JOHN EDWARDS

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my retiring colleague from North Carolina, Senator JOHN EDWARDS.

Senator EDWARDS was the first in his family to attend college, working his way through North Carolina State University and later earning his law degree from the University of North Carolina. Afterward, JOHN EDWARDS established himself as a distinguished and successful lawyer. These accomplishments alone are quite striking and aptly demonstrate the intelligence and determination of Senator EDWARDS.

During his time in the Senate, Senator EDWARDS served on four committees: Health, Education, Labor & Pensions, the Judiciary, the Small Business & Entrepreneurship, and the Select Intelligence. He continually championed for issues affecting the daily lives of regular people in North Carolina and the nation.

I am sure Senator EDWARDS will find success in any endeavor he now chooses to undertake and I join with my colleagues in wishing him the best.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent there now be a period of morning business, with Senators speaking up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

A PRAYER FOR THANKSGIVING

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, in a matter of days, families across this Nation will gather around the table to celebrate Thanksgiving, that quintessential American holiday on which we pause to give thanks for our many blessings as a Nation and to celebrate that most precious gift of all, the love and fellowship of our families and friends.

There will be many empty chairs at the table this year as America observes the second Thanksgiving holiday since the invasion of Iraq. As many as 140,000 U.S. military personnel are currently serving in Iraq and another 20,000 in Afghanistan.

What that means in human terms is that tens of thousands of American families will be sitting down to a somber Thanksgiving dinner, their prayers of thanksgiving tempered by their fears for the safety of their loved ones.

Others, the families and loved ones of the more than 1,200 American troops who have been killed in Iraq, will sit down to a dinner seasoned with sorrow, the empty chair at the table a wrenching reminder of the terrible cost of war.

Whatever one believes about the justification of the war in Iraq, it is an indisputable fact that the troops on the ground, and their families and friends here at home, are bearing the heaviest burden of the President's decision to go to war. And on holidays like Thanksgiving, when family and friends are held especially close to the heart, the weight of that burden becomes especially hard to bear.

It is easy to talk about war in the abstract. It is easy for the President and his military advisers to point to the steady progression of U.S. victories against the insurgents in places like Falluja and Mosel as evidence that we are winning the war in Iraq. It is easy to be armchair quarterbacks in a bloody battle raging halfway across the world. But as anyone knows who has visited wounded troops at Walter Reed Army Hospital, who has gazed into the eyes of young widows or grieving parents, or who has read the poignant stories of the fallen, there is no such thing as war fought in the abstract or battles waged in statistics.

War, to those who must fight it and to their loved ones who must endure it, is painfully real and painfully present at the table, on Thanksgiving and on every other day of the week for the duration of the conflict—and sometimes for long after the fighting has ceased. These are the men and women on the front lines of the battle, and it is they whom we must salute and thank for their sacrifice.

I was struck by an article in the November 14 edition of the Los Angeles Times on the psychological toll that the war in Iraq is taking on U.S. soldiers and Marines. According to the newspaper, the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research has found that 15.6 percent of marines and 17.1 percent of soldiers surveyed after returning from Iraq reported suffering from major depression, generalized anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Even more disturbing, the article predicted that the reported statistics were only the tip of the iceberg. According to the Times article:

> Army and Veterans Administration mental health experts say there is reason to believe the war's ultimate psychological fallout will worsen. The Army survey of 6,200 soldiers and Marines involved only troops willing to report their problems. The study did not look at reservists, who tend to suffer a higher rate of psychological injury than career Marines and soldiers. And the soldiers in the study served in the early months of the war, when tours were shorter and before the Iraqi insurgence took shape.

The Los Angeles Times went on to quote Dr. Matthew J. Friedman, a professor of psychiatry and pharmacology at Dartmouth Medical School and the executive director of the VA's National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: ''The bad news is that the study underestimated the prevalence of what we are going to see down the road,'' he said.

What a chilling forecast. One has only to look at the video footage of the house-to-house, mosque-to-mosque combat in Falluja to understand the tremendous psychological stresses on the young servicemen who form the vanguard of our assault against the insurgents in Iraq. One has only to read of the wary convoys of soldiers and Marines who are tasked to traverse the treacherous stretches of deadly Iraqi highways day after day after day, or to edge their way into labyrinthine alleys of Baghdad's most dangerous neighborhoods, to understand the sheer psychological hell of the war in Iraq.

The Pentagon keeps a daily log of U.S. military troops killed or wounded in Iraq. As of this morning, November 19, the Pentagon reports that 1,214 American troops have been killed in Iraq and another 8,956 wounded, more than half of them so severely injured that they could not be directly returned to duty. Barely more than halfway through the month, November 2004 has already turned into the second deadliest month for American military forces since the United States invaded Iraq in March of 2003. Where and when will the carnage end?

The casualty statistics are heartbreaking enough, especially on the cusp of what is supposed to be one of the most joyful seasons of the year. But they do not represent the whole story. The Defense Department does not tally the walking wounded, those soldiers and Marines who return home from duty physically fit but emotionally scarred, sometimes for life. These men and women are also casualties of the war in Iraq, and they and their families may suffer just as deeply as those whose wounds are plain to see. Modern medicine has come a long way in mending the broken bodies of soldiers wounded in combat, but I fear the military still has a long way to go in identifying and mending the broken psyches of otherwise healthy veterans.

And so on this Thanksgiving, I hope that all Americans will take a moment to pray for the safety of our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, for the eternal salvation of those who have died in service to their country, and for the speedy recovery of all who have been wounded, including those who are suffering from the invisible ravages of emotional wounds. I also hope that Americans will take a moment to pray for the families and loved ones of all those who have been called to duty in the battle zones of Iraq and Afghanistan. We cannot fill the empty chair at the table, but we can offer an abundance of love and support for our neighbors and friends whose lives have been upended by the war, and we can pray most fervently that our troops will be returned home quickly, and that their families will not have to endure another Thanksgiving without them.

Praise Almighty God for His kindness, His love, His mercy. Thank Him.

I yield the floor.

CONGRATULATING THE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, Senator LIEBERMAN and I extend congratulations to the Center for Excellence in Education, and its president, Joann DiGennaro, for the achievements of its educational programs to nurture young