Mr. President, I thank my friend from South Carolina

and also my friend from Arizona.

This is a very important question, and I thought it was a very

compelling part of the testimony offered both by General Petraeus and

Ambassador Crocker yesterday. If I may approach this by going back to

the colloquy between my two friends earlier, they put their finger on a

very important point. Let me go even a little further back.

After 9/11/01, after we were attacked, one of the insights we had was

there is a violent civil war, both theological and political, going on

within the Muslim world between a small group of fanatics, violent

jihadists and the rest of the Muslim world who are pretty much like the

rest of all of us. They want to live better, freer, more opportunity-

filled lives for themselves and their children.

We went into Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein. We are there now to

essentially help the Iraqis--and remember, Iraq is not just another

country. It is one of the historic centers of the Arab world--to help

this great country and its leaders and people to take hold of their own

destiny and, in doing so, reject the extremists, the jihadists, the

suicide bombers, and create for the Muslim world a different path to

the future than the extremism and suicidal death and hatred and

primitivism that al-Qaida, the current leadership of Iran, and others

of that sort present to them.

Part of what the testimony yesterday, I think, from Ambassador

Crocker and General Petraeus said is that thanks to the backing of the

United States through the surge, the Iraqis are taking control of their

destiny.

As my colleagues pointed out, the moderates are winning. They have

al-Qaida on the run out of Al Anbar Province. The businesses are

reopening. The children are going back to school. They have hopes of a

better future.

One of our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee said to General

Petraeus: What is going on here? I thought we were in Iraq to fight al-

Qaida. Now you are telling me we pretty much have beaten al-Qaida, we

have them on the run, and now you are telling us we are there to fight

Iran.

That question missed the point, the point my colleagues have made in

their colloquy. The point is, we are there for an affirmative reason.

We are there to help the Iraqis establish a self-governing, self-

defending moderate country, an antiterrorist country. We do have al-

Qaida on the run, but as the two witnesses made clear yesterday, Iran

is not on the run. In fact, Iran is an expansionist, fanatic power not

only working through these special groups in Iraq but through Hezbollah

in Lebanon and through Hamas in the Palestinian areas. They were

tremendous statements yesterday, very strong.

Ambassador Crocker:

This takes me--and then I will yield back to my colleagues--to what

seemed to be the frustration of some of our colleagues on the committee

yesterday. They were trying to get General Petraeus and Ambassador

Crocker to tell us again: We are going to get all our troops or most of

our troops out by X date. Fortunately, General Petraeus and Ambassador

Crocker are not accountable to political calculus. They have been given

the responsibility for this mission. They have American lives on the

line. They have lost American lives.

The answer General Petraeus gave us is clearly the right one: I wish

I could tell you how many brigades more I can pull out after July, but

I can't until I see what conditions on the ground are. Maybe I can

bring out some more, but maybe I can't. If I do it prematurely, we will

run the risk of chaos and a loss of all we have gained in Iraq;

frankly, a disrespect of the lives of Americans who have been lost

there. Their families and loved ones always tell us: Don't let them to

have died in vain. The No. 1 winner, if we pull out prematurely, would

be Iran. They are all over Iraq. They have their hands in just about

everything.

If we leave and chaos ensues, as Ambassador Crocker said yesterday:

We cannot let that happen. I thank my colleague.

Mr. President, I thank my friend. Briefly, I recount a

conversation with a friend of mine this morning. He said, watching the

hearings yesterday, that he thought those

who have been critical of our effort in Iraq seemed quite restrained

yesterday. I said they were, and I think it is because the record

General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker were giving us was one of

remarkable progress militarily, politically, and economically. It was

hard to criticize, so the criticisms were kind of around the side: Why

can't you tell us when we will get out exactly? Why didn't President

Maliki consult more before he went south?

What I wish is that our colleagues had accepted the facts General

Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker gave us of the extraordinary progress

in Iraq, which is very critical to our security because it creates a

victory for the moderates, the good guys in the civil war within the

Islamic world, and it protects our security in that sense because,

remember, it is the fanatics who killed 3,000 of us on 9/11.

Let's hope for another day when there will be an agreement on the

facts, and maybe we can get together to figure out how we can

accelerate progress in Iraq so what all of us want can happen, which is

we bring as many of our troops home as quickly as possible, with honor

and after success. What can Congress do? I would say two things, after

listening yesterday. One is to pass a supplemental. The second is to

stay out of the way and not force our military and diplomatic leaders

to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Don't impose deadlines.