Mr. President, for the benefit of the Members, as they

remember, we passed the substance of this legislation, I believe, 97 to

3. That is what is effectively the substance of this legislation. The

House of Representatives has passed its own minimum wage. Because of

the parliamentary complexities, we were unable to get this issue

resolved. The House has included a minimum wage provision in their

proposal.

We offer this proposal, which is an expression of the Senate. It has

broad bipartisan support--Republican and Democrat. This will mean both

pieces of legislation--the supplemental--will have the minimum wage,

and then the conferees will be able to make their judgment. But out of

it will come an increase in the minimum wage. So it is in that spirit.

I am delighted to debate the minimum wage, but I think we had a good

debate. We had, I think, close to 7 days' debate on it in the last few

weeks, so I do not think that is necessary.

That is the current situation. That is the reason that legislation is

pending at this time. I very much appreciate the cooperation of the

floor managers in letting us get this at least up before the Senate at

this time.

Mr. President, I oppose the Republican effort to strike

the critical section of this bill requiring our troops in Iraq to begin

to come home in 120 days and that we finish the job in 2008.

This is a defining moment for our country. The American people are

watching, and the world is watching. The issue is clear. Will we stand

with our soldiers by ending their misguided mission and beginning to

bring them home? Or will we stand with the President and keep our

soldiers trapped in Iraq's civil war?

History will judge us. We can either continue down the President's

perilous path or insist on a new direction. If we don't change course,

we know what lies ahead--more American casualties, more deaths, more

destruction, greater loss of respect for America in the wider world,

and greater danger to our national security. A new strategy that makes

Iraqis less reliant on our military is the best way forward.

More of the same misguided policy will result in more of the same

tragedy for our military. We need a realistic strategy, and we need it

now. Iraq is the overarching issue of our time. Our national security

itself is at stake.

In this debate, we hear echoes of the past: We are accused of cutting

and running. We are accused of giving comfort to the enemy. We are told

we need to be patient and to accept the importance of staying the

course. We are told we have to give the latest escalation a chance to

succeed.

Listen to this comment from a high-ranking American official:

That is not President Bush speaking. It is President Lyndon Johnson

40 years ago, ordering a 100,000 more American soldiers to Vietnam.

Here is another quotation:

That is not President Bush on the need for more forces in Iraq. It is

President Johnson in 1966 as he doubled our military presence in

Vietnam.

Here is yet another familiar argument.

Those are not President Bush's words. Those are the words of

President Johnson in 1966.

Here is another familiar argument:

That is not President Bush, but it sure sounds like him. It is Vice

President Agnew in December 1969.

Here is another familiar argument being used in the Iraq debate by

the stay-the-course Republicans that we've heard before:

That is not President Bush. It is President Nixon in September 1969.

And here is another:

That's not President Bush. Those are the words of President Nixon in

April of 1970.

These words from the past resonate painfully in today's debate on

Iraq. In Vietnam, the White House grew increasingly obsessed with

victory, and increasingly divorced from the will of the people and any

rational policy. The Department of Defense kept assuring us that each

new escalation in Vietnam would be the last. We were told to be

steadfast, to stay the course, and not to retreat. There was no

military solution to that war. But we kept trying to find one anyway.

In the end, 58,000 Americans died in the search for it.

Echoes of that disaster are all around us today. Iraq is George

Bush's Vietnam.

But we have heard all that in the current debate about Iraq as well.

We have heard for years that the administration has a plan for success,

that progress is just around the corner. But the plans for success keep

getting tossed aside for new plans. The administration has benchmarks

to measure success, but there are no consequences when the benchmarks

are not met. The timelines for progress keep getting extended. We have

turned so many corners that we have ended up back where we started--

trying to control Baghdad.

It is time to change direction. Mr. President, 3,200 members of our

forces have been killed, and more than 24,000 have been wounded. The

casualties keep mounting. The violence continues to spiral upward. Our

troops are in the impossible position of trying to stabilize a country

at war with itself.

The recent National Intelligence Estimate confirms the nightmare

scenario unfolding for our troops. Iraq is sliding deeper into the

abyss of civil war, and our brave men and women are caught in the

middle of it. Prospects for halting the sectarian violence are bleak.

Greater chaos and anarchy are looming ahead. Needless additional U.S.

causalities are inevitable.

The facts speak for themselves. According to the United Nations,

nearly 35,000 civilians were violently killed in Iraq last year. Most

were killed in Baghdad, where ``unidentified bodies killed execution-

style are found in large numbers daily.''

More than 2 million refugees have fled the violence in Iraq, and

another 1.8 million have been displaced internally.

Our military should not be caught in the middle of this quagmire.

Only a political solution can solve Iraq's problems.

General Casey, in his testimony to the Senate Armed Services

Committee in June 2005, called for a political solution. He said:

Last August, General Abizaid spoke about the need for a political

solution. He said:

General Petraeus, the new commander of our forces in Iraq, recently

emphasized as well that there is ``no military solution'' in Iraq. But

no one in the administration has been able to clearly articulate a

political solution or how it can take hold in the midst of this chaos.

Instead of giving the Iraqis a necessary incentive to get their

political house in order by beginning an orderly redeployment of our

troops out of Iraq, the President stubbornly insists on sending more

and more American troops into Iraq's civil war. Escalation didn't work

in Vietnam and it won't work in Iraq either.

Even worse, the administration has not been honest about the number

of troops the President plans to send to Iraq for the surge.

On January 10, he announced that he had committed ``more than

20,000'' additional troops to Iraq. Within a few days, we were told the

number was 21,500.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that it would be far higher

as much as 35,000 to 48,000 troops when support troops are included.

On February 6, I asked General Pace and Secretary Gates for the best

military estimate as to the actual size of the escalation. Their answer

was an additional 10 to 15 percent. General Pace said, ``you're going

to need no more than another 2,000, 2,500 troops on the ground.''

Nine days later, the number more than doubled. General Schoomaker

told the Armed Services Committee his estimate was somewhere between

5,000 and 6,000 troops when he included imbedded trainers. Then, on

March 6 Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England told a House

committee ``about 4,000, maybe as many as 7,000.''

On March 7, at the request of General Petraeus, Secretary Gates

authorized an additional 2,200 military police troops.

We still don't have an accurate total for the size of this

escalation. The administration refuses to speak with clarity and

candor.

Since the current surge began, Shiite militias in Baghdad may be

lying low, but violence has increased elsewhere in Iraq.

In Diyala province, in just 3 months, American casualties have

exceeded the number for the entire year of 2006.

In January this year, 83 American soldiers were killed, compared to

62 in the same month a year ago.

Eighty more American soldiers were killed in February this year. In

the same month last year, we lost 55 soldiers.

In March, we have already lost 76 soldiers, compared to 31 in March

2006.

Continuing our open-ended commitment to stay in Iraq will not bring

victory. It will not stop the violence, and it will not protect our

national security.

The administration has outlined military, economic, and political

benchmarks to measure success. But it has not given any timeline to

achieve them, and it has not specified any consequences if the

benchmarks are not met.

This same administration supported timelines for every Iraqi election

and for drafting the constitution. Yet it remains emphatically opposed

to any timeline for the redeployment of our military.

The American people have been patient. But America has now been in

Iraq longer than it took us to win World War II. Instead of progress,

we continue to see unacceptably high levels of violence, death, and

destruction.

We are putting too much strain on our Army, especially the Army

National Guard. Our forces are overextended. Many soldiers are now on

their third rotation. In the long run, we can't protect our Army if we

don't end the war.

Our troops have done their part. They have served with great courage.

We are proud of their service, and we are ready to welcome them home.

It is time to change course. It is time to insist that Iraqis step up

to the plate and take responsibility for their own future. It is time

to begin to redeploy our troops out of Iraq. It is time to put the

Iraqis on notice that our military will no longer be a permanent crutch

for them to lean on and avoid their responsibility to achieve a

political solution. As General Abizaid told the Armed Services

Committee last November:

The only practical way to accomplish the change that is long overdue

is for American combat troops to begin to come home.

Those of us who opposed the war are used to the administration's

attacks when we disagree with their wrongheaded policy. We have come to

expect that.

They have questioned our patriotism and called us defeatists.

When we challenged the President's misguided policy, they accused us

of having political motives and being partisan. But all of their

criticisms have a hollow ring, because the administration has been so

consistently wrong about the war in Iraq.

They were wrong about the link between al-Qaida and Saddam Hussein.

They were wrong about Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass

destruction. They were wrong about America being greeted as liberators.

They were wrong about the insurgency being in its last throes. And they

are wrong to deny that Iraq is in a civil war. The American people are

far ahead of the administration. For all of us who oppose this

misguided war, our goals have always been clear: to protect the lives

of our soldiers and to protect our national security.

We have an obligation to stand up for our troops and stand up to our

President when he stubbornly refuses to change course in Iraq.

This legislation will do that. It will change the mission of our

military away from combat and require the

President to begin to redeploy American combat troops out of Iraq in 4

months. The target date for the completion of the redeployment is March

2008, 1 year from now. A limited number of troops would remain in Iraq

after that, to train and equip the Iraqi Security Forces, to conduct

counter-terrorism operations, and to guarantee the safety of our

soldiers.

Legislation is clearly necessary to give the Iraqi Government enough

incentive to step up to the plate, work out its political differences,

and take responsibility for Iraq's future.

Our proposal is consistent with the bipartisan Iraq Study Group's

findings. It is also consistent with the wishes of the American people,

who want most of our troops home within a year. How much clearer does

it have to be before Republicans in Congress and the President finally

respond to the voices of the American people? We are meeting our

responsibilities by changing the mission of our military. We are not

micromanaging the war.

Many of us oppose the war, but all of us support our troops. We don't

want to keep sending more and more of them into the middle of a civil

war. Under no circumstances do we want them to go to war without proper

armor and equipment. Our troops deserve better. Their families and

loved ones deserve better.

For the sake of our men and women in uniform in Iraq and the American

people, it is time for us to take a stand. We need to adopt a new

strategy. We need to make clear to the Iraqi Government that the

mission of our troops must change and that we have a clear timeframe

for their departure from Iraq.

The Senate will fail our troops unless we vote to change course and

begin to bring our soldiers home.

At the end of this debate, the American people will know where each

of us stands. On our side of the aisle, we stand with the American

people. The voters told us in November to change course and begin to

bring our troops home, and that is what we want to do.

We stand with our troops. We and we alone are the ones insisting on a

policy worthy of their courage and sacrifice.

We stand for protecting America's national security. The war in Iraq

has been a disaster from the start. It has made America more hated in

the world. It has made it harder to win the war against terrorism. It

has made it harder to work with other nations on every issue.

Peace and progress in Iraq must be earned by Iraqis and their

neighbors.

We must no longer send our brave soldiers to an uncertain fate on the

streets of Baghdad.

We must begin to bring them home, to the hero's welcome they have

surely earned.