Mr. President, this is a defining moment. The American

people are watching. The world is watching. The issue is clear: Will we

stand with our soldiers by changing their mission to begin to bring

them home or will we stand to keep our soldiers in Iraq's civil war?

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

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

know what lies ahead: more American casualties, more American death,

and more destruction. A new strategy that makes the 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. Let's

try a new course and try it now.

We must proceed because Iraq is the overarching issue of our time. We

are being told we need to be patient. We are being told we have to give

the latest escalation a chance to succeed. But we have heard it all

before. We have heard for years that this administration has a plan for

success. We have heard for years that progress is just a few months

away. We have heard for years that we have turned a corner. But the

plans for success keep getting tossed aside for new plans, the

timelines for progress keep getting extended, and 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. There are too many parents who have

buried their children, too many children left without their father or

mother, and too many soldiers missing arms and legs and eyes and ears.

It is time to change course, let the Iraqis step up to the plate and

take responsibility for their own future, and begin to redeploy our

troops out of Iraq.

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

attacks. They have questioned our patriotism and called us defeatist.

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

having political motives and being partisan. They were wrong then, and

they are wrong now. Our motives have always been clear: to protect the

lives of our soldiers.

The American people are far ahead of the administration. 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. We are meeting our

responsibility by changing the mission of our military, not

micromanaging the war.

The recent hearings on Walter Reed should instruct us here today.

They tell us how little faith we can put in this administration. The

very people who hide behind the troops when their policies are

questioned have failed to keep faith with our wounded soldiers. But

just as importantly, the hearings on Walter Reed remind us all of the

human costs of the war. This administration has done all it can to hide

them from us. They have forbidden photographs of the coffins flown back

from Iraq. The President has avoided attending the funerals of the

fallen, and the tours at Walter Reed never included Building 18. But

the hearings on Walter Reed swept away all the spin and camouflage and

put our wounded soldiers back where they belong: at the heart of our

debate about the war.

At the end of those hearings, everyone agreed that the Army had

failed these brave soldiers. But we failed them long before they

arrived at an Army hospital. This administration failed them when it

trumped up the intelligence in order to make the case for war.

I ask unanimous consent for 30 additional seconds.

It failed them when it sent too few troops with too little armor. It

failed them when it turned the reconstruction of Iraq into a political

science project.

We in the Senate will fail them today if we do not vote to change

course and 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 are going to do. We stand

for our constitutional system in which the Congress speaks for the

people in matters of war and peace and can require that the President

listen to them. Finally, we stand with our troops. We alone are

insisting on a policy worthy of their courage and worthy of their

sacrifice.

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

neighbors. We must no longer send our brave soldiers into an uncertain

fate on the streets of Baghdad. Bring them home to the heroes welcome

they have earned.

I thank the Chair. I do not intend to be long, and I am

glad to yield at any time to the chairman of the Armed Services

Committee.

Mr. President, this is a defining moment for our country. The

American people are watching. The world is watching. The issue is

clear. Will we stand with our soldiers by changing their 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 do not change course,

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

destruction.

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. Let's try a new course and let's try it now

because Iraq is the overarching issue of our time and because we need

to protect our national security.

We are told we need to be patient. We are told we have to give the

latest escalation a chance to succeed. But we have heard all of that

before.

We have heard for years that this administration has a plan for

success. We have heard for years that progress is just a few months

away. We have heard for years that we have turned 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 for a new direction.

Mr. President, I reference this document. It is: ``Measuring

Stability and Security in Iraq.'' It is a report to Congress by the

Department of Defense, embargoed until 3 o'clock this afternoon. It is

now after that hour. Here is what this document, which has just been

released by the Department of Defense, has to say on stability and

security in Iraq:

Mr. President, too many parents have had to bury their sons and

daughters. Too many children have been left without their father or

their mother. Too many soldiers are missing arms or legs. Nearly 3,200

of our forces have been killed. More than 24,000 have been wounded. The

casualties keep mounting. The violence in Iraq continues to spiral as

well. 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.

casualties are inevitable.

The intelligence community has finally determined what everyone but

the Bush administration has been willing to admit for some time. As the

Intelligence Estimate stated:

Those are the words of the intelligence community. Secretary Powell

agrees. Former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan agrees. Only President

Bush continues to stubbornly deny that our troops are policing a civil

war.

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

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

November and December of last year, more than 6,000 civilians were

killed. 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 June 2005 testimony to the Senate Armed

Services Committee, called out for a political solution. He said:

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

solution. He said:

This is General Abizaid--

Last week, General Petraeus, the new commander of our forces in Iraq,

stated 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 troops into

Iraq's civil war. Escalation didn't work in Vietnam and it will not

work in Iraq either.

The President's latest proposal--to increase the number of our troops

in Iraq--makes no sense at all. Sending more troops into the cauldron

of Iraq's civil war is not the solution.

In addition to the fact that we know a military solution is not the

answer, the administration still has not leveled with us on the number

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

On January 10, the President announced he had committed more than

20,000 additional troops to Iraq. Within a few days, this number had

been revised to 21,500.

The CBO 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 estimates of the actual size of the escalation, and their

answer was an additional 10 to 15 percent. General Pace said:

By February 15, the number had more than doubled. General Schoomaker

told the Armed Services Committee his estimate was somewhere between

5,000 and 6,000 troops when you 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.''

Last week, 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 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

Americans were killed in February of this year. In the same month last

year, we lost 55 soldiers. Already, in 2 weeks this March, we have lost

more than 31 soldiers, the same number killed in the entire month of

March of 2006.

This is what today's report from the Defense Department points out on

page 18, under the section ``Attack Trends and Violence'':

It continues:

That is today's report.

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 stated 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 for any timeline for the redeployment of our

military.

The American people have been patient. But America now has 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. The Army is overextended. Many soldiers are now on

their third rotation. To deal with the recruitment shortages, we have

eased the standards and increased the bonuses. The Department of

Defense is formalizing a policy to redeploy reservists more often and

for longer. But 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 ask the Iraqis to step to

the plate and take the responsibility for their own future, and 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. As General Abizaid told the Armed Services

Committee last November:

It is time 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 wrong-headed policy. We have come

to expect that. They have questioned our patriotism and call us

defeatists. When we challenged the President's misguided policy, he

accused us of having political motives and being partisan.

Before the war, Vice President Cheney said we hadn't seen all the

intelligence he had seen. But after the war, when things were going

badly, the President said more than 100 times that we had seen the same

intelligence.

More than 2 years ago, I called on the administration to focus on the

training of the Iraqi security forces and to begin to redeploy our

troops out of Iraq. I said the Iraqis need to take responsibility and

that we should set a goal of about a year for the redeployment of most

of our forces out of Iraq. Rather than debating the merits of the

policy, the Republican spin machine went into overdrive. A year ago, on

the third anniversary of the war, Vice President Cheney went on

national television and said:

Well, the American people certainly know we cannot look to the Vice

President and this administration for national security. The

administration has been consistently wrong about the war in Iraq. Year

after year, they insist on a dangerously incompetent strategy. They

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

were wrong about Saddam Hussein's 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 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:

protect the lives of our soldiers and protect our national security.

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

President when he stubbornly refuses to

change course in Iraq. Our 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

counterterrorism, and to guarantee the safety of our soldiers.

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

finding. It recommended that:

Those are the words of the Iraq Study Group.

Legislation is clearly necessary to give the Iraq Government enough

of an incentive to step up to the plate, work out its political

differences, and take responsibility for Iraq's future. 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 good of our men and women in uniform 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 recent hearings on Walter Reed should inform our debate as well.

They tell us how little faith we can put in this administration. The

very people who hide behind the troops when we question their policies

have failed to keep faith with our wounded soldiers. As importantly,

the hearings on Walter Reed remind all of us of the human costs of the

war. This administration has done all it can to conceal them from us.

They have forbidden photographs of the coffins flown back from Iraq.

The President has avoided attending the funerals of the fallen. The

tours of Walter Reed never included Building 18.

But the hearings on Walter Reed swept away all the spin and

camouflage. They put our wounded soldiers back where they belong: at

the heart of our debates about the war.

At the end of those hearings, everyone agreed that the administration

failed these brave soldiers, but we failed them long before they

arrived at Walter Reed. The administration failed them when it trumped

up the intelligence in order to make the case for war. It failed them

when it sent too few troops with too little armor into battle. We in

the Senate will fail them today 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 to begin to bring our troops home, and

that is what we are going to do.

We stand for our Constitution, in which the Congress speaks for the

people in matters of war and peace and can require the President to

listen.

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.

I yield the floor.