

to look at that part of that bill, the Women, Infants, and Children's Program during this holiday season; to sign the farm bill because of a lot of reasons, but in this context because of the nutrition funding which is included in it that I mentioned, as well as other nutrition increases. There are billions of dollars more for nutrition in the farm bill. So I ask the President, No. 3, to sign the farm bill.

And No. 4, and finally, to release the remaining \$20 million in contingency funding for the so-called LIHEAP program—another acronym, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. A lot of people know about it and depend on it. Just \$20 million; a tiny eyedrop worth of money in terms of a Federal budget into the trillions.

I ask the President not only to read a letter and not only to respond to it, but, most importantly, to take action which is asked for in this letter and the pleas for help from families across America. U.S. Senators, Members of Congress, and others have asked this President to do his part in this holiday season because the President, just like the Congress, has power—power to help people, power to improve their lives, and power to do all he can to help them every time throughout the year but especially at this time of the year.

I conclude with this: In this season of hope, let it be said of those who have power—real power—let it be said of those who have power that they helped those who are hungry, those who are cold, and those who will live through yet another season of despair. Let it be said of us, and let it be said of the President, that he fulfilled and met his obligation to help those Americans who need it, especially in this season.

Mr. President, I thank you and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

CONGRATULATING SENATOR CASEY

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, first, while the Senator from Pennsylvania is on the floor, let me congratulate him for an extraordinary first year in the Senate. He has made a real difference in his first year. We all are grateful he is present here to assist this Senate and hopefully achieving some very important results. I congratulate him on his freshman year.

Mr. CASEY. I thank the Senator.

MESSAGE TO THE IRAQI POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I want to review the outcome of last evening's debate and vote on the Iraq amendment that I offered along with Senators REED, VOINOVICH, HAGEL, SNOWE, REID, SMITH, and SALAZAR.

The amendment expressed the sense of the Congress that the missions of the U.S. forces in Iraq should transition to counterterrorism operations,

and training, equipping, and supporting Iraqi forces, as well as force protection, and that—and this is, perhaps, the most critical, the important part of the amendment we voted on—that it should be the goal to complete that transition by the end of 2008.

The vote on our amendment was 50 yeas and 45 nays.

Legislating on Iraq is a difficult matter because of the need to gain 60 votes in order to overcome a filibuster, and it was made perhaps even more difficult last night because the Republican leader stated that the President would veto the Consolidated Appropriations Act if it contained our amendment.

Now, imagine that. The President of the United States would veto funds for the troops if 60 or more Senators simply expressed their nonbinding opinion that a goal should be to bring most of our troops home by the end of next year. I would hope the President would welcome at least the nonbinding advice of the Congress and not threaten funding for the troops if that advice were forthcoming.

Despite a great deal of pressure, including the veto threat, our amendment secured six Republican votes—more Republican votes than amendments to change course in Iraq have secured to date. Senators VOINOVICH, HAGEL, SNOWE, SMITH, COLLINS, and DOLE joined 44 of the 46 Democrats who were present to produce a 50-vote majority in favor of our amendment.

I am confident that at least four of the five absent Senators would have supported our amendment, as they have done in the past. So we would have had 54 votes in favor of our amendment, which would have been the most votes thus far for this type of a policy change in Iraq.

Now, what does that majority Senate vote mean, last night's majority vote? What message does it send to the White House, the American people, the Iraqi political leadership, and the Iraqi people?

I believe the message is that more and more Senators are embracing the view that the American people reflected during the last election a little over a year ago; namely, that we want to change course in Iraq, and we want to have a reasonable timetable for the return of most of our troops, and that we have reached the limits of our patience with the Iraqi political leadership. I hope the President takes full notice of last night's majority vote, although the majority will was thwarted by a filibuster. I am sure he is aware of the vote, since the Republican leader said the President would veto the legislation if it contained our amendment.

I hope the American people understand a growing majority of the Senate agrees with their view that we need to establish a goal for the reduction of most of our forces in Iraq and the goal should be most should leave Iraq by the end of next year.

I hope the Iraqi political leaders understand a growing majority of the

Senate is willing to vote to change course in Iraq as a way to bring pressure on them to make the long-promised political compromises that virtually everyone agrees are required to end the violence in Iraq.

I hope Prime Minister Maliki, in particular, understands what the U.S. Department of State said on November 21 about him and the other political leaders in Iraq. This is an extraordinary finding by the Department of State. I hope it gets somehow or other through to Prime Minister Maliki. Here is what the Department of State report said:

Senior U.S. military commanders now portray the intransigence of Iraq's Shiite-dominated government as the key threat facing the U.S. effort in Iraq, rather than al-Qaida terrorists, Sunni insurgents, or Iranian-backed militias.

I wish the President of the United States would read his own State Department report so that not only would the majority of the Senate adopt resolutions intending to put pressure on the Iraqi leadership by telling them the open-ended commitment of American forces is over, but that the President of the United States would tell the Iraqi leaders what his own State Department said in that November 21 report. It is so important that I am going to repeat it:

Senior U.S. military commanders now portray the intransigence of Iraq's Shiite-dominated government as the key threat facing the U.S. effort in Iraq, rather than al-Qaida terrorists, Sunni insurgents, or Iranian-backed militias.

I hope the members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, the Iraqi Parliament, understand they must find a way to bring about reconciliation or face the consequences of squandering that window of opportunity provided by the military successes of the surge that, as General Odierno notes, will not be open forever. As I did after my trip to Iraq last August, I once again express my personal hope that the Iraqi Parliament will replace Prime Minister Maliki with someone who is willing to strongly push national reconciliation and to replace that Prime Minister with someone less connected to a sectarian group.

Finally, I wish to note that while last night's vote relative to Iraq was the last such vote this year, it is not the last vote the Senate is likely to hold on our policy in Iraq. The \$70 billion approved last night is only about one-third the amount the administration has sought for Iraq and Afghanistan. The next time the Congress considers funding for the war in Iraq, of the many factors that Members will no doubt consider, none will be more important than whether Iraqi political leaders have compromised with each other and assumed responsibility for the future of their own country.

THANKING STAFF AND SENATOR SALAZAR

As others of my colleagues, let me add my thanks to our staffs, the Senate staff, our pages, all the people who make it possible for us to try to do the