

Senator John Ensign – April 26, 2007

Floor Speech As Prepared For Delivery

Mr. President, I rise to speak on the subject of the Emergency War Supplemental and the adverse impact this political theater is having on our efforts in Iraq.

For me, this political gamesmanship calls to mind a book written some 50 years ago about some very brave men in our Nation's history.

Not brave in the sense of today's Marines and soldiers, who are doing the grunt work in Afghanistan and Iraq to ensure that the free world can sleep in peace at night.

No, the men in this book were brave for a very different reason.

The book I'm referring to is the 1956 classic, Profiles in Courage, written by a young United States Senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy, who later became our thirty-fifth President.

The book is an account of men of principle, integrity and bravery in American politics.

Then-Senator Kennedy profiled eight exceptional United States Senators from throughout the Senate's history whom he considered to be models of virtue and courage under pressure.

These men defied the public opinion of the day in order to do what was right for the country—even though they suffered severe criticism and losses in popularity because of these actions.

The senators profiled included:

Thomas Benton from Missouri, for staying in the Democratic Party despite his opposition to extending slavery into the territories;

Sam Houston from Texas, for opposing Texas' secession from the Union. For refusing to support this secession, Houston was later deposed as Governor; and

Edmund Ross from Kansas, for voting for acquittal in the Andrew Johnson impeachment trial. As a result of Ross' vote, Johnson's presidency was saved and the stature of the office was preserved.

In this definitive book on political courage, each of the eight Senators profiled is today considered a "hero" for having done the right thing, not the popular thing.

They are heroes today for having filtered out the political noise of the chattering classes of their day.

They are heroes for having done what was in the best interest of the United States and not in their own political best interest.

They are heroes for doing what was necessary instead of simply doing what was easy.

Today, each of us faces our own Profiles in Courage moment. A clash of visions regarding America's future has brought us to this point.

One vision has America defeating al Qaeda and the forces of Islamic fascism.

The other vision has America surrendering in Iraq and allowing jihadist forces to determine Iraq's future, making America and the rest of the world less safe.

These competing visions must be reconciled by each individual Senator.

But let's understand exactly what the majority party is attempting to accomplish by hijacking this legislation.

I could speak at length about the ample amounts of unrelated pork that have somehow found their way into this emergency supplemental. Those embarrassments continue to be addressed by my colleagues.

What I'd like to do is spend a few minutes specifically discussing the misguided efforts of the other side to revise, or more accurately restrict, this Nation's policy in Iraq.

Democrats are once again attempting to constrain this Nation's Commander-in-Chief in the execution of his Constitutional duties; this time by inserting language in the emergency supplemental that would limit the use of force in Iraq to certain congressionally pre-approved ends.

It would also provide a date certain for the surrender of U.S. forces in Iraq. This language within the emergency supplemental unconstitutionally micromanages the conduct of the war from the floor of the United States Senate.

It does so by providing that Congress, and not the Commander-in-Chief, would determine just how our military is to be used.

It inserts 535 commanders-in-chief into the decision-making process when it comes to the execution of military operations in Iraq.

This is not what our founding fathers intended.

This legislation, as it is currently written, directs the President to begin the surrender of our forces no later than October first of this year and calls for all U.S. combat forces to be back in the United States 180 days after that.

As a matter of policy, even the bipartisan Baker Hamilton Commission specifically considered and rejected setting a timetable for our withdrawal from Iraq.

But this current debate we're engaged in regarding the emergency supplemental affects more than politicians on Capitol Hill.

It goes far beyond the political posturing taking place on Sunday talk shows.

It is more than a mere power struggle between the commander-in-chief and a new majority in Congress asserting itself.

No, this debate directly affects the health and well being of our men and women in uniform; men and women that this Congress authorized the President to send to Iraq.

This is unconscionable.

Recently, the Readiness and Management Support Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee held a hearing on overseas basing issues.

Witnesses represented the Department of Defense and the Departments of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

As the Ranking Member, I asked these witnesses about the impact that delaying enactment of the emergency supplemental would have on Department of Defense operations, particularly those associated with Iraq and Afghanistan.

I learned from them that the Army has already started to feel the financial squeeze of our failure to pass the emergency supplemental and has begun to limit certain functions.

They've had to curtail the training of Army Guard and Reserve units within the United States, thus reducing their readiness levels.

They've had to re-prioritize predeployment training and eliminate anything that is not Iraq specific. No longer will units deploy to Iraq capable of handling the full spectrum of possible military scenarios.

The Army has begun reducing quality of life initiatives including the routine upgrade of barracks and other facilities.

They've stopped the repair and maintenance of hundreds of tanks, Bradleys, and other vehicles necessary for deployment training.

The impact only gets worse with time.

If the emergency supplemental funding is not received by May 15th—less than a month from now—the Army will undertake further actions.

These include:

Reducing the pace of equipment overhaul work at Army depots which will worsen the equipment availability problems facing stateside units.

Curtailing training rotations for Brigade Combat Teams scheduled for deployment to Iraq. This will also slow the arrival of more brigades which are needed to expand the Army's rotational pool and reduce stress on existing units.

This smaller rotational pool will result in the further extension of those currently deployed until their replacements are judged to be ready for deployment.

The Army would be forced to implement a civilian hiring freeze.

They would have to prohibit the execution of new contracts and service orders.

They would have to hold or cancel repair parts orders in the non-deployed Army, directly impacting the units' ability to deploy with mission capable equipment and fully trained soldiers.

I shudder to think of what additional steps the military will need to take if Democrats remain as stubborn and irresponsible regarding the emergency supplemental as they have proven to be up to this point.

Before we consider voting on any emergency supplemental legislation which includes the offending surrender language, we need to seriously ask ourselves; in twenty, or fifty, or even a hundred years, will those generations that follow us look upon us as the heroes of our time for having done the courageous thing?

Will we be admired for having chosen to do what was in the best interest of the Nation, in the best interest of the world, regardless of the political costs?

Or will this body be viewed with disdain for having cast our vote to set certain a date for our surrender to the forces of al Qaeda?

Will we be viewed as inhumane for condemning some twenty-five million Iraqis to a living hell on earth?

It is my opinion that this misguided effort by my Democratic colleagues is a surrender strategy for Iraq; a surrender that will take us at least a year to complete, but a surrender strategy none the less.

I join today with the President in refusing to surrender to the likes of al Qaeda.

Calling this surrender a 'withdrawal,' or a 'redeployment,' is like putting lipstick on a pig. No matter what you call it, it's still a pig. And no matter what you call this surrender, it's still a 'surrender'.

Now, there might have been a time in our history when we could have hidden behind our own borders and not had to worry about what was happening in the Middle East – or any place else across the ocean. Those days haven't existed for some time.

Remember the consequences of our abandonment of Afghanistan in the 1980s. We supported the Mujahideen against the Soviets until the Soviets surrendered, or 'withdrew' as my Democratic friends would call it, in 1989. Then we left the Afghans to fend for themselves. In short order, they had a civil war. The Taliban rose to power and provided a safe haven for al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden established training camps where he trained some 20,000 terrorists in the late '90s; graduates of those camps came here and killed 3,000 of our fellow citizens on 9/11.

Perhaps, at the end of the Cold War, it was difficult to imagine the impact of the US leaving Afghanistan. The same cannot be said about leaving Iraq. We have to prevail in Iraq, and we can if we don't choose to surrender.

Mr. President, in closing I have a question for those on the other side.

If my Democratic colleagues believe our current struggle against Islamic jihadists in Iraq is such a mistake;

If you honestly believe that you were lied to or misled into initially supporting this war and that there is no useful purpose for continuing;

If you believe that the lives of those in uniform who have made the ultimate sacrifice were truly wasted;

If you believe that al Qaeda and the threat of Islamic fascism confronting America is merely something invented by a small band of neoconservatives, or;

If Islamic fascism is simply an ideological movement that can be appeased and reasoned with; then why are you seeking to continue funding our fight in Iraq for even another day?

If you believe that Iraq is simply a mistake gone bad, then you should at least have the courage of your convictions and act accordingly.

Vote to end the funding now.

Don't string along those putting their lives on the line for you to make some sort of weak political statement.

This may well be our Profiles in Courage moment. I implore you to do the right thing, not the currently popular thing.

Support our men and women in uniform and do it now.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.