I rise today to speak about the war in Iraq. There is a

lot of talk in this Chamber and across this town and across the country

about our economy, and that is justifiable. But we have to remember

that in the midst of a difficult economy in America, there is a lot to

talk about and to work on to respond to that. We still have a war in

Iraq to worry about, to debate, and to take action on. I don't think we

can lose sight of a war that grinds on without end in Iraq.

This war does burden our troops, obviously, with repeated and

prolonged deployments and, in fact, drains our national resources. The

war hampers our efforts in places such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, the

real frontlines in the global struggle against Islamic terrorism and

extremism.

So we must ask ourselves at least a couple of questions when it comes

to the war in Iraq. There are many, but there are at least a few I can

think of.

What are we in the Congress doing about this war today, this week,

this month, and in the months ahead, even as we struggle to deal with a

difficult economy?

The second question might be: When will the Iraqi Government start

serious discussions on national reconciliation?

Third, how will we know when we have achieved our objectives in Iraq?

How will we know that?

Finally, and I think the most compelling question is: When will our

troops come home?

Last night, the President spoke about a number of topics, and one was

the economy. One of the first words the President said with regard to

the economy, he talked about a time of uncertainty. Mr. President--

President Bush I mean--I disagree. With regard to the economy, this is

not about something that is uncertain. It is very certain. The lives of

Americans, the perilous and traumatic economy they are living through

is not uncertain or vague or foggy. It is very certain. The cost of

everything in the life of a family is going through the roof, and we

have to make sure we respond to that situation.

I argue that word ``uncertainty'' does apply when it comes to the war

in Iraq in terms of our policy. I would argue to the President what is

uncertain, if there is uncertainty out there in our land, it is about

the war in Iraq. Uncertainty, frankly, about what our plan is in Iraq

and what is this administration and this Congress doing to deal with

this war in Iraq. That is where the uncertainty is. I think the reality

of the economy is very certain for American families.

While the headlines about Iraq have all but vanished from the front

pages and television screens and the administration continues to divert

attention elsewhere, we have a fundamental obligation as elected

representatives of the American people to continue to focus on the war

until we change the policy and bring our troops home.

We marked the first year anniversary of the President's decision to

initiate a troop escalation in Iraq, and we are coming upon the fifth

anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

Last night, in his State of the Union Address, the President

described the surge in very positive terms. Make no mistake about it--

we all know this--our soldiers have succeeded in their mission with

bravery and heroism and violence in many parts of Iraq is, in fact,

down. Yet despite all that, despite all that effort, despite all that

work, Iraq today is still not a secure nation, and it will not be

secure until its leaders can leave the Green Zone without fear of

assassination. It will not be secure until they can leave the Green

Zone without fear of suicide bombings. It will not be secure until its

own national Army and police forces can stand up and protect all of

Iraq's people without regard to ethnicity or creed.

In assessing whether the surge has worked, we should pay attention to

the President's words from a year ago. President Bush declared in

January 2007, when he first announced the surge:

Those are the President's words. So let's judge this issue by his

words. Judged by those standards enunciated by the President, we can

only conclude the surge has not worked, if that is what the objective

was. I add to that, when I was in Iraq in August and I talked with

Ambassador Crocker about the terminology used by this administration

with regard to the war, because I said sometimes the terminology is way

off and misleading, he said: The way I judge what is happening here is

whether we can achieve sustainable stability. That is what he said,

sustainable stability.

Based upon what Ambassador Crocker said and based upon what the

President said, if we measure what is happening now against those

standards, the surge has not worked, based upon those assertions by the

Ambassador and by the President.

The troop escalation did not prompt the Iraqi Government to make the

hard choices or to meet the benchmarks laid out by the administration.

As General Petraeus told me in that same meeting this past summer in

Baghdad, the war in Iraq can only be won politically, not militarily,

and he said that on the public record as well. But on national

reconciliation, oil sharing, and other key issues where Iraqis must

forge agreement in order to allow U.S. forces to eventually withdraw,

we do not see nearly enough progress. In fact, the evidence of

substantial progress is very bleak.

We heard recently about things that have been happening in Iraq.

Although the Iraqi Parliament passed a debaathification measure this

past month, it is unclear how far the legislation will go toward

addressing Sunni concerns, since serious disagreements exist on the

law's implementation. Some contend that former Baathists will still be

barred from important ministries such as Justice, Interior, and

Defense.

As has often occurred in the past, once again the Iraqi political

leadership has chosen to avoid the hard choices and instead kick the

can down the road, ensuring further bloodshed and national

fragmentation in the interim.

We all know how long this war has endured. It has endured longer than

the war we know as World War II. It is longer than that war, with over

3,900 dead, 178 Pennsylvanians, the number of wounded in Pennsylvania

is about 1,200 or more; across the country, 28,000. Our military forces

have done everything we have asked of them. They have matched the

bravery and success in every way possible of those great American

warriors who preceded them in past conflicts. But our troops, the best

fighting men and women in the world, cannot force a foreign government

to be stable, they cannot force the Iraqi national police to put aside

their deep-seated sectarianism and corruption, and they cannot force

Iraqi political leaders to want progress as much as our troops do and

as much as the Iraqi people deserve.

We have much to do to make progress. But here is what is happening

lately. This is a very important point, and I conclude with it. The

President is showing every sign that he intends, in the waning days of

his administration, to lock the United States and, in particular, to

lock our fighting men and women into a long-term strategic commitment

in Iraq without consultation with the elected representatives of the

American people in Congress. He has signaled to the Iraqi Government

that the United States can maintain significant U.S. troop levels in

Iraq for at least 10 years--10 years--if not longer. He seeks to

negotiate a long-term strategic agreement with the Iraqi Government

that would commit the United States to providing security assurances to

the Iraqi Government against external aggression--an unprecedented

commitment that could embroil the United States in a future regional

conflict or even a full-scale Iraqi civil war. The President's senior

aides have proposed that such an agreement would need to be ratified by

the Iraqi Parliament--the Iraqi Parliament--and bypass the U.S.

Congress. That is unacceptable to me and I think to anyone in this body

and to the American people, and it is why five other Members of this

body joined me in December in sending a letter to the President stating

that the Congress must be a full and coequal partner in extending such

long-term commitments.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record

my letter of December 6, 2007, to the President.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in

the Record, as follows:

We now learn that the President, in signing the Department

of Defense authorization bill into law yesterday, has once again taken

the opportunity to issue another infamous signing statement, imposing

his own interpretation of a law over the clear intent of the Congress.

Let's not forget that this important legislation has been needlessly

delayed for weeks because the President wanted to defer to concerns of

the Iraqi Government over compensation for U.S. victims of Saddam

Hussein's acts of terrorism. Let me repeat that. A critical pay raise

for our troops was delayed because a foreign government raised concerns

with this White House.

In signing the Department of Defense authorization bill into law, the

President declared his right to ignore--ignore--several important

provisions, including the establishment of an important special

commission to review wartime contracting. This provision was an

initiative of the Senate Democratic freshmen class, led by Senators

Webb and McCaskill. The President also declared his right to ignore a

provision prohibiting funding for U.S. military bases or installations

in Iraq that facilitate ``permanent station'' of U.S. troops in Iraq.

Let me say that again in plain language. This provision sought to

prevent the United States from establishing permanent bases in Iraq,

and

the President has indicated he may ignore--ignore--this provision.

Every time senior administration officials are asked about permanent

military bases in Iraq, they contend it is not their intention to

construct such facilities. Yet this signing statement issued by the

President yesterday is the clearest signal yet that the administration

wants to hold this option in reserve. This is exactly the wrong signal

to send both to the Iraqi Government and its neighbors in the region

and to others as well.

Permanent U.S. military bases gives a blank check to an Iraqi

government that has shown no evidence that it is ready to step up and

take full responsibility for what happens in Iraq. Permanent U.S.

military bases feeds the propaganda of our enemies, who argue that the

U.S. invasion in 2003 was carried out to secure access to Iraq's oil

and establish a strategic beachhead for the U.S. military in the

region. Permanent U.S. military bases means U.S. troops will be in Iraq

for years to come, ensuring that the great strain on the American

military will continue indefinitely.

Finally, and I will conclude with this, we have a lot on our plate

this year to deal with. We have the economy to deal with and so many

other difficult issues, but the war in Iraq continues to be a central

foreign policy challenge faced by the President, by the Congress, and

by the Nation. When this President departs office after 8 years, he

should not--should not--commit our soldiers and our Nation to 10 more

years--10 more years--if not longer, and hundreds of billions of

dollars, if not more, spent on the war in Iraq.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a

quorum.