Mr. President, 16 months after President Bush declared

``mission accomplished'' aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, the fighting

in Iraq continues and casualties continue to mount.

Yesterday we reached a mournful milestone that we never thought

possible: 1,000 brave Americans have lost their lives in Iraq. Nearly

7,000 more have been injured. The youngest of America's fallen soldiers

was just 18 years old. The oldest was 59. More than half had not even

celebrated their 30th birthday. They hailed from nearly every State in

the Nation. They are the best of America, and we are proud of each one.

Although I disagree with the President about Iraq, I honor the service

and sacrifice and dedication of each of these brave men and women.

It was wrong for the President to rush to war for such a deeply

questionable cause. We all know Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator,

but he did not pose the kind of immediate threat to our national

security to justify a unilateral and preventive war.

Despite the President's claim that Iraq is central to the global war

on terror, there was no persuasive pattern of ties or operational links

between Iraq and al-Qaida. There were no nuclear weapons.

President Bush has stated that the war in Iraq was a catastrophic

success. He is right in one sense. The war has been a catastrophe. The

war has been a catastrophe for our fallen soldiers, far too many of

whom were sent to war with no plan to win the peace. The war has been a

catastrophe for their loved ones. The war has been a catastrophe for

our Nation's standing in the world and for the war on terror, for it

distracted us from the real threat of al-Qaida in Afghanistan. It has

made the war on terrorism far harder to win and it has made America

more hated in the world than at any other time in our history.

We need honest solutions that will end the terror of Osama bin Laden

and destroy al-Qaida. We need honest solutions that will bring the war

in Iraq to a noble end and bring our troops home with honor. This

administration has had its chance and it failed the basic test of

competence. It failed to deploy enough troops in Iraq to win the peace.

It failed at Abu Ghraib. It failed in issuing sweetheart deals to

Halliburton. It has failed the basic test of Presidential leadership.

We need a new administration that will be honest with the American

people on national security and propose real solutions to make us safer

and stronger.

How much time remains for the Democrats?