Mr. President, we are now in our fifth year of this

conflict in Iraq, and throughout that time I have met with commanders

of our Armed Forces, listened to their experiences and recommendations,

and after much consideration I have come to the conclusion that we are

not on the right path. While some of my colleagues believe that we

should support President George W. Bush, who continues to make

decisions that place our men and women in the Armed Forces in harm's

way, I disagree.

The past few months have been among the deadliest for our military

personnel. We have seen 79 U.S. soldiers killed in February, 82 in

March, and 85 so far this month. To the more than 3,300 U.S. soldiers

that have been killed and the over 24,000 wounded since the conflict

began, to our men and women in the Armed Forces and their families who

are valiantly serving our country and to the American people, I say to

all of you, we must change our course.

To stay the course is to welcome disaster. Iraq lies like the

proverbial clay pot broken in shards on the ground. It is shattered

into the fragments of warring factions, clans, and religious groups.

Afghanistan, still the center of the war on al-Qaida, is becoming

progressively more dangerous as our attention remains focused on Iraq.

Al-Qaida and the Taliban are rebuilding their forces and terrorists

have extended their attacks to North Africa and Western Europe. We are

facing, as our military leaders tells us again and again, a ``thinking

enemy,'' one that learns and adapts. Should we not also learn and

adapt? Can anyone doubt that our strategy needs to change?

Some have painted this conflict as simply a war against al-Qaida in

Iraq. Let us not make the mistake of fooling ourselves. Al-Qaida is

stoking the flames but it is the internal divisions among the Iraqis

themselves which has made it the bonfire it is today. If the Iraqis

unite, they can defeat al-Qaida as they have demonstrated in some

provinces already. But as everyone, including the President and our

military leaders, have observed, the Iraqis themselves must form a

reconciliation government. American soldiers are not a thread that can

permanently stitch together the broken parts of Iraq. The Iraqis

themselves are the masters of their own fate.

The legislation before us today is a call for a new strategy. It

requires that we change our present course. It makes clear that the war

in Iraq can only be won by Iraqis. It is their will and their will

alone that must determine the fate of their country. Americans cannot

do the fighting for them. A democratic Iraq will not be established

unless the Iraqis do it for themselves. We cannot put the shattered

pieces of Iraq together. Only the Iraqis can do that.

Today, with the Senate passage of H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop

Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability

Appropriations Act, 2007, we will be providing $100 billion for the

Department of Defense, primarily for continued military operations in

Iraq and Afghanistan. It also

includes a $1 billion increase for the National Guard and Reserve

equipment and $1.1 billion for military housing. Mr. President, $1.789

billion would be provided for the Department of Veterans Affairs to

specifically target treatment for veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom

and Operation Enduring Freedom, reduce the backlog of benefit claims,

and ensure that facilities are maintained at the highest level. In

addition, $6.9 billion would be appropriated for the victims of

Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, $650 million would be provided

for the State Children's Health Insurance Program, $2.25 billion in

homeland security investments, including funds for port security and

mass transit security, and $3.5 billion to help relieve pressures that

farmers and ranchers experienced due to severe drought and agricultural

disasters.

In addition to funding these important efforts, the legislation

includes an important step in setting the proper course in Iraq for our

military service members and their families by providing them with a

road map to success. By outlining the benchmarks that must be met by

the Iraqi government and clarifies our military involvement in Iraq. It

defines our mission in Iraq by steering our military away from policing

a civil war to training and equipping Iraqi security forces, protecting

U.S. forces, and conducting targeted counter terror operations. A phased

redeployment of our troops would begin no later than October 1, 2007,

with a goal of removing all combat forces by April 1, 2008, except for

those carrying out security, training, and counter terror operations.

This bill holds the Iraqi government accountable by setting benchmarks

that must be met for security, political reconciliation, and improving

the lives of the Iraqi people. It is no longer acceptable for this

Administration to set arbitrary benchmarks that have no consequences

attached to it. It is time for the Iraqi government and regional

leaders to work together to promote democracy in Iraq. It is time for

the United States to take the necessary steps that illustrates our

willingness to relinquish control and allow the Iraqi government and

the Iraqi people to control their own destiny. And it is time for the

Iraqi people to set their own path to victory and democracy.

The American people and more importantly, our service members and

their families, deserve to have the administration define our mission

in Iraq. The President must also give a clear directive to the Iraqi

government that it must demonstrate the will to overcome the civil

unrest that is taking control of their country. Unfortunately, the

President has indicated that he will veto this important legislation.

By vetoing this legislation, this administration is sending the wrong

message. It is preventing our troops from receiving the funds they need

to continue their mission in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is preventing

victims of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita from rebuilding their

lives and farmers and ranchers from receiving relief due to severe

drought and agricultural disasters. Moreover, it is preventing our

veterans from receiving the health care and benefits that they deserve.

It is time for this administration, this President, to lead us out of

the morass in Iraq. This legislation sends the right message to our

service members, to the Iraqi government and its people, and to the

American people. I urge the President to do the right thing and enact

H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery,

and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007.

Mr. Salazar. Mr. President, today I will vote for the Iraq-

Afghanistan emergency supplemental bill. I believe that this bill

supports our troops, our veterans and their families, and should be

signed by the President.

But first I would like to say that as we continue the debate on this

legislation and on the best way forward in Iraq, I come to the floor

today with two key principles in mind.

One, we should honor the bravery and courage of our troops. America's

finest men and women have done an extraordinary job--too often without

the needed equipment and support. But honoring our troops means more

than just singing their praise. It means making sure that every

American in Iraq is adequately trained and equipped; it means

guaranteeing every veteran access to all available benefits and

services; and it means setting a policy that is as wise as our soldiers

are brave.

And two, we should work to heal the deep divisions which this war has

caused at home. Not since Vietnam has the American public been so

divided. I am concerned that the bitterness and the harshness of the

debate clouds good judgment on the future direction in Iraq.

It is important for us to remember that, no matter how contentious

this debate may become, every Senator shares the same goal: peace and

stability in the Middle East and a safe return home for our troops.

While we may disagree on the best path to that end, we must continue to

work together for a constructive change in our policy. It is important

to remember what binds us together--so that we will not be torn too far

apart.

I would now like to comment on the bill before us today.

Specifically, the bill includes: More than $100 billion for our

troops on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan; more than $5 billion to

help ensure that our veterans and their families can receive the health

care they need and deserve when they return home; nearly $7 billion to

rebuild the gulf coast and help the victims of Hurricanes Katrina and

Rita so that they can finally rebuild their homes, communities and

livelihoods; and $3.5 billion in disaster assistance to help our

farmers and ranchers across the Nation recover from 7 years of drought

capped by this winter's devastating blizzards.

The bill sends a direct message to the Iraqis that our military

commitment is not open-ended. We hold the Iraqi government accountable

through measurable and achievable benchmarks for security, political

reconciliation and improving the lives of ordinary Iraqis.

The bill also launches a new diplomatic, economic and political

offensive and takes steps to begin to rebuild our military.

Finally, it sets an April, 1, 2008, goal of redeploying U.S. troops

not engaged in carrying out security, training and counter terror

operations in Iraq.

I support this new direction for Iraq. This new direction recognizes

the reality that success in Iraq is contingent upon a strategy of

military, political and diplomatic progress.

I am disappointed that the President has said he intends to veto this

legislation. But I remain hopeful. I believe that we must continue to

seek a new course in Iraq. I believe we can and should do that by

achieving a bipartisan consensus on the best path to success.

I know most of my Republican colleagues do not support this bill. But

I believe they sincerely want to join in finding a solution to the

difficult problem that confronts us in Iraq. The Iraq Study Group

provides a model for how we can work in good faith, across party lines.

And I believe that the group's recommendations can and should be our

blueprint for a compromise that can gain broad support here in the

Senate.

So next week, I will be back on the floor to discuss with my

colleagues how we can implement those recommendations, working with the

President.