

issues that impact the life and safety of our soldiers whom we have called on to serve us in Iraq. It is a matter the American people care about, and we owe them the most careful study.

To my distinguished colleague, the assistant Democratic majority leader, Senator DURBIN, I would say one thing about a change in strategy. We voted to change our strategy. We voted 80 to 14, 53 days ago, to change our strategy, to send General Petraeus and fund the surge that is going on in Iraq. That is our strategy. We just voted on this. In fact, a few weeks ago, the last part of that surge arrived in Iraq. What, are we going to change it again, this month?

Later this week, we will vote on the Levin amendment to decide whether to change, again, our strategy in Iraq. Changing strategy by Congress during a time of war, particularly making changes that are opposed by the military and our Commander in Chief, is not a small matter. Our decisions deal with war and how to achieve peace and will affect the safety and the mission of those magnificent men and women who now serve us in Iraq.

For the busy American, the casual observer, and even the world citizen, it may be this is an appropriate time to vote on this subject again. Certainly, the frustration in our country and inside all of us is high and we are deeply concerned.

I would note that I think all of us agree that quite a number of errors have taken place in our military actions in Iraq. I suggest perhaps the most serious error was our belief that we could, too readily, alter this Government in Iraq and create a new government that would be effective virtually overnight.

That is contrary to good, conservative principles. These people in Iraq have never had a heritage of a functioning government other than brutality, and it is very difficult to do. I think we are finding out it is very difficult to do. It can't be done as quickly as many of us would like to have thought when this activity was begun some years ago.

But with regard to this change in policy, I suggest the Members in the Senate know better. We know it is not appropriate to be changing our policy again. We know that any nation, especially one that aspires to be a great nation, must deal with these life-and-death matters with maturity and sound judgment. We know if we were to lift our eyes off politics and emotion, that our country, striving to do good, is facing a most difficult challenge in Iraq. Things have not gone well. Our terrorist enemies are watching our politics with great interest. Sometimes they play us like a Stradivarius. And so our allies are watching. So, indeed, is the whole world. The terrorists are quite sophisticated and strive to produce a continuous series of bloody headlines to affect American public opinion. Our judgment, our character,

our principles, our very souls are being tested. But this Nation has faced tough times before.

Don't we remember the history of Washington at Valley Forge or the burning of our own Capitol by the British in 1812 or the brutal bloody Civil War or the massive deaths in World War I or the attack on Pearl Harbor or the Italian campaign, the ferocious battles for Iwo Jima, Okinawa, D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge or the Chosin Reservoir in the Korean war? These are major moments in American history, and blunders in strategy and tactics and timing occurred in almost every one of them. Many errors occurred. Failures that cost lives unnecessarily, placed our Nation at greater risk than was necessary. But that is the nature of war.

Enemies lose a great deal of sleep trying to figure out what the weaknesses are of their adversary and trying to exploit that, and frequently they are successful, to a point. But certainly it is appropriate, even in times of war, that the Congress question and challenge the Commander in Chief and our military generals. But that challenge must be, no matter how vigorous, responsible, and honest. Our domestic politics are quite partisan, true; and, frankly, I have been a little disappointed at the nature of the debate I have heard this afternoon. Republican this and Republican that and President Bush this and President Bush that—it sounds more like politics than a sincere effort to reach the proper decision about what our future course should be.

Still, no one should deny that a congressional response to a war, a war that over three-quarters of us voted to authorize, should rise above political gain. With some exceptions, this Congress I think has done so.

Truly, there is great concern in our land about the war in Iraq. It is real and justified. I readily admit my concern. I will admit I am not able to state with certainty today what our long-term course should ultimately be or how this will all play out in the end. Therefore, I do not contest the sincerity of those who will disagree with my conclusions.

I can only state my views honestly and forthrightly because that is what I have been elected to do, and that is what our soldiers who depend on us for support expect of me.

First, I strongly believe this Nation cannot flop around, changing its policy from month to month. That would be immature. It would result in bad execution of this military effort, this war. It would demoralize our soldiers who are walking the streets of Iraq this very moment because we sent them there.

Additionally, this Congress funded their military operations. We funded them. Our duly elected President, our Commander in Chief, has directed the policy with the advice of his commanders in the field. That is what it is.

That is what is going on. That is what is happening.

Now we had a great debate in April and May over whether to fund the so called "surge" that President Bush and the Defense Department requested. This is the surge that has, a few weeks ago, reached its full strength. After the full debate, Congress could have said no to the President on his request for the surge and not provided those funds.

Fourteen Senators did vote no. But we said yes by an overwhelming vote of 80 to 14. On May 24, less than 2 months ago, we authorized the surge and, more importantly, we passed an emergency supplemental to fund this surge. Nothing required us in Congress to do that. We concluded it was the right thing to do, considering the serious alternatives that existed.

Because of the concerns we all had at that time, we required an interim report on July 15th, which has been received on time. We also called for a complete report from General Petraeus, in September, on the status of his efforts and our soldiers' work.

Of course, we had voted to confirm General Petraeus by a vote of 99 to 0 to command this operation. There was no mistake then concerning the seriousness of the situation we were in. As General Petraeus described the challenge:

It is difficult but not impossible.

We were in no way misled about the difficulties we faced, nor were we unaware of the most serious ramifications of a failure in Iraq.

Thus, on May 24, this Congress, with an overwhelming majority, said: Let's go with the surge. But we said: General Petraeus, we will expect you to give us a full, complete, and honest report in September as to how it is going with the good and the bad, and set out specific benchmarks we want you to address. That he promised to, do, and off he went.

Yet even before the personnel who were to be deployed to effect this surge had even arrived in Iraq, the Democratic majority leader, Senator REID, who voted for the surge, to my dismay, declared it a failure. While the troops were still arriving, the Democratic leader, the majority leader of the Senate, declared the surge a failure.

To me it is unthinkable that this Congress would pull the plug on this operation before it has had a fair chance to work, and we have had a fair chance to evaluate its effectiveness. We voted for it 53 days ago. What must the world community think, friend and adversary alike? Does not such immaturity of action reflect poorly on us as a nation? Nothing has occurred since that time of decision in May to justify concluding that the situation in Iraq has significantly changed for the worse? In fact, there are indications that some improvements have occurred. We know that General Petraeus, last year, after two tours in Iraq, 2 years over there, came home and last year wrote the Department of