Mr. President, I want to take a few minutes to talk about

the testimony given yesterday by General Petraeus and Ambassador

Crocker regarding our progress and challenges in Iraq. I think it is

important for the American people to understand and for our colleagues

to understand that the surge of troops in Iraq that began in the early

part of last year was a corrective measure, and that from the fall of

Baghdad until January 2007, it was clear to me, Senator McCain, and

others that our strategy during that period of time was not working;

that we had too few troops; that the country got into a lawless state;

that political progress and economic progress was virtually

nonexistent. There was a paralysis when it came to the ability to

govern in Baghdad: The economy was stalled; violence was spreading

throughout the country to the point, in 2006, that the al-Qaida flag

flew over parts of Anbar Province.

So there was a moment of reckoning. The President had a decision to

make after the Republican losses in November of 2006. It was widely

held that the reason Republicans lost in the midterm elections was

because of Iraq policy. Secretary Rumsfeld resigned and the President

had a choice. One of the choices would have been to adopt the strategy

of withdrawing at a faster rate, the theory being to put pressure on

the Iraqi military and government to perform better because they were

not doing well because they were relying too much upon us. The other

theory was that the security environment is so out of control and so

tenuous that you will never have military, political, or economic

progress until you get better control over security.

Well, the surge argument, advocated primarily by Senators McCain,

Lieberman, and others, won the day with the President. So it was clear

that we needed to change strategy at the end of 2006, and we did. There

is an ongoing debate about whether that was the correct choice. To

evaluate fairly the testimony of Ambassador Crocker and General

Petraeus, I think one has to look at what happened from January of 2007

up to today and planned out to July 2008.

During that period of time, there was a surge of American combat

forces into Iraq of 30,000 additional combat troops. The security

argument prevailed over the withdrawal argument. The troops were

deployed in a significantly different way. Not only were there more of

the troops, which was a requirement, General Petraeus came up with a

new strategy. He got the troops out into the communities, at security

stations, where American soldiers served with Iraqi soldiers and

policemen within the community. That built a sense of confidence we had

not seen before. At the end of 2006, something very startling happened

in Anbar Province. Sheik Sattar, one of the young sheiks in the Anbar

Sunni region, after part of his family was murdered by al-Qaida, came

to an American colonel and said: We have had it, we want to fight with

you. We want these guys out of Anbar. We don't want to be dominated by

al-Qaida in Iraq. The commander seized the moment and put a couple of

tanks around the guy's house. From that action by the colonel and the

addition of combat forces, Anbar Province is a completely different

place.

If you ask me what is the most successful event of all within the

surge period of time, I would argue it is the uprising in Anbar

Province by Iraqi Sunni Arabs against the al-Qaida presence in Anbar.

They have rejected the al-Qaida agenda and joined forces with the

coalition forces, American forces, and we have literally delivered a

punishing blow to al-Qaida in Anbar Province--to the point now that

Ramadi and Fallujah are some of the safest places in all of Iraq.

So for the American public to grasp what is going on here, I think

you have to understand this one fact. When Arab Muslim people say no to

al-Qaida and we will fight bin Laden, his agents, and sympathizers,

that is a good day for America. That is what the war is going to be

about conventionally, in terms of how we win. If the people in the

Mideast turn on al-Qaida and they say no and shoulder the burden of

fighting and create a community in place of al-Qaida's agenda that is

more tolerant, more open, that will allow the Shia and the Kurds to

live in peace; that will not try to pass on the al-Qaida philosophy and

agenda to everybody surrounding the region. So this is incredibly good

news from the surge, with the increased combat capability and the

overplaying of al-Qaida's hand in Anbar; they were incredibly vicious

to the people.

I have been to Iraq 11 times, and the stories that come out of Anbar

Province while al-Qaida dominated the region are heart-breaking and

bone-chilling. Now we have, in April of 2008, a completely changed

Anbar Province, where we have over 90,000 Iraqis, called the ``Sons of

Iraq,'' patrolling their communities at night and during the day to

make sure al-Qaida doesn't come back.

Iraq is a changed place in many ways. If you had to list the winners

and losers of the surge, I argue that the biggest loser of all is the

al-Qaida presence in Iraq. Any time al-Qaida is losing, we are winning.

What has happened in that period of time? The economic progress in Iraq

is real and is fundamentally different than it was before the surge.

The reason I think we

have had economic progress in Iraq is because, with better security,

you can engage in commerce. It is hard to run an economy when you are

afraid to go to work. It is hard to build a society when your children

cannot go to school. The GDP growth in Iraq is about 7 percent, and

inflation before the surge was at 66 percent. Now it is close to 12

percent, and dropping. The oil production is up by 50 percent.

Electricity demand is up by 25 percent.

We have economic progress in Iraq that is showing signs of a vibrant

country moving toward normalcy. We had a budget path in Baghdad by the

Iraqi Parliament, where Sunni, Shia, and Kurds took the $48 billion of

revenue that the central government has under their authority and

shared it with each province and each and every group within Iraq. What

does that mean? I think most political leaders in America would tell

you that money is political power. In our minority status as

Republicans, the Democratic majority gives us an allocation to run our

staffs and participate in committee activity. We share the resources of

running the Senate. We sit down and say the Republicans get this and

the Democrats get that. That is a recognition that we may disagree

with, but we all have a vibrant role and we need the resources. The

fact that the Shia, Sunni, and Kurds were able to come together and

allocate resources owned by the country as a whole to each and every

group is a major step forward. It would not have happened a year and a

half ago. It is a buy-in by every group that Iraq is a separate country

with a common identity. When you can get all three groups giving the

resources of the country to each other, that is a buy-in to win Iraq.

There is more than that. An amnesty law was passed about 90 days ago.

That means there are thousands of people in jail in Iraq--mostly

Sunnis--who were captured in part of the surge and some before--that

were taking up arms against the central government. These Sunnis in

jail didn't want to participate in democracy. They ran the show under

Saddam Hussein. Even though they were a minority in Iraq when Saddam

was in power, they ran the show. They had an uprising, using violence

to get their way, to topple the government. They landed in jail. One

thing history will tell you and teach you, if you follow it closely, is

that there will never be a reconciliation of a country that is divided

ethnically or politically until there is a level of forgiveness.

Reconciliation is a word, and it means nothing without action. The

amnesty law was passed by the Shia, Kurds, and Sunnis, and it gave the

people in jail who were captured as part of the Sunni insurgency a

chance to be released and to start over again. There have been 24,000

applications to be released from jail under the amnesty law and 17,000,

I have been told, have been granted.

That is a statement by the Shia and the Kurds who were on the

receiving end of the violence to the people in jail, saying: Go back

home. Let's start over as a new country. That, to me, is an act of

forgiveness that is a precondition to reconciliation, and it would not

have happened if there had not been a surge in the reduction of

sectarian violence.

I see my good friend from Arizona.

I asked General Petraeus that very question. He said that

anytime Muslims would take up arms against al-Qaida, it is marching

toward the solution America has been seeking. I think General Petraeus,

myself, and Senators Kyl and Lieberman understand this war is not just

about killing terrorists; this is about supporting moderation where you

can find it, isolating the elements within the region.

If you had to put a list of extreme elements together, al-Qaida would

be at the top. To those men and women who have participated in the

surge and stood by the Anbar Iraqis who turned on al-Qaida, I think you

have made our country safer. To the Iraqis who took up arms against al-

Qaida, I think you have made Iraq safer and the world safer.

Mr. President, my question back to the Senator from Arizona, if I

may, is, from his understanding of what was said yesterday, what can

the Congress do, rather than criticize, what constructively can we do

as a body to support those in harm's way and make sure we leave Iraq

with a successful outcome?

Mr. President, I see our colleague, Senator Lieberman, is

on the floor. If I may, I wish to direct a question his way.

One of the themes of the testimony from General Petraeus is that

after the surge has progressed to this stage, the biggest threat to

Iraqi stability is no longer al-Qaida or sectarian violence but special

groups trained by the Iranian Government sent back into Iraq to

destabilize this effort of moderation.

Mr. President, can Senator Lieberman tell us his take on Iran's

involvement and where he thinks we need to go as a nation?

Mr. President, I think our time expires in the next 5

minutes. I will quickly wrap up my thoughts and ask my colleagues to

comment.

People want to know when we are going to come home. Trust me, if you

have been to Iraq at all, if you spent any time with our men and women

in uniform, you want them to be with their families and out of harm's

way in the most desperate way.

The point I want people to remember is these are all volunteers. Some

have been there two, three, four times. They make one simple request to

me as a Senator: Take care of us, but support us so we can win. The

reason they go back time and time again is they understand the

consequences to our Nation if we lose.

So if you want to take stress off the military--and don't we all--the

best stress we can take off our military is the stress of not knowing

if they are going to be allowed to win.

I hope colleagues in this body will respect General Petraeus's

reasoned opinion and give him some deference because I think he has

produced results that will go down in history as one of the most

successful military counterinsurgency operations anywhere on the planet

and give a little deference and respect to Ambassador Crocker, who has

put together political progress under the most difficult circumstances,

where the Iraqis are seeing each other now not as enemies but as

partners in an endeavor to create a better life for themselves, to live

at peace with their neighbors, and to make the whole world safer

against extremism.

When we come home is not the question for the ages. It may be for

your next election and it may be about your political future; that may

be the way you are looking at it or it may be about the Republican

Party's political future. It is not that way for me, Senator McCain, or

I think anybody else, certainly not for Senator Lieberman.

The question for me, the question for our Nation, and the world over

time is, What did we leave behind? I am more confident than ever that

we can leave behind, in the heart of the Mideast, in the center of the

Arab world, a group of people called Iraqis, who will be our friends

for a long time to come, will contain Iranian expansionism, and will

continue to be al-Qaida's worst nightmare. That day is coming. The only

way we can lose now is for Congress to undercut it.

To Senator Kyl, how important is it for the Congress to pass a

supplemental without strings attached?