Mr. President, I thank my colleagues from the other side

of the aisle for giving us this opportunity to discuss the matters

surrounding the Iraq war, a war in which we are still engaged, a war in

which Americans are losing their lives and their limbs on an almost

daily basis. I am sure my colleagues have attended funerals, as I have

in my own State, of brave men who did not return from that war alive.

We all know the human cost that has been involved.

A number of us were at Walter Reed Hospital 2 weeks ago for an

evening with brave men and women who have lost limbs and health, and in

some cases will not ever be able to live fully normal lives because of

the terrible devastation wreaked on their bodies by the war in Iraq. So

what we are talking about tonight is something of enormous importance,

something we should have talked about far more often in the past months

and year than we have. I attempted back in the first months of 2003 to

get this body to address some of these critical issues, questions about

the information we had been provided even though we had voted

previously in October of 2002 on this resolution that the President

requested the majority of this body authorize, along with the House, to

initiate a war at a time of his determination. But in the weeks

preceding that I tried in vain, as did some of my colleagues, to ask

the majority leader to bring this matter before the Senate, before the

American people again. Unfortunately we were not able to. The decision

was made not to create the time and the opportunity to do so.

Better late than never. This is much later than it should have been.

I look forward to this opportunity in the weeks and months ahead

because, as I understood from the Senator from Arizona, who was

coordinating the time the Republican caucus used before we were given a

chance to reply, that whenever the questions were raised, challenges

were raised about the use or the misuse of intelligence information by

the President of the United States and by his administration, there

would be these occasions to discuss those matters again in the future.

If that is the case, then I look forward to those opportunities because

those questions should be raised. They have been raised before.

The American people have a right to know the truth, the facts about

these matters. Those who have lost sons and daughters over in Iraq,

those whose sons and daughters are serving there now, all of us whose

lives, whose children, and grandchildren will bear the consequences of

these profoundly important decisions that have affected not only the

United States and our national security but the stability of the entire

world have a right to know the truth.

Let's have these debates and these considerations as frequently as

possible and air these matters fully, particularly since the

commissions that have been established--the most recent one, by the

President himself singlehandedly--are being precluded from addressing

many of these issues like the misuse, as has been alleged, of

intelligence information by high intelligence officials. That

commission will not be allowed to investigate those matters. It will

not have the authority to subpoena documents and information,

investigating those matters. We will remain in the dark as those of us

on the Senate Armed Services Committee on which I serve will remain in

the dark despite our requests repeatedly to have that committee

investigate these matters under its jurisdiction. At one point the

distinguished chairman of that committee, Senator Warner, a man for

whom I have the greatest respect, one of the finest of the men and

women with whom I have had the privilege of serving in this body over

my 3 years, suggested on a Sunday talk show that would be the

appropriate purview of the committee and that should be investigated to

its determination of the facts and truth and then, from all accounts,

was forcefully dissuaded from that position by higher level officials

in the administration who did not want that kind of investigation.

So if we can't get the facts because we can't get committees of the

Senate to look into these matters, if we can't get the facts because

the President's own hand-picked commission is going to be prevented by

him from investigating and reviewing these matters, then let's use

these occasions here on the Senate floor, even if we are going to be,

as the word was used, ambushed by the Republican caucus on these

matters. That was reported last week. This was going to be a big

surprise last Thursday. It was reported in one of the Hill newspapers

and evidently it was decided to postpone it.

Today, after we talked, even at our caucus lunch today, the

Democratic caucus lunch at 1 o'clock today, based on the information

the Democratic leader received from the majority leader, we were going

to finish the resolution of the bill before us and then we were going

to turn to another piece of legislation. Lo and behold, we found out

literally as members of the Republican caucus took the floor this

afternoon that this was going to be the subject for debate.

But so be it. If you want to ambush us on this topic, then do it as

frequently as possible so we can present to the American people all the

facts, facts they may not receive in any other way.

Let's go back a minute and review the bidding on this whole matter.

Let's go back to January of 2002. Mr. Karl Rove, senior adviser to the

President, political strategist, was quoted as telling a Republican

political gathering that the winning issue for the Republicans in

November of 2002, at the midterm election, would be ``the war.'' By

that at the time he meant the war against al-Qaida, against the Taliban

in Afghanistan. But evidently in June of 2002, according to published

reports based on an interview with the chief of staff of the White

House, Andrew Card, published in the New York Times on September 7 of

2002, but referring back to a decision that was, according to Mr. Card,

made in June of that year, 3 months earlier, to bring the spotlight

onto this supposed immediate, desperate, urgent threat to the national

security of the United States and the safety of our people by Saddam

Hussein and his regime in Iraq, the question was asked of Mr. Card by

the reporter, why, then, was there this delay until then right before

and then right after

Labor Day of 2002, a good 3 months later, to bring this matter to the

attention of Congress and to the American people. Mr. Card's answer,

and I quote, was, ``Well, from a marketing standpoint you don't bring

out your new products in August.''

About two sentences later he indicated also the President was on

vacation in August. So, instead, we were all, I think, startled--this

Senator was certainly surprised to hear from the Vice President, Vice

President Cheney, at two conventions of former men and women of the

armed services in the last week of August of 2002, where he spoke to

the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and he announced, ``Simply stated, there

is no doubt that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction.''

The President himself then elaborated on these claims time and time

again. He conjured up the most serious of threats to this country. On

September 26 of 2002, at the time when this body was being pressured to

rush to a vote about authorizing a war in Iraq, the President, after

meeting with Members of Congress on that date, said:

He continued on that day to say:

On October 7, just 4 days before the October 11 vote in the Senate on

the war resolution, the President said:

He continued:

He also elaborated on claims of Iraq's nuclear weapons program when

he said on October 7 of that year:

At that time, 4 days thereafter, the Senate voted historically and, I

believe, having voted against that resolution, erroneously to authorize

the war with the determination of the President--on a resolution which

I believed and still believe is unconstitutional, was premature and,

which has ultimately turned out to be the case, unfounded.

These assertions continued during the fall and then into the new

year. Of course, Secretary of State Colin Powell went before the United

Nations and stated that there were thousands of tons of these strains

of botulism, of nerve gas agents, of botox, and other substances that

were of such enormous quantities that they would have been easily

identified by satellite surveillance or by the United Nations weapons

inspectors then in Iraq, though at the time none had been found.

The Vice President again on March 16, just before the eve of the

decision by the President to invade Iraq, leveled a serious new

allegation that Hussein already had nuclear weapons. He said, ``We know

he has been absolutely devoted to trying to acquire nuclear weapons,''

and ``We believe he has in fact reconstituted nuclear weapons.''

Subsequent events, of course, have proven all of those assertions to

be almost totally incorrect.

Thank God. When United States and British forces invaded Iraq just a

few days later, there were no chemical or biological or nuclear weapons

used against them. None were found on the battlefield unused or in

caches hidden and ready for use or even those weapons materials

anywhere in Iraq, as the chief weapons inspector, David Kay, has now

indicated in his public statements. He said to our Senate Armed

Services Committee that he does not believe they will be found. But the

more important fact, the irrefutable fact, is that they did not exist

to be used against our Armed Forces. I am grateful for that. But that

was the overriding premise--at least I know from a number of my

colleagues on this side of the aisle--the overriding factor in their

decision to support the resolution in October.

Under the United Nations charter, under international law, the only

justification legally for invading another country, for launching a

preemptive attack against another country, starting war against another

country, is either an actual attack itself or the imminent danger or

threat of an attack against a country.

It was certainly on that assertion by the administration repeatedly

that Members of Congress were persuaded to support the resolution in

October. It was that assertion that was made by the President himself

and others leading up to and even in the speech the President gave to

the Nation the night he authorized that invasion of forces.

In his State of the Union Address, he made assertions that Iraq had

sought to buy uranium in Africa to reconstitute its nuclear weapons

program. It was not until July 7 of 2003--almost 6 months later, or

over 5 months later--that the administration acknowledged for the first

time that the President should not have made that statement even though

the reports were they knew conclusively as early as March. Some

allegations are that they knew even prior to the time, or at the time

of that statement, that that was not substantiated, or, in fact in

March, a report even said it was false.

There are other statements that have been made by former CIA

intelligence officials, reports made by investigative reporters that

refer to information that was available to the administration at the

time these various assertions were made that were contrary to facts as

they were being reported.

The linkage to al-Qaida, between Iraq and al-Qaida, is one that I

certainly can say from my own direct experience, being involved in

probably two dozen top secret briefings in the fall of 2002 and early

2003 with members of the administration, that was something that was

repeated, was raised in a most speculative way from other intelligence

sources.

Then it is reported in June of 2003, after all this has been

underway, according to the New York Times, two high officials of al-

Qaida now in U.S. custody told interrogators, told them before the war

in fact, that the organization did not work with Mr. Hussein. Several

intelligence officials said no evidence of cooperation had been found

in Iraq.

It caused the CIA Director, George Tenet, to state that:

An article in the Baltimore Sun went on to say:

Yes, there are very serious questions and a most profoundly serious

matter reflecting on the veracity of the President of the United States

and his officials at the highest levels. The debate should be

undertaken here and the American people should have a right to all the

facts but they will not get them.

One of the most disgusting ploys tonight has been to blame President

Clinton and Senate Democrats during the 1990s for the supposed

curtailment of our Nation's military preparedness and its intelligence

operations. Some people are masters at this kind of slander.

In 2002, there were Republican campaign commercials that put Senator

Max Cleland, a Democratic Senator from Georgia, upon the television

screen next to pictures of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, claiming

that all three of them were enemies of the national security of the

United States.

Senator Cleland was a triple amputee and sat in this chair next to me

during my first 2 years of the Senate, the

most amazing demonstration of human courage I have ever heard. I could

scarcely imagine a man who lost three limbs serving in the military in

Vietnam, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who had voted

for every single dollar of President Bush's requested military

increases for military spending, for homeland security, every dollar,

being smeared as an enemy of this Nation along with Saddam Hussein and

Osama bin Laden.

Here they go again, smearing President Clinton and even Senator John

Kerry. I heard President Clinton attacked by colleagues across the

aisle from the day I joined the Senate Armed Services Committee in

January of 2001 for supposed military weaknesses. That continued up

until the military that President Clinton commanded for 8 years routed

the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan 10 months later. Now he is

accused of emasculating the Intelligence Agency, causing the failures

to prevent September 11, 2001, and the failures to inform us properly

about the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Unfortunately, we cannot find out who is and who is not responsible

for whatever failures occurred. We cannot find out because President

Bush has blocked the 9/11 Commission access to the information that

bipartisan group of distinguished Americans has been requesting for

months from the administration.

We will not get to the truth about who misused intelligence

information about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq because the

President refused to appoint an independent commission, refused to

grant them subpoena powers, and refused to authorize them to

investigate the use of intelligence information by himself and his

administration.

If the former administration is the one that is so culpable and if

the current administration is so blameless, why wouldn't this

administration want those two commissions to have access to all

relevant information? Why would this administration block the 9/11

information that its cochairman, former Republican Governor of New

Jersey, Thomas Kean, has requested for months on behalf of his

Commission? Why won't the President allow his own handpicked Commission

to assess the misinformation about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq

that was provided to Congress and to the American people to investigate

all the questions about that colossal misrepresentation of the truth as

we later discovered it to be?

Those are critical questions that affect the future safety of our

country and our citizens, whatever flaws existed before September 11,

whatever errors were made after September 11, whatever mistakes,

whatever lack of communication, whatever misreporting,

misunderstanding, misrepresenting, exaggerating, or improper

influencing of information, whatever or wherever it occurred, which

weakened our national security, must know what that was in order to

prevent it from ever happening again.

That imperative should transcend partisan politics. It should

transcend Presidential reelections. It should transcend any

consideration except for the safety of this country and of the American

people.

If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle want to strengthen

our national security, as I know they do--as we all do, because we are

Americans first, and we are partisans after that--then I ask them to

join us in insisting that the President unshackle those two

commissions. Let them find the truth, the whole truth, whatever it

might be, wherever it is, whoever it helps, whoever it hinders, so that

we can know what we must do to ensure that the horrors of 9/11 never,

ever occur again, and to ensure that the serious misinformation about

weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which influenced Members of this

body to support a resolution to authorize the President to start a war

against that country--to make sure that kind of misinformation used to

justify a war to the American people never, ever happens again.

So, yes, let's debate these matters as frequently as possible. Let's

get out all of the facts. And then let's let the American people

decide.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.