

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I have listened to most of the comments made by my friend from Oklahoma, and I think he asked some good questions, things we all have to consider about what will happen when we leave.

The Senator talked about the moral obligations, what moral obligations we have. I wonder what moral obligation we had back in the 1980s when Donald Rumsfeld went to visit with Saddam Hussein? What moral responsibility did we have in the Reagan administration when we supported Saddam Hussein, gave him weapons, and gave him information in his war against Iran? What was our moral obligation at that time?

We hear about what will happen when we leave, all this talk about a bloodbath and everything. Well, Madam President, I can remember Vietnam. I can remember the same things: Oh, if we leave Vietnam--we either fight them there or we fight them here. We have to stop the Communists in Vietnam or it will be the Philippines next and then Japan. We have to stop them there. And if we leave, there will be a bloodbath in Vietnam. All of the people who supported us will be slaughtered in the streets.

Well, it didn't happen. Here today, with Vietnam, we have diplomatic relations. I think we just had the new Ambassador or President come over and meet with President Bush in the White House. You look back and you think about those 50,000-plus Americans who died over there, and you wonder, what was that all about? What was that moral obligation all about?

So, again, we haven't learned from the past. The specter is always raised that calamities will happen if we don't follow what the President wants. Well, the President is not always right. This President and his colleagues here couldn't be more wrong about our course in Iraq.

So I have come to the floor this evening on behalf of many Iowans who have been calling and e-mailing my office. The overwhelming majority of people in my State have turned against the war in Iraq, as have the overwhelming majority of Americans elsewhere. According to a USA Today/Gallup poll released last week, 71 percent of Americans favor removing all U.S. troops from Iraq by April 1 of next year.

The American people are sick of seeing our brave men and women killed and maimed in what has become a vicious civil war in Iraq. They want to chart a new course in Iraq, a course out of that civil war. They simply can't believe President Bush and his allies in this body have responded to their wishes with a strategy of obstruction, filibuster, and veto threats. They can't believe Republican Senators here are blocking votes on the No. 1 issue before our Nation, the No. 1 issue on the minds of the American people.

All we are asking of our Republican colleagues is let us vote. Let us vote up or down on whether we want to extricate ourselves from Iraq and bring the troops home. In a nutshell, people have been calling my office saying that Republican Senators certainly

have a right to support President Bush's war in Iraq, they have a right to advocate that we stay the course, but our Republican colleagues should not claim a right to block simple up-or-down votes on amendments calling for a new course in Iraq.

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The President and his allies are demanding we wait until September before we act, but this is the same game of obstruction and delay they have been playing for years now. Time and again, the President has announced a new plan, a new strategy for victory in Iraq. Time and again, the President has asked for patience. Time and again, he has cited progress and suggested that success is just around the corner. Sounds just like Vietnam. Meanwhile, with each new plan, with every new strategy, the United States gets dragged deeper and deeper into the quagmire in Iraq. More Americans get killed and maimed, more innocent Iraqi men, women, and children are killed and wounded, and Iraq spirals deeper into chaos and sectarian division. Sounds just like Vietnam.

The President's spokesmen insult our intelligence, saying that the surge is only a couple weeks old, that we should give it a chance. As we all know, it was announced in January, more than 6 months ago. I remember very well because 1 day after the President announced his surge, 640 soldiers from the 133rd Infantry of the Iowa National Guard were told they would not be coming home from Anbar Province as planned. Instead, their combat tour would be extended to 16 months--nearly a year and a half in the middle of the most deadly combat in Iraq.

Since the surge began back in January, 615 more U.S. troops have died in Iraq. Many thousands more have been injured. Since the surge was announced, eight more soldiers from Iowa have been killed in Iraq, including a second soldier from the small town of Tipton, IA. Think about that, a small community of 3,100 people in rural Iowa has lost two of its sons in Iraq.

On Sunday, the Washington Post published a story about Tipton, IA, and its growing disillusionment with the war in Iraq. The story noted that in the first 6 months of this year--since the surge began--125 troops from 10 Midwestern States have died in Iraq, the bloodiest stretch of the war so far.

Mr. President, as more and more Iowans and other Americans turn against this war, as more and more of our young men and women are killed and wounded, the administration asks us to be patient. But patience is not a virtue in the face of a manifestly failed policy, and there is no virtue in staying the course when the course you are on is dragging you deeper and deeper into a geopolitical disaster.

Just last week, the administration issued the required progress report on benchmarks for Iraq. As expected, the report shows that the Government in Baghdad has failed to meet any of the benchmarks for political and economic reform. The Iraqis have failed to make progress in passing a law governing the sharing of oil revenues. They have failed to make progress in allowing former Baath party members to return to their jobs. They have failed to make progress in disarming militias. They have failed to make progress in organizing

new provincial elections. Failure after failure after failure. Indeed, the only thing the Sunni, Shiites and the Kurds in Parliament have agreed on is that they will go on vacation in the month of August.

The American people refuse to be patient in the face of this monumental failure. And I agree wholeheartedly with Senator *Lugar's* remarks on this floor to the effect that we cannot and should not wait until September to begin to chart a new course. The war has been spiraling downward for 52 months. What possible difference could 2 months make?

Indeed, I can predict right now what will happen when we get General Petraeus's report in mid-September. Against all evidence to the contrary, the President will cherry-pick the report to claim positive military results from the surge, and he will say those results justify staying the course until the end of the year or into next spring or for another year. Indeed, yesterday, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said the surge could well be followed by a request for even more troops. I was told today that about 50 percent of our troops in Iraq are now National Guard and reservists.

Well, it is abundantly clear to me that this President has no intention whatsoever of changing course or reducing the number of troops in Iraq through the end of his term on January 20, 2009. He will only change course when and if he is compelled to do so by the Congress, and that is exactly what a clear majority of the Senate is attempting to do with amendments to this Defense authorization bill.

The Levin-Reed amendment was basically passed by the House. But now, Republican Senators here will not allow us to vote on it. All we are asking is to let us vote up or down on the Levin-Reed amendment. The President and his allies are responding with a furious campaign of obstruction, filibuster, and veto threats. They refuse to listen. They refuse to learn. They refuse to consider a new direction. All we are asking is, let us vote. Let us vote.

I personally know many Iowans serving in our Armed Forces. Whether Active Duty or the Guard or Reserve, they are disciplined professionals who love their country. Even those who profoundly disagree with the war and the surge will continue to do their duty. They deserve our profound respect and admiration. But we need to listen to them. We need to listen to their families.

So I have come to the floor tonight to read just a few of the e-mails and letters I have received in recent days. One of them is from Peggy--I won't use her last name--from Council Bluffs, IA, whose son is serving in Iraq, and here is what she writes:

My 19-year-old son is in Iraq with the United States Army. Please, please get us out of this horrific nightmare and bring them all home. I can't go a day without crying, as I worry about him. Every single member of our brave military that dies in this quagmire is a waste, a tragic waste of life. If my son were to be killed over there, I could never reconcile to it due to the fact that we should not be over there in the first place. We

invaded a country based on lies and have caused the death and suffering of untold thousands of Iraqi people. Please vote to withdraw the troops.

Peggy, all I can tell you is that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to get a vote up or down to get your son and the troops out of Iraq and bring them home. But our Republican colleagues will not allow us to have that vote.

I received the following letter from Regina--again, I will not use her last name--from Bloomfield, IA. She writes:

While reading some articles yesterday, I ran across several stating the possibility of extending even more the tours of duty of our soldiers in Iraq. Is there anybody thinking about these soldiers other than how many live in a day and how many die? Do they understand how hard this is on these soldiers, and costly to our Government? And more important, the tremendous pain and agony on the families of these troops? Have you ever been in a war zone for an extended time, or members of your family--in Vietnam, Kuwait or Iraq? If you sense frustration here, it is. [I feel it] every time we lose a soldier over there for something we can never win. I have never taken as much to heart, and fear for my grandchildren. Where is the common sense of our country?

Regina, we are here, pleading with our Republican colleagues for common sense. Let us vote up or down on the Levin-Reed amendment, that is all we ask. That is what all these letters are asking, basically.

Let me read portions of a letter from Barbara of Waverly.

I sit here to write this letter, not knowing why, since I'm feeling like no one cares anymore or will be able to do anything about it. I am a 41-year-old woman, a military wife of 23 years and a mother of 3. My husband's unit is currently serving in Iraq and has been gone for 16 months so far on this mission. The soldiers and the families were finally feeling like we were seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. As the new year began, we started our countdown for our reunions expected in April. Our worlds came crashing down once again as we learned that our loved ones would not be coming home in April but were being extended until August, thus being deployed for almost 2 years by the time they return. I am angry, I am devastated. How could this happen? I have lost all hope and faith in our Government. I don't understand politics, so my biggest question is, if so many people are against this war and the increase in troops being sent over, then why is the President not listening? Doesn't he care? I voted for him and believed in him and he has let me down.Please think about the effects this is having on our soldiers and their families. We have all given so much and though we are proud to have been part of serving our country, it is time for our soldiers to come home. Please, bring them home.

Barbara, all I can say is that is what we are trying to do. All we are asking is that we be allowed to vote up or down on the Levin-Reed amendment.

Let me read excerpts from one more letter. That is why I am reading these.

There are probably a lot of things I can say about this issue, but I think it is more poignant to read the letters from Iowans, people who have been tragically touched by this war. This one is from a mother in Dows, IA.

I have a 19-year-old son, my only child, who is fighting in Iraq. He is a smart, strong and brave infantry soldier. He has always wanted to be a soldier and is proud to serve in the United States Army. He is our pride and joy. Heaven forbid if anything happens to him in Iraq, my husband and I will be crushed beyond measure. My point in telling you all this is that we are talking about young lives that have a bright future. This is not some political game. Why should our Government put our soldiers' lives at risk for a civil war in Iraq? Like it or not, that's what it is, a civil war, and our precious soldiers are smack dab in the middle of it. Why should our soldiers be losing limbs and even dying for a group of people who can't get along and will probably never get along? Iraq did not attack us. Things are going from bad to worse in Iraq. Unless you have a loved one fighting in Iraq, you can't begin to understand how difficult it is. It is time to get the troops back home and back to their families. Every one of these soldiers who have died meant "everything" to someone. They were a husband, wife, son, daughter, grandchild or close friend to someone. I am neither a Republican nor Democrat, I am just an American mother who wants this violent war stopped and to get our soldiers home safe.

I can say to this mother, that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to get a vote. Let us vote. Let us vote up or down on a deadline for getting our troops out of Iraq. What are the Republicans so afraid of? Why are they so afraid to let the Senate express its will?

I want all of our colleagues to listen especially closely to the final words from this soldier's mother. This is from Dows, IA. She writes:

With the overwhelming majority of the American people wanting to bring our soldiers home and stop the war, don't you think, since you actually work for the American people and are elected by the American people, that you should seriously consider our views and hear our voices? Someone told me I was wasting my time writing this letter, but I believe otherwise. I want my voice heard and isn't this what democracy and freedom are all about? I plead with you with all my heart that you will consider this and do what is best for our troops, their families, and the United States.

That is the end of that letter. Yes, you are right, we actually work for the American people. Your voices should be heard. That is what democracy and freedom is all about. Yet we are not being allowed to have your voices heard here on the Senate floor in terms of a vote. Because of the Republican filibuster, we can't. Once again, all we are asking is a very simple request from our Republican colleagues: Let us vote up or down. Why are you so afraid of that?

The letters and e-mails coming to my office are heartbreaking. They tell the story of lives disrupted, lives put at risk, lives in a war that the overwhelming majority of Americans believe was a tragic mistake. Now 6 months into a surge that has failed to

significantly reduce the violence in Iraq, 6 months into a surge that has utterly failed to bring about any progress or reconciliation within the Iraqi Government, Republicans in the Senate are pulling out the stops to block a simple up-or-down vote on charting a new course in Iraq.

Once again, I plead, I ask, let us vote. Let us vote. All we are asking is just that opportunity, a simple up-or-down vote. Let us have the vote.

Frankly, I was shocked last week when Republicans on the other side of the aisle filibustered Senator *Webb's* amendment which was even supported by the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator *Warner*. The amendment would only have required that active-duty troops receive as much time at home recuperating and training as they spend deployed in combat. The amendment even allowed for a Presidential waiver if the troops were needed for an emergency. This ought to have been an amendment to have drawn strong bipartisan support. After all, many troops in Iraq are now in their third or even fourth deployment. The Army Chief of Staff has warned Congress that the current pace of combat deployment threatens to "break" the Army.

The Webb amendment would have passed if we had been allowed a simple up-or-down vote, a majority vote. Isn't that what we believe in? We believe in a majority vote. Majority votes elect the President. Majority votes here pass bills. There was a majority here to pass the Webb amendment, but because the Republicans filibustered it, we needed 60 votes. We couldn't get an up-or-down vote on that amendment.

The wives and mothers and family members who have written to me and whose words I placed here in the *Record* tonight have their own idea of what it means to support the troops. They believe it means allowing the Senate to have a straight up-or-down vote on these amendments to ensure decent treatment of our troops. They believe it means allowing a straight up-or-down vote on whether we need to have a new direction in Iraq. But they are being denied this by a willful, obstructionist minority here in the Senate, a minority that believes, frankly, they know better than the American people; a minority that insists on endlessly prolonging a war that the American people want to bring to a close.

The American people are not only angry about this war, they are angry the way our brave men and women in uniform have been misused and mistreated. The President rushed our troops into combat without proper equipment and in insufficient numbers. He has insisted on staying the course of that failed policy for more than 4 miserable years. He has sent troops back to Iraq for a third and even fourth rotation, with insufficient time to retrain and regroup.

In January he decided to roll the dice one more time by throwing another 30,000 troops into the middle of this sectarian civil war in Baghdad. Now the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is suggesting that come September the President may decide to send even more troops to Iraq. At this point, the single best way to support the troops is to tell

President Bush more than 4 years of bungling, bad judgment, and bullheadedness is enough. We have complete and total confidence in our troops, but we have no confidence in your leadership or in pursuing this war any further.

This evening we have reached an extraordinary juncture. We have a surge in Iraq now 6 months old which was designed to give the Iraqi Government breathing space for reconciliation.

As I said, the only thing the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds in Parliament have agreed on is that they will go on vacation in August. Meanwhile, here in Washington we have a President refusing to listen to the American people, supported by a Republican minority in Congress that is determined to obstruct any legislation charting a new course. If they prevail, if the President and his Republican obstructionists in the Senate prevail, our military units will be deployed again and again and again until they finally break and the United States will stay bogged down and bleeding in Iraq, creating terrorists around the world faster than we could ever hope to kill them.

It has reached the point, frankly, where you are either on the side of the President and his failed policies or you side with the American people and our military commanders who have concluded there is no military solution to the mess in Iraq. You either support this endless, pointless war or you support a smarter, more focused campaign against the terrorists who truly threaten us. It is unconscionable that the Republican leader, at the behest of President Bush, is refusing to allow the Senate to vote on changing our course in Iraq. At long last it is time for them to listen to the American people, to the families of our troops in the field. The Senate should be allowed to vote on the No. 1 issue facing this country.

It is time the Republicans stop their obstruction to allow the Senate to work its will. It is time for Republicans to let us vote, up or down, simply up or down on the Levin-Reed amendment to chart a new course in Iraq.

I yield the floor.