Mr. President, I wish to offer my thanks as well to the

distinguished majority leader of the Senate for his comments and his

support of the amendment that I am about to address, as well as my

friend and colleague, the distinguished junior Senator from Virginia.

The war in Iraq has pushed the U.S. military to the breaking point.

Our troops are being deployed longer than they should be, more

frequently than they should be, and without full training and

equipment. When we deploy our military, the President and the Congress

have a responsibility, an obligation to ensure that our troops are

rested, ready, fully trained, and fully equipped.

Senator Webb and I have introduced this amendment to protect and

maintain the readiness and strength of our Armed Forces. Our amendment

requires, with the force of law, that our

troops are only deployed to Iraq when they meet the military's own

standards for readiness and deployment. We are not creating new

standards. We are simply requiring that the military's own standards be

met so that our men and women in uniform are sufficiently rested,

ready, fully equipped, and fully trained when deployed.

That is the President's and the Congress's responsibility. No

American wants to allow a single soldier to be deployed without meeting

the required standards of readiness. Our amendment gives the President

appropriate flexibility. Our amendment has a 4-month delay, before the

provisions come into force, to give the President time to comply.

The President can waive the readiness requirement in case of a

national emergency and under circumstances where a unit will receive

its full complement of equipment in the theatre of operations. Our

amendment exempts from the deployment cap all headquarters personnel

and any other U.S. military personnel who are needed in Iraq to ensure

continuity of mission between rotating forces.

This amendment will help our troops in a way that avoids having

unintended operational consequences for our commanders in Iraq. Our

amendment is about our troops. It is about readiness. It is about

preventing our troops from being extended 3, 4, 5 or 6 months, as has

been and is currently the case today. It is about ensuring a minimum

time home between deployments.

This amendment is also about addressing deployment rotations of our

troops in Iraq. Many are there for their third and fourth tours of

duty. The United States will not be able to sustain the greatest all-

volunteer military that the world has ever known if we allow the status

quo to continue.

We are witnessing a clear and dangerous consequence of the

administration's Iraq policy in Army recruitment. To meet recruitment

targets, the military is being forced to issue waivers today. These

waivers are for violent offenders, criminals, and for drug abuse. We

are waving education requirements. The result is a defining down, a

defining down of the standards of the U.S. Army. No institution can

maintain any aspect of excellence by dumbing down its standards. If we

do not stop this dangerous trend, it will affect the entire institution

of our military, an institution that has taken great American leaders

30 years to build.

After the disaster of Vietnam, our military was shredded. Ask Colin

Powell. Ask Norman Schwarzkopf. Ask other great military leaders who,

in fact, after Vietnam said: No more. We are going to build the finest,

greatest, most responsible, best force structure the world has ever

known, and they did.

The deployment and operations tempo our military has had to endure in

both Iraq and Afghanistan over the last 4 years cannot be sustained

without inflicting unacceptable costs to our military power and our

standing and influence around the world.

As the Washington Post reported today, General Barry McCaffrey, the

former four-star commander of the U.S. Southern Command, tours in

Vietnam, led a division in 1991 in the Gulf War, he now believes--

according to the article in today's Washington Post--that the U.S.

military is in, his words, ``strategic peril.''

Yesterday, LTG Steven Blum, the Chief of the National Guard Bureau,

testified before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness.

General Blum said the National Guard is, in his words:

In February, GEN Peter Schoomaker, the Chief of Staff of the U.S.

Army, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee. General

Schoomaker said: ``I am not satisfied with the readiness of our non-

deployed forces.''

At the same hearing, GEN Peter Pace, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs

of Staff, acknowledged that today our Army units ``do not have the

opportunity that they would normally have in a two-year cycle to train

for the combined arms that they may be required to execute elsewhere in

the world.''

On March 1, the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves issued

a report that concluded that: Nearly 90 percent of Army National Guard

units are rated as--their words--``not ready.''

There have been repeated reports that senior Army officials now

believe there are no nondeployed Army brigades who are rated as combat

ready.

Now in our fifth year of the war in Iraq, the Congress must assert

itself in a very real and responsible way to fulfill our constitutional

responsibilities in matters of war as a coequal branch of our

Government.

Over the last 4 years, the Congress has been absent from this

responsibility. The American people now expect us to step into this

tragedy that we have allowed to happen and begin to reshape our policy

in Iraq by placing responsible conditions on our continued military

involvement in this war in Iraq.

We are abusing our all-volunteer force in a dangerous and

irresponsible way. We are abusing our people. We are abusing their

families. We cannot continue to burden our military by continuing to

place our military in the middle of a civil war in Iraq and loading

onto them, continuing to load onto our military, expectations that they

are incapable of fulfilling.

We are asking our military to accomplish things they cannot

accomplish, not because they are not brave enough, not because they

haven't fought valiantly--they have fought valiantly and we are proud

of them--but it is new diplomatic initiatives that must now drive our

policies in Iraq. There will not be--nor cannot be--a military victory

in Iraq that will achieve peace or any form of stability or security

for the Iraqi people or the Middle East.

The future of Iraq will be determined by the political accommodations

of the people of Iraq which will result in a political resolution that

will be supported by the Iraqi people, its regional neighbors, and

other powers, including the United States. Our military should not be

asked to do it all. Our military should not be expected to do it all.

They have done more than their part.

Our men and women in uniform and their families deserve policy worthy

of their sacrifice. I do not believe that to be the case today.

Unfortunately, today the Senate will not vote on our amendment. But

Senator Webb and I are committed to this amendment, and we will

continue to push for a vote in the Senate in the coming weeks, and we

will be back and we will be back.

We have been assured by the majority leader that we will get a vote

on this amendment in the Senate. I conclude with this: I often ask

myself, who speaks for the rifleman? Who cares about the rifleman? War

is not a distraction. Those whom we ask to go fight and die are a very

small percentage of our population whom we ask to carry all the burden

and make all the sacrifices. But who speaks for them?

Of course, we have a responsibility for a larger geopolitical

strategic policy for our interests. We have interests in Iraq. We have

interests in the world. We have interests in the Middle East. But do we

ever stop enough and listen enough and focus enough on these soldiers,

these marines and their families who have nothing to say about policy;

but they do what their country asks them to do.

When we frame policy in Washington, part of that prospective of

framing that policy must include the right because it must ultimately

get to this question: Is the cost worth what we are attempting to

accomplish? Is the cost worth the high price we are asking others to

pay?

Ultimately, that is the question we should always ask ourselves,

those of us who have the privilege and the responsibility to frame

policy--if Congress must be part of that--not just constitutionally but

morally, but morally.

We each represent constituencies from around this country. We are

close to those constituencies. We mirror those constituencies. We are

products of those constituencies. We are close to those constituencies.

We must do better for our military. We will pay a high price if we do

not turn this around. We will pay a high price, indeed, not just in

America's blood and treasure but for our future interests and security

in the world.

We have not paid attention to our military, we have not paid

attention to

the rifleman, and now is the time to start paying attention. I

appreciate the time to offer this amendment with my friend and

colleague who, as the majority leader noted minutes ago, was one of the

most decorated veterans of the Vietnam war. He understands this issue

very well. He understands it from the bottom up.

It does not mean Senator Webb and Senator Hagel are always right on

anything. But we do try to bring a frame of reference to this debate

that is relevant, that is important, and focus our attention on the

very critical element of who we are. It is our people. Nothing is more

important than our people.

I yield the floor.