Mr. President, first of all, I want to acknowledge how

pleased I am to join as cosponsor of this extremely important

amendment. I applaud Senators Hagel and Webb for returning the focus of

the Senate to the issue of our troops and their readiness.

There is a lot of talk around here about supporting the troops. Too

often we don't take the kind of action that can achieve that goal.

Yesterday, when the Senate voted to maintain the language on changing

course in Iraq, it was a good day for our country and for our troops

who may finally get the new policy they deserve.

With yesterday's vote, the Senate finally acknowledged the reality in

Iraq: The President's policy is not working. It is time to change

course. This bipartisan position was backed up in the newspapers around

the country today. USA Today and the Associated Press have an article

today detailing how the surge is not working. Baghdad, in some

instances, may be quieter, but according to the news outlets I have

just mentioned, insurgents have taken their attacks elsewhere. I quote:

Violence has not stopped in Iraq. It has gotten worse. Earlier today,

Shiite militants, including local police, went on a violent rampage.

When it ended 2 hours later, we do not know how many Sunnis have been

killed, but at least 60. The victims were men between the ages of 15

and 60, most of them killed with a shot to the back of the head.

These reports fly in the face of what we heard in the Senate

yesterday from some quarters, and we hear from President Bush that

things are better in Iraq. The idea that the surge is working or that

it needs more time is a fantasy. What we see today in Iraq, months into

the surge, is more of the same--the same violence, the same chaos, the

same loss of life we have seen over the last 4-plus years, with 3,200

dead Americans and $500 billion spent. It is long past time to change

course in Iraq.

If, yesterday, the Senate acknowledged the reality of the Iraq war,

today we must acknowledge the reality of what the Iraq war is doing to

our military and their ability to defend this Nation everyplace.

Mr. President, we have no better advocates to learn about the reality

of combat than Senators Hagel and Webb. The authors of this amendment

have authority on this subject based on their experience in battle, in

war--not the classroom. When Chuck Hagel and Jim Webb speak for a

change of course, we should all listen.

Chuck Hagel is a Vietnam combat veteran. He served with his brother

Tom. Both of them were infantry squad leaders with the U.S. Army's 9th

Infantry Division. For his service, Senator Hagel earned many military

decorations, including having been wounded twice--two Purple Hearts.

When I say Chuck Hagel is a combat veteran, I mean it. I mean it. Here

is a description from a 2005 Washington Post profile of what Senator

Hagel faced in Vietnam:

That is only part of the story. Jim Webb was also in Vietnam. He was

a marine with the Fifth Marine Regiment. For his service he was awarded

the Navy Cross, the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars, and also two Purple

Hearts. Here is an excerpt from his citation for the Navy Cross:

Webb's service did not stop on the battlefields of Vietnam. In 1984,

he was appointed the inaugural Assistant Secretary of Defense. In 1987,

under President Reagan, he became the first Naval Academy graduate in

the history of our country to serve the military and then become

Secretary of the Navy.

These two men are authorities on war, authorities on war and the

military. All of us would be wise to heed their counsel. Chuck Hagel

and Jim Webb are certified heroes. That is all you can say.

This morning I got up early and went to Walter Reed. I met a new

generation of heroes, men and women injured serving in Iraq and

Afghanistan. I was accompanied by my friend, the distinguished Senator

from Washington, Mrs. Murray. To say I left depressed is an

understatement. We have all heard the stories about Walter Reed.

I have two observations from my visit. I have been there on other

occasions, but I have two observations from my visit today.

First, private contracting is destroying the ability of the military

to care for our troops. Go to Walter Reed. Listen to the parents.

Listen to the people who are there, who are hurt. I was walking into

Walter Reed and I introduced myself to a man dressed in civilian

clothes. He told me who he was: a college graduate.

I said: What do you do?

He said: I am an industrial hygienist.

I said: What do you do?

He said: I am one of those guys who goes around trying to make sure

that these places are sanitary and safe. I check for mold.

I said: How are you doing?

He said: Terrible.

I said: Why?

He said: Because of contracting out we went from 15 industrial

hygienists at Walter Reed to 5.

So contracting out is hurting our ability to care for our troops.

No. 2, one soldier said it the best. He was sitting there, leg off

midthigh. He said: Everyone thinks that this is my problem. He said:

That's not my problem. He said: It's this leg--and he had a leg that

was terribly mutilated--the calf blown off, dropped foot, scars all up

and down it.

He said: You know, but I'm really fortunate because I'm alive.

He went on to say: We amputees are treated pretty well. It's the

people with injuries that you can't see who are having a difficult

time.

That is the way it is. One young man from Cincinnati, OH, just turned

20 years old--big, as big as the Presiding Officer--big man. He said: I

only got shot once. He said: I had a protective vest. I was shot in the

stomach. It didn't hurt me too bad. But I survived multiple explosive

devices.

He said: My friend--these are his words--``vaporized sitting next to

me.''

He is now in big trouble--emotionally, mentally. He has a lot of

problems. He said: I have nightmares, I sweat, I become violent, I

can't remember anything. He said: I don't know what I'm going to do. He

was one of a number whom we visited with there.

Walter Reed is a metaphor of what is happening to our military as a

whole. We don't have a single Army unit that is nondeployed that is

battle ready. We hear today from one of the generals that in the

National Guard, 40 percent of the units are not capable of anything

realistically connected to battle. It will take $40 billion to bring

the Guard alone up to what it was before the war. The war has badly

strained our military. The administration's policies have reduced our

military readiness to levels not seen for a long time. Not a single

unit, nondeployed Army unit, I repeat, is combat ready. Multiple and

extended deployments overseas have reduced readiness and damaged

recruiting, retention, and morale. Units have been sent into battle by

this administration without the proper training and equipment, in my

opinion. That is not supporting the troops; that is breaking the force.

We have to do better.

This is not just my opinion. It is the opinion of current and former

senior Army officers.

Colin Powell:

Arnold Punaro, Chairman of the Commission on the National Guard and

Reserves 15 days ago said:

Peter Schoomaker, Chief of Staff of the Army, said:

I spoke yesterday to a man in my security detail on his way to Iraq

for the third time. Sadly, his story is the norm, not the exception. Of

the Army's 44 combat brigades, all but one permanently based in South

Korea have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Of those 43 brigades,

12 deployed once, 20 deployed twice, 9 deployed three times, 2 have

been deployed 4 times.

Today we have soldiers serving in Iraq who have been fighting in

battle well over a year. We have other soldiers who were on their way

to Iraq after having been home with their families for a matter of

months.

That is not supporting the troops. It is hurting the troops. Our men

and women cannot and should not continue to bear the burden of this

mismanaged war. We have to do better. That is why the Webb-Hagel

amendment is so important.

This amendment will ensure our troops have the equipment they need

before they go to battle--before they go to battle. It explicitly

states that our troops must have the training and equipment they need

or they cannot be sent overseas.

This amendment will also enhance the quality of life for troops and

their families and, as a result, improve recruiting and retention. It

says that after our brave men and women serve 365 days in Iraq, they

are entitled to a significant period of rest back home before they can

be redeployed. In short, this Hagel-Webb amendment will improve

readiness and our ability to respond to other threats and project power

around the world.

We live, we all know, in a dangerous world. We face many threats.

From destroying al-Qaida to deterring Iran and North Korea from gaining

nuclear weapons, there are critical challenges around the world that

we, the superpower, America, must confront. Unfortunately, we have a

military stretched too thin to meet these challenges.

After years of overuse and neglect, we must reinvest in the military.

With this amendment we will take the necessary steps to make a

downpayment on rebuilding our fighting force and keeping our families

safe.

I so appreciate these two combat veterans, these two unique, good

Senators leading us down this road on which we must be led.