

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SUNUNU). Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business not to exceed 60 minutes, with the first 30 minutes under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee, and the remaining 30 minutes under the control of the Senator from Texas, Mrs. HUTCHISON, or her designee.

The Senator from Florida is recognized.

UNITED STATES MILITARY ROTATION POLICY

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I will address the rotation policy in Iraq of our U.S. military forces, and specifically the National Guard and the Reserves. I will also address the planning of that rotation policy.

Over the weekend, I met with enumerable groups in Florida about their loved ones who are serving overseas. As members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, we addressed this issue with Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Myers, in our committee meeting 2 weeks ago on the plan of rotation and the inequities that are coming out as a result of the lack of planning and how that is being implemented.

Now, I am going to give some specific examples. I might say that this large stack contains all e-mails—and you know how small the type is on e-mails—from family members in my State about the inequity of the situation. These are e-mails that I have received directly from soldiers, primarily members of the Florida National Guard and the Reserves.

As I tried to address what I perceive to be the inequity in this so-called plan as being implemented, as I tried to address it in committee, as I have in private meetings with the brass, and now as I try to discuss these inequities with the Senate, I, first, will say that had the executive branch of Government listened to the bipartisan voices in the Senate Armed Services Committee—and in particular the Senate Foreign Relations Committee where the chairman of that committee, Dick Lugar of Indiana, a Republican, and one of his ranking members, Senator CHUCK HAGEL of Nebraska, a Republican, and another of his high-ranking members, Senator LINCOLN CHAFEE of Rhode Island, a Republican, along with a chorus of voices on the committee, including mine—had they listened about the need for a plan after the military campaign in the postwar occupation of Iraq, then I don't think we would be going through the strains and stresses on this rotation policy. Combatant Com-

mander General Abizaid, who is supplied with Army troops through the Army Chief of Staff, of which they are having to stretch out these deployments of the National Guard and Reserves in Iraq, had they listened—had the executive branch of Government listened that there had to be a plan in place, as we had for Germany and Japan—we had a plan being worked on for 3 years prior to the end of World War II for Germany and Japan—had the plan been in place, we would see that we should not have an American face as occupiers in a Muslim country. Instead, it should be the world community participating in trying to stabilize Iraq politically and economically.

Had a plan been in place, the preparation would have been there to bring in the Iraqi civilians to run the Government so that there is an Iraqi face on the running of the Government. But that plan is not in place and we are seeing the results of the near chaos from time to time and, indeed, the sabotage that is occurring, the deaths that are occurring, and so forth.

But that is an issue for another day. It is a table setter for what I want to talk about—the inequity of the rotation policy and the plan that is specifically being conducted in the rotation of the troops in Iraq.

First, Florida's National Guard is one of the most professional in the Nation. It is well organized, it is well trained, and it is well led. They have proven their dedication to duty in this war, and they have committed to do whatever this Nation asks, and they have done it very well.

A couple of days ago, General Schoemaker, the Chief of Staff of the Army, told me that the soldiers of the Florida National Guard are as good as they come. They are also tired and fatigued.

I raised this rotation policy with the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in that committee meeting a couple weeks ago. I have discussed this rotation policy with the Army Chief of Staff. I will discuss this policy with the Secretary of Defense tomorrow.

Florida National Guard soldiers were among the first Guard units alerted in December. They were brought into the armory the day after Christmas to start preparing all of their equipment, and they were mobilized right after New Year's Day. They were also among the first to enter the theater of operations, beginning in February and flowing quickly through March and early April.

Florida's National Guard soldiers participated throughout the major combat phase of this operation and throughout the breadth and depth of the theater—a theater that we know had no safe rear area, in the traditional sense.

Company C, Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 124th Infantry of the Florida Guard—let me tell you what they did before the war. The war started on

March 19. Charlie Company dug by hand through the berm that marks the Jordanian-Iraqi border, and then they attacked into Iraq in support of the 5th Special Forces Group. They were in Iraq before the war started on March 19. Since then, Charlie Company has been passed around the theater, from command to command, about 10 times, from the 5th Special Forces Group, to Special Operations Headquarters, to the 5th Corps Headquarters, to the 3rd Infantry Division, to the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, and to the 1st Armored Division.

Charlie Company is still there and they have suffered two fatalities—one gunned down at the University of Baghdad the night I was coming into Baghdad in early July, another in a vehicle accident, and a third wounded in the neck. Other companies of the three battalions of the 124th Infantry, of the Florida Guard, have been passed among the headquarters all over the theater no less than 40 times since arriving in the area of operations.

This is not a complaint. This is a statement of fact. Florida is justifiably proud of its contribution to the war on terror. Florida has the third highest number of Guard and Reserve soldiers mobilized and deployed globally in the war on terror, with 6,190 Florida Guard soldiers. Two States are a little higher, California and Texas, and it is only by a few hundred soldiers in each of those States.

Florida has also deployed the second highest number of Guard soldiers to the Iraqi theater. Right now, in the Iraqi area of operations, there are 2,482. We are second highest to Alabama, and Alabama has 38 soldiers more. These two States, Alabama and Florida, by far have the most soldiers deployed to the Iraqi theater.

No State has provided more infantry from the Guard than Florida—1,392 infantry soldiers, followed by Indiana's infantry at 1,286. These two States by far are contributing more to the Iraqi theater from Guard units than are infantry troops.

Naturally, since they were deployed the day after Christmas, they are tired, and I believe they should be replaced by fresh troops as soon as possible.

There is a new policy, and the new policy of the Defense Department is a "12-month Boots on the Ground in Iraq" rotation policy, and it may not be equitably implemented because Florida's Guard entered the theater in company-size elements spread out over a period of 2½ months. So it doesn't sound like it is equitable for this new policy of boots-on-the-ground for the clock to start ticking only when the last unit arrives in theater, what they call over at the Pentagon "closed in command."

I understand that other National Guard units are already beginning the process of coming home, and I am happy for them, and I am happy they are coming back to their loved ones. But I cannot seem to get a clear answer from the Department of Defense