Mr. President, I know many people have been watching

General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker reporting on what is going on

in Iraq. Obviously, it is very important information, and I would hope

we would heed what they are saying.

Regrettably, I must say that too many in the Democratic Party remain

in denial over the progress being made in Iraq and still remain

politically vested in defeat. We have heard the leaders of the party

say: Oh, we have already lost. They believe that might give them an

advantage in the November elections. That is certainly a bad way to

decide what our strategy should be to defend the security of the United

States.

We have made great progress in our fight against terrorism. The war

is far from won, but today there is no question that the central

battleground in the global war on terror is Iraq. Our men and women in

the military are fighting the al-Qaida terrorists there in Iraq, where

Osama bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri say they are going to establish

their caliphate. We are fighting that war so that future generations

will not have to fight them on our own soil.

For my colleagues who argue we should not be fighting them in Iraq

but in Afghanistan, let me get you a little bit of intelligence

news. Al-Qaida is not in Afghanistan. Al-Qaida left Afghanistan after

we deposed Saddam Hussein. What we are fighting there are the

indigenous Taliban insurgents, not al-Qaida.

More than anyone else, our brave veterans who are fighting in Iraq

against the al-Qaida know the dangers of defeat. They know what they

and others like them have done. Their word to us is: We as a nation,

but more specifically we as your military, have made too many

contributions and too many sacrifices to walk away from this essential

battle for our freedom and declare defeat.

My own son, a marine, returned last fall from his second tour of Iraq

with his scout snipers. He returned on success because they cleaned al-

Qaida out of Falluja and Al Anbar, and they turned the job of keeping

security over to the Iraqi Sunni Citizens Watch and the police.

If my colleagues will listen today to the voices of veterans who are

on the Hill in their tan golf shirts, they are the voice of people who

have been in the field--the Vets for Freedom, with whom I have had the

honor of being this morning, and to General Petraeus and Admiral

Crocker--these are the people we need to listen to, not the voices of

moveon.org and the Code Pink extremists. We need to bring our troops

home, but we need to bring them home on success. That is what they

fought for; that is what they are there for.

As one man in the field reported today: You can't be for us, for the

troops, and against the war because we are the war.

Despite the evidence of progress in Iraq, the media seems trigger

happy to report bad news. Less than 48 hours after Iraqi security

forces began their campaign against the militant Shia factions in

Basra, the media already was declaring the operation a failure. The

operation initiated on March 25 was designed to quell rogue factions of

Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army. In covering the fighting, the press

displayed its previously seen penchant for quickly throwing in the

towel when the military operation does not instantaneously achieve its

goals. If the operation were a failure and didn't meet its goals, then

why did Muqtada al-Sadr order a cease-fire? I don't know of any

commander who has declared a cease-fire when he is winning.

Right now, General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker are

testifying before the Senate on the progress being made in Iraq. I

expect that testimony will show that the new counterinsurgency, or COIN

strategy, backed up by the surge, has been working and has brought

Iraqi citizens to our side in the fight against al-Qaida.

Since the surge forces began operating under this new policy in mid-

2007 and the adoption of the COIN strategy, there is some important

security progress to point to. Overall violence in Iraq, civilian

deaths, sectarian killings, and attacks on American forces are all

down. Coalition forces have captured or killed thousands of extremists

in Iraq, including hundreds of key al-Qaida leaders and operatives.

American troops are beginning to return home on success.

In addition to security progress, the Iraqis are also making critical

political progress. While this front has been the slowest--and we must

continue to demand that the Iraqis assume greater control--the

Government has taken several important steps. The Iraqi Government has

enacted a pension law that keeps the promises made to Sunnis. It has

enacted a debaath- ification law that allows midlevel Baath Party

members to reenter political and civic life. It has passed a budget

that focuses spending on security reconstruction projects and

provincial governments. It has enacted an amnesty law, and it has

reached agreement on a provincial powers law that will ensure the

Iraqis the right to be heard in upcoming elections.

Democrats are in denial of the progress in Iraq despite this evidence

of both security and political gain. Their rejection of the reality in

Iraq does not extend just to the current Petraeus and Crocker

testimony, however. Some who favor retreat and defeat in Iraq have also

taken issue with the classified Iraq National Intelligence Estimate, or

NIE, distributed to lawmakers last week.

Always quick to tout and cherry-pick information from a NIE that can

be twisted to support their motives, the retreat-and-defeat gang has

outright rejected the latest Iraqi intelligence report. They claim it

is ``too rosy.''

Unfortunately, this denial is no more than rhetoric and fodder for

the mainstream media because we know that defeat in Iraq would have

serious national security implications and do great harm to our image

around the world, an image that so many of our colleagues on the other

side say they wish to repair. Iraq is the central battleground in the

war on terror. In addition to giving al-Qaida safe haven, defeat in

Iraq would embolden a possibly nuclear-armed Iraq. The intelligence

community has stated in an open hearing before the Intelligence

Committee earlier this year that if we withdraw from Iraq before their

army and police can maintain security, violence and chaos will spread

across the region.

This has been a tough fight. We have lost over 4,000 of our bravest

and finest men and women. The surest and most fitting way to honor

their memory and their service is to ensure victory, not defeat.

Mr. President, I have several Members on my side who have been

waiting for time in morning business. What is the situation?