

**Floor Statement by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) on Iraq War Costs
Not Being Included in Senate Republican Budget Resolution
March 20, 2003**

Mr. CONRAD. ...There is no money in this budget for the occupation. There is no money in this budget for the reconstruction. There is no money in this budget for humanitarian assistance.

But I think there is a larger question. That is, our troops are now engaged. For us to conduct business as usual here just strikes me as totally and wholly inappropriate.

I am the ranking member of the Budget Committee. I have been there my entire time in the Senate. I am in my 17th year. For us not to be discussing our Nation at war has the priorities all wrong. Yes, the budget is important. Yes, we ought to do a budget resolution. But we have lots of time to accomplish that. We can do that next week. We completed most of the debate on the budget already, but, unfortunately, a big chunk is missing.

If we want to talk about supporting the troops in the field, we ought to do it tangibly by putting dollars in the budget. There aren't any....There is not a penny. We have been told the reason there is not a penny is that when the budget was done, operations had not commenced. Well, operations have commenced. The President spoke to the Nation last night and made clear that we are at war.

I hope cooler heads are going to prevail. We need to think very carefully about what we do as an institution when we have a quarter of a million Americans' lives on the line.

What should be the discussion in this Chamber? Should it be the pay-go provisions of the budget? Should it be the reconciliation instructions in the budget resolution? Or should it be the question of war and peace? Should it be the question of supporting our troops in the field? Should it be a question of sending a clear message that our country is united behind our forces, no matter what our positions were on the wisdom of engaging in this conflict? That ought to be the priority we discuss.

I must say I think this is an extraordinary moment, that the suggestion is we just have business as usual in the Senate. I find it totally and wholly inappropriate.

Mr. REID. Could I ask the ranking member of the committee another question? The Senator has stated on at least two occasions this morning that there is not 5 cents in this budget to support the troops for the war that is going on in Iraq. Now we have heard statements for months about we are there to free the Iraqi people, and that we are going to supply food and medicine and everything else necessary to take care of the reconstruction of the country of Iraq. The Senator has heard those questions, has he not?

Mr. CONRAD. Yes.

Mr. REID. Would it not seem to the Senator, as it does to me, that in preparation for

reconstructing Iraq there must be some budget numbers floating around down at the White House someplace? Would you think that is a fair statement?

Mr. CONRAD. We know there are. We know there are estimates of \$65 to \$95 billion.

Mr. REID. Is there one penny in this budget dealing with the reconstruction of Iraq?

Mr. CONRAD. No, there is nothing for reconstruction. There is nothing for the conflict. There is nothing for any part of it.

Let me say this for the Senator, if I could. We have been told a budget request will come next week for that. That is fine. It just seems to me it ought to be part of the budget. It is an odd circumstance to do a budget but leave a big part of the expenditures out of that budget. But what strikes me even more dramatically, much more dramatically than that, is we are not discussing our troops in the field. We are not discussing the fact we have gone to war.

Now, goodness, the budget is important, but it is not the thing that is on the minds of the American people this morning. What is on the minds of the American people this morning is this Chamber sending a signal of support for our forces. They have been ordered to go into harm's way. We have an obligation to send a signal that we back them. Whatever our position is on the wisdom of this course, that is not the point at the moment. The point at the moment ought to be we support our forces in the field. That ought to be the discussion that is going on in this Chamber, not a discussion of pay-go or reconciliation. That is not to say we don't go to the budget quickly and in a timely way. Absolutely. But goodness--

I think if we would look back in the history of this Chamber, when America goes to war, the Senate turns its attention to that fact, that confrontation, and sends a signal of our support for the troops in the field. That is just the most basic, I would say, of values, that that is what we should be talking about. That is what we should be discussing, and the budget we can talk about later. We can talk about it tomorrow or the next day. But today we ought to be talking about what is going on, what is on the minds of the American people.

I urge my colleagues--I know the leader indicated we would go to a resolution at some point today. That is fine. I would just hope we would go to morning business so people could have a chance to discuss their feelings about our troops in the field.

The Senator has indicated he has large bases in his State. I have large bases in mine. Minot Air Force Base, home to our B-52s, one of just two B-52 bases in the country, Grand Forks Air Force Base, one of the three core tanker bases for the United States, those are the places that are providing the air bridge to Iraq half a world away. We have thousands of troops engaged from North Dakota. We have large components of our National Guard which have been called up as well.

I tell you, I just don't feel comfortable, honestly, talking about the budget on this day at this moment.