people. What does victory look like to President Bush? How does all this end?

We must not commit our courageous troops to the endless task of policing another Nation's bloody civil war. The job of America's Armed Forces—a job to which they risk and often give their lives and limbs—is to protect our country and its interests. It is time to recommit to that crucial purpose and begin a responsible end to this war.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

#### CELEBRATING THE VICTORY OF THE KANSAS JAYHAWKS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I note the presence of the Senator from Kansas in the well of the Senate. He must be coming over to celebrate the victory of the Kansas Jayhawks last night. I assume that is the reason for his presence. I will let him address that and whatever other matter he may have in morning business. But in noting his presence, even though I know he has some K State leanings, he nevertheless must be incredibly proud of the Kansas Jayhawks, as they won the national championship last night.

#### EXTENDING SYMPATHY TO THE DOLE FAMILY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter and a sad matter, I wish to start with news of the passing of John Hanford. John was a World War

II vet, a great patriot, and the dear brother of our colleague, Senator DOLE, who I know is very close to him and will miss him terribly.

This is a sad day for the Dole family, and I wish to extend our deepest sympathies to Senator DOLE and all her relatives and friends.

#### HOUSING CRISIS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I know the main event isn't housing, but I would like to start by thanking the majority leader once again for realizing the only way to address the housing crisis was to do so on a bipartisan basis, and we are on the verge of doing that. We have now made significant progress, and I am confident that before the week is out, we will be able to stand together to announce completion of a good and responsible bill.

Most homeowners will be relieved to know one of the earlier proposals we heard from the other side—a proposal to let bankruptcy judges rewrite the terms of existing mortgages—will not be a part of the Senate's final product. Although well intentioned, this proposal would have led to a sharp increase in mortgage rates for millions of homeowners, and Republicans weren't going to allow that at a time when families are already stretched quite thin.

The final bill will help neighborhoods that have been hit hard by foreclosure with provisions that limit the amount of time empty homes sit on the market—a proposal by Senator ISAKSON. This, along with the economic growth package we passed earlier this year, will put more money in the pockets of homeowners, and it will help homebuilders climb back from the slowdown.

Americans don't want to bail out the speculators and those who tried to game the system at everyone else's expense, so this is a targeted bill that will help homeowners in the short term without jeopardizing the long-term economy. Its likely passage later this week is something we can be proud of on both sides of the aisle.

#### IRAQ WAR TESTIMONY

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, to the testimony on the Iraq war in committees today. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will be here, as we all know. This is an eagerly anticipated update on political and military progress being made in Iraq.

Less than a year after our counterinsurgency plan went into full effect, we have been getting a steady flow of positive reports on the security situation in Iraq. Overall violence in Iraq is down. Civilian deaths are down. Sectarian killing is down. Attacks on American forces are down. As a result, thousands of U.S. troops have already begun to come back home.

Another measure of the Petraeus plan's success is the dramatic increase

in Iraqi security forces since the full implementation of the counterinsurgency strategy last June. Between December 2007 and last month, Iraqi security forces have increased by more than 40,000, bringing the total number to more than 530,000. This includes 141,000 assigned soldiers and officers and a police force of 347,000 strong. Over the last year, the so-called surge of Iraqi security forces has been three or four times larger than our own surge. As we stand here, the Iraqi security forces continue to expand, with young Iraqis signing up for local police forces to protect the border and for special operations.

As the Iraqis take over more of their own security needs, Congress can help by passing a supplemental appropriations bill that has been on request for more than a year. These funds are also needed to ensure the combat readiness of the force and our forces over in Afghanistan as well.

Increased security in Iraq has led to political progress in Iraq. Although significant benchmarks remain unmet, progress on other significant benchmarks that seemed far off a few months ago is now underway. These include such things as passage and approval of debaraathification legislation, an amnesty law, and measures leading to greater centralization of the Iraqi security forces. It is also worth noting the Iraq Government has started to meet more of its own expenses, including three-fourths of the costs of its security forces and a new jobs program.

The success of General Petraeus's strategy is the best reason we have for listening closely to his advice as we move forward. Last August, he said security and local political progress will enable us to reduce the number of U.S. troops to presurge levels, and we have reason to hope the progress that has been made, both politically and in security, will, in fact, lead to a reduction in troop levels.

But General Petraeus has a better grasp than most on whether the gains we have seen are secure enough for a full reduction to begin. For the sake of our long-term security, we should listen very closely to what he has to say.

When Democrats on the campaign trail tout their plans for Iraq and Afghanistan, they often cite the need to listen to the generals. The junior Senator from New York likes to say one of her first actions as President would be to convene the Joint Chiefs of Staff to help her draw up a plan for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. If military advice is needed to draw up plans for withdrawal, shouldn't it be important to draw up plans for success?

Our friends on the other side are rightly concerned about military readiness. I share their concern. But the best way to ensure the military's readiness is not to scrap a plan that has been working in Iraq. The best way to improve readiness is to approve the Defense supplemental without arbitrary dates for withdrawal and to fully fund the 2009 Defense appropriations bill.