

[The full text of Cantwell's remarks as delivered on the Senate floor Wednesday follows below]

Mr. President, we are here today discussing the emergency supplemental conference report, which appropriates over \$70 billion for Iraq and Afghanistan. Tomorrow we will return to the defense authorization bill that will include more discussion of our efforts in those countries. The last week had events that this senator considers very positive: the finalization of a new government in Iraq with the naming of ministers of defense and interior, the U.S. military's success of killing Al-Zarqawi, and the safe return of the president just today from Iraq. While we've had these successes, I think it's important for Congress, as we discuss both the supplemental bill and the D.O.D. authorization legislation, to keep in mind the challenge ahead of us.

While Prime Minister Maliki has moved forward with his new government, we know that national security experts warn that Iraq is still in bad shape. I believe that Congress must do its job in holding the administration accountable as we consider these two pieces of legislation and make sure that 2006 is a year of significant transition in Iraq. That is, specifically, that while we have understood the challenges and mistakes that have been made, that we need to make sure we are moving forward, and we need to make sure we are turning the security efforts over to the new Iraqi government.

While we have seen some promising developments in Iraq in the last week, we need to remind ourselves that sectarian violence in the last several months has been on the increase, and that the challenge for Iraqi and U.S. forces remains high. The challenge before us as a Congress is to remain vigilant on the accountability of the administration as we consider this legislation I believe is paramount.

U.S. ground forces have been stretched and placed under enormous stress. Sectarian militias are responsible for waves of increasing violence, and there are now over 1.2 million internally displaced persons throughout Iraq. And as I said, while we've had some successes, not everything has gone as planned. There has been mismanagement, contract abuses, fraud in various levels of our reconstruction, and some lack of accountability on exactly how U.S. taxpayer dollars have been spent. Electricity and oil production are below prewar levels. This all has to change.

This year the United States has been spending about \$8 billion per month in Iraq, and Congress has appropriated to date about \$320 billion for Iraqi operations. We need to know where the president is going from here.

Everyone should be thankful that Saddam Hussein is gone, but we should learn from the mistakes that have been made so far and re-bolster our efforts to get more international support for what the Iraqi government and the United States are trying to accomplish. No matter where the world community was prior to the U.S. involvement in Iraq, everyone should rise to help the new Iraqi government meet our growing challenges. So this senator wants to make sure that we are reaching out and being effective at a broader international effort.

Mr. President, I call on President Bush to name a special envoy to Iraq to promote regional diplomacy and to make sure the United Nations and the World Bank are fully engaged. The president could name someone with the stature and leverage of former President Bill Clinton or former president George H.W. Bush, who was so instrumental in building an international

coalition before the first Gulf War. I believe that again today diplomatic collaboration is vital. A special envoy could help garner the international support for both Iraqi reconstruction and security. As I said, regardless of what foreign governments thought about the administration's decision to go to war, everyone should share the same desire to help Iraq succeed as a sovereign nation. The international donor community has pledged approximately \$13.5 billion for Iraq and for reconstruction efforts, but has only delivered about \$3.5 billion of that total. That must change. If nothing else, a U.S. envoy could make its primary mission the financial contribution by these countries to help shoulder the burden of stabilizing this very important region of the world.

Second, I believe the United States should not hesitate in calling a Dayton-like summit with our allies, with Iraqi neighbors, with the United Nations, to make sure we are moving forward on answering any political and security questions that will help in stabilizing the region. We should also support the Arab League's plan to hold its own international conference on reconciliation in Iraq. The international community should work together to help the Iraqis reach a comprehensive agreement to guarantee regional security, protect Iraq's borders, supplant the militias with Iraqi Security Forces, and revive the reconstruction efforts, especially in Baghdad. We cannot allow the political process to drift. The international community must demand that Iraqis continue making compromises necessary to end the sectarian violence and to make sure that any amendments to the Iraqi constitution, if necessary, take place in short order.

Third, I believe that the United Nations should become more involved. The United Nations should encourage the creation of a U.N. High Commissioner for Iraq similar to the U.N. High Representative for Bosnia, which was created to work with the international community to ensure a peaceful, viable state in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Creating a U.N. High Commissioner of Iraq could open up the doors for countries that might have otherwise been hesitant to participate. The U.N. can call on its wide network of trained personnel and specialized resources, saving U.S. taxpayers money and providing a genuine boost for our efforts in Iraq.

We must also make sure that we are serious about last year's amendment, the Warner-Frist amendment, which declared that "2006 should be a period of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty with Iraqi security forces taking the lead for the security creating the conditions for phased redeployment of the United States from Iraq." We pushed for greater oversight and required the administration to provide Congress with quarterly reports, and while we have received some information, the latest reports have not had sufficient information about sectarian divisions and the risk of civil war and our response to those risks.

The Department of Defense aims to train and equip about 325,000 Iraqi troops and police by the end of the year. I want to make sure that Congress, in our budget process, holds them accountable for meeting these goals. For the sake of the U.S. troops that are on the ground, we must make sure that the Iraqi government knows that we want the security responsibilities transitioned to them. And we must make it clear that the United States is not going to stay in Iraq indefinitely.

I take Prime Minister Maliki at his word. He basically has said that the Iraqi forces could take complete control of security within the next 18 months and that the new Iraqi government could deal with the militias and that the Iraqi Security Forces would take control as quickly as possible. I think we need to continue to push that issue and to make sure that we are meeting the milestones that will help that to occur as soon as possible.

We also need to make sure that the efforts on reconstruction move forward. The United States should help the Iraqis concentrate on security and development efforts in certain areas to ensure that we are demonstrating meaningful economic progress. I think again particularly in Baghdad.

Protecting the Iraqi people and the civilian infrastructure should be our highest priority. Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds alike must have faith in their government's ability to provide access to reliable electricity, clean water, and proper sanitation.

We must remember that we have to honor our commitment to our troops—the U.S. military who have sacrificed so much. And no one here on the Senate floor will ever forget the awful cost of war. In Iraq, the loss of nearly 2,500 members of our armed forces, and I'm deeply concerned about the 18,000 that have been wounded.

And just as our troops have been stretched to the limit, it's time for us to realize that our capacity for veterans' health care has also been challenged. Based on credible projections from the Independent Budget, composed by Veterans Service Organizations, the federal government is under-funding veterans' health care by at least \$2 billion and the demands on the system are growing.

In March, the V.A. told congress they are seeing 38 percent more Iraq war veterans than they had budgeted for. So what's the impact? Some veterans are waiting more than 18 months just to get access to V.A. health care, and thousands of others across the country are waiting for access to care. As of the last month, more than 2,900 veterans in Washington state were waiting over 30 days to gain access to outpatient care that they deserve and have not been able to get because we have not adequately funded the veterans' health care system.

Some experts suggest that one-third of the soldiers coming home from Iraq seek mental health services, and we need to make sure that we are adequately funding mental health. A lack of capacity in the veterans' mental health system has caused a V.A. official recently to remark that when it comes to mental health the waiting list renders care virtually inaccessible. I believe this is unacceptable and that we have to do our job and do not shortchange veterans' health care. We must give those who have stood up for us the access to care that they deserve.

Mr. President, the United States must make sure that it does not ever condone indiscriminate or deliberate killings of civilians. The overwhelming majority of men and women in uniform are honorable and understand the rules of war and requirements of the Geneva Conventions. Any accusations of misconduct must be handled fairly by the military justice system. We should also play our oversight role here in Congress and make sure that Congress is not leaving the investigation of this issue simply up to the Department of Defense.

We need to make sure that Congress is also investigating this issue and providing the accountability and oversight that everyone deserves. Whether it is detainee abuse or Haditha, we need to make sure that the U.S. image is not damaged and our efforts to win the hearts and minds both in Iraq and the war on terror are not hurt. We must make sure that we have aggressive oversight and accountability of all agencies of the federal government.

The United States should be an example of leadership committed to treating people humanely and abiding by the rule of law and promoting opportunity and a common vision.

I know that recently when British Prime Minister Tony Blair was here, he gave a speech that said—quote—“this should be a moment of reconciliation not only in Iraq, but the international community. The war split the world. The struggle of Iraqis for democracy should unite it.”

I believe that is what we must move forward on now too as we consider these two pieces of legislation. Congress must be aggressive in its oversight and accountability on these goals for 2006 and in turning over control to the Iraqi people. And we must make sure that we engage the international community to help us move forward in this effort. The United States should lead the way, but it should do so with sufficient international support.

And then, Mr. President, I believe we must get on to our larger goals, one that the 9/11 commission recommended to us when it said—quote—“just as we did in the Cold War, we need to defend our ideals abroad vigorously. If the United States does not act aggressively to define itself in the Islamic world, the extremists will gladly do the job for us.” So besides these objectives, Mr. President, we need to move forward in fighting terrorism by promoting American ideals. I yield the floor.

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