Mr. President, we must change the mission of our military

forces in Iraq. We have to concentrate on training Iraqi forces so they

can assume the burden of this hostility. We have to continue our

efforts in counterterrorism to strike those international terrorists

wherever they may be. And we have to protect our forces at all times.

But we cannot continue an open-ended commitment and involvement in a

civil war. That is essentially what the President is urging us to do.

This appropriations bill provides more resources for our military

than was requested. It also funds extremely important domestic

concerns, including the Veterans' Administration, so we can keep faith

with those veterans who have served and will continue to serve; and

also, as my colleague from Louisiana pointed out, we have to begin to

reconstruct our gulf coast. It is ironic that we are pouring billions

into Baghdad, helping them build all sorts of utilities, and still

Americans languish along the gulf coast.

It also includes the Murtha standards of readiness on our forces as

they deploy, to ensure that no American unit goes into the war zone

without proper equipment, proper training, and appropriate personnel.

The President has the ability to waive this under certain

circumstances, so we are not unduly constricting his ability as

Commander in Chief.

Then, of course, this legislation has benchmarks so that the Iraqi

Government can stand up to their task. I think the one common theme

that I have heard in this body is, ultimately, this is a political

struggle and, ultimately, the Iraqi Government will make the decisions

that are so important to the success of their efforts, which will allow

us to begin a phased redeployment. But their record is very

discouraging when it comes to their government.

Leon Panetta published an editorial a few days ago in the New York

Times. He points out the Iraqis promised to achieve by the end of last

year and the beginning of this year the approval of a provincial

election law but, so far, no progress; approval of a law to regulate

the oil industry and share revenues, and a draft is circulating, but it

has not been approved by the parliament; approval of a debaathification

law to reintegrate officials of the former regime and have a

reconciliation, but there has been no progress; approval of a law to

rein in sectarian militias, but no progress there either.

By March, the Government promised to hold a referendum on

constitutional amendments. No progress.

By May, the Prime Minister committed to putting in place the law

controlling militias, with no progress; the approval of the amnesty

agreement, with no progress; and the completion of all reconciliation

efforts. No progress.

If the Iraqi Government is unwilling to stand up to the demands they

must face, then I think we can legitimately--and, indeed, we must--tell

them very strongly that we will not support an open-ended commitment to

that Government, that we will change our mission and refocus our

resources.

It is interesting to me that our Secretary of Defense and the

Secretary of State, those who travel to Baghdad, stand up and say this:

Tell them what we are doing here is important, critical, and will

happen, unless the Iraqis change. But in Washington, we are criticized

for doing this.

I think the reality in Baghdad has to be the same as here. We have to

move forward with this legislation to change the course, protect our

soldiers in the field, and to allow a chance for success in Iraq.

I think we are all committed, we hope, to a policy that will lead us

and the people of Iraq to a much better day. I believe supporting this

initiative will do that.