Mr. President, last evening, as most of us had departed

with the understanding that the floor was about to close, our colleague

from Illinois, Senator Durbin, the distinguished whip of the Democratic

Party, came over and proceeded to give what I felt was a very strong

critique of all of those things in Iraq which in his judgment and, to

some extent, the judgment of others sharing it went wrong. There was

little or no reference to what went right and the progress that has

been made in Iraq.

He concluded again with his own personal views with regard to

Secretary Rumsfeld and what should be done with respect to his services

in the future.

It is interesting. Yesterday, Senator Biden also spoke out with

regard to his concept of this very difficult dilemma, facing not only

the Iraqis but all those nations working to help the Iraqis form their

government, as to how certain modifications should be taken with regard

to the new government, namely three secretaries having their own say in

this matter with an overall arching government on top. Senator Biden's

commentary, in my judgment, was constructive, and was maybe a little

too late to back up from where we are at this moment. But it was

nevertheless a positive contribution to the debate and constructive, in

sharp contrast to the comments of Senator Durbin.

A lot of things have gone right in Iraq, not the least of which is

the freedom of elections, the formation of a new government, the

difficult process that their political structure went through in

selecting a new prime minister, and making the commitments by that

newly selected prime minister to finish within this month of May the

appointments necessary to have a government in place and one that

hopefully will work to establish and take upon itself the

responsibility of full sovereignty of that nation. This was a ray of

optimism, in my judgment, a ray of hope.

If there were any time in the entire history of this Iraqi

confrontation situation and the Iraqi war when the new leaders of Iraq

need support, it is now. I daresay the constructive criticism of many--

I led a codel with Senator Levin a few weeks ago, and other codels have

gone through. The Secretaries of State and Defense have been through.

Ambassador Khalilzad has done a remarkable job in encouraging the Iraqi

leadership to move forward with this new government. That has been

done.

Now is not the time to stop all the constructive debate but to stop

those remarks and debate which can be pulling back from the gains we

have made, showing less than full support to the Iraqi people for their

courage and their new government.

I have studied each of the generals individually. On the whole, I

personally believe it was a constructive contribution to the debate.

Others may differ. Somehow, I believe throughout our history our senior

uniformed officers--and, indeed, others, including enlisted men--have

come forward at times to provide their own perspectives which are

contrary to the policymakers in charge of that period of history.

I commend all who are participating in the constructive debate. It

should go forward at this time. This Nation is at war. At the very

minute we are privileged to be in the Senate exercising freedom of

speech and debate, young men and women in our Armed Forces are in

harm's way, subjecting themselves to life at risk and, indeed, giving

their lives and limbs. We must be ever mindful of the suffering of

their families.

Now is the time to show our strongest resolve in Iraq. The President

has made a decision as to the leadership he desires, including

Secretary Rumsfeld. He has that right as Commander in Chief under the

Constitution. He has exercised that unequivocally and stated his views.

It is now a matter for all to respect that judgment of the President

and move forward.

I personally have worked with many Secretaries of Defense; three I

served under in the Department of Defense. Every one in the last 30-

plus years I have worked with--except one, coincidentally; when

Secretary Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense I was taking 2 years of my

life preparing to try and get elected to the Senate, so with that one

hiatus I have worked with them all, I have established a satisfactory,

hard-working relationship with Secretary Rumsfeld.

Our committee is now in the midst of its markup and prepared to bring

to the Senate its annual authorization bill. This is the most intense

work period between our committee and the Department of Defense.

I conclude by saying think first of our troops and their sacrifices

that they have made, the risk they face each day, and our goals to try

and support the formation of some type of democratic government of the

choosing of the Iraqi people and their leadership. Progress is being

made every day now. Now is the time to stand steadfast in our support

of our troops, the coalition forces, the Iraqi elected leaders, and the

people.