Mr. President, last night, we passed the Department of

Defense Authorization bill. I want to comment briefly on the debate we

had during consideration of that legislation related to the war in

Iraq. I am frustrated that we did not reach a bipartisan consensus on a

new way forward that could begin to bring an end to this conflict.

When I introduced the Iraq Study Group Recommendations Implementation

Act last spring with Senator Alexander and a bipartisan group of our

colleagues, I was hopeful we could work constructively with the

President toward the goal of having our troops redeployed by the spring

of 2008. I was hopeful that we would send a strong signal--with a

bipartisan group that eventually grew to 17 Senators--that we should

get out of the combat business in Iraq as quickly as possible.

The Iraq Study Group Report was issued 10 months ago. Its core

recommendation was that we transition our military mission from combat

to training, supporting, and equipping Iraqi security forces. The

report said that we should condition our support of the Iraqi

Government on its performance in meeting important milestones. The

report contemplated that we could be out of the combat business by

March 31, 2008.

The report was anticipated with great fanfare. But when it came out,

the Bush administration failed to embrace it. The Iraqi Government has

failed to meet most of the benchmarks described in the report. General

Petraeus has testified, essentially, that we should maintain our combat

mission for the foreseeable future. And that March 31 date is only 6

months away.

I still believe in the report. It is still relevant, and it is still

important. It sets forth a comprehensive military, political, and

economic strategy for bringing a responsible end to the war in Iraq.

But I believe we must build upon the report and take decisive action

now to redefine our mission in Iraq and set a clear course for the

redeployment of our troops.

Ten months after the Iraq Study Group issued its report, we have

failed to begin the transition of our mission that was central to their

recommendations. That transition in mission is the key to encouraging

the Iraqi Government to take responsibility for the future of their

country. The Government Accountability Office has concluded that the

Iraqi Government has failed to take that responsibility by meeting the

reasonable benchmarks set forth by the Iraq Study Group.

I continue to believe that we must follow the core principles laid

out in the Iraq Study Group Report. I continue to believe we need a

bipartisan solution to bring this conflict to a responsible end. And I

thank each of the cosponsors of our amendment, Republicans and

Democrats, for their willingness to join in this important effort. They

include Senators Alexander, Bennett, Coleman, Collins, Domenici, Gregg,

Specter, and Sununu from the Republican side and Democratic Senators

Pryor, Casey, Carper, Conrad, Landrieu, Lincoln, McCaskill, and Bill

Nelson.

I believe now is the time to build upon the principles set forth by

the Iraq Study Group. We must begin a transition of mission from combat

to training and support. We must demand more from the Iraqi Government

and send a strong and unequivocal message that our commitment is not

open-ended. I believe these actions are consistent with the

recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, and I remain hopeful that our

legislation can be the basis for a constructive, bipartisan solution to

the war in Iraq.