Mr. President, I want to review the outcome of last

evening's debate and vote on the Iraq amendment that I offered along

with Senators Reed, Voinovich, Hagel, Snowe, Reid, Smith, and Salazar.

The amendment expressed the sense of the Congress that the missions

of the U.S. forces in Iraq should transition to counterterrorism

operations, and training, equipping, and supporting Iraqi forces, as

well as force protection, and that--and this is, perhaps, the most

critical, the important part of the amendment we voted on--that it

should be the goal to complete that transition by the end of 2008.

The vote on our amendment was 50 yeas and 45 nays.

Legislating on Iraq is a difficult matter because of the need to gain

60 votes in order to overcome a filibuster, and it was made perhaps

even more difficult last night because the Republican leader stated

that the President would veto the Consolidated Appropriations Act if it

contained our amendment.

Now, imagine that. The President of the United States would veto

funds for the troops if 60 or more Senators simply expressed their

nonbinding opinion that a goal should be to bring most of our troops

home by the end of next year. I would hope the President would welcome

at least the nonbinding advice of the Congress and not threaten funding

for the troops if that advice were forthcoming.

Despite a great deal of pressure, including the veto threat, our

amendment secured six Republican votes--more Republican votes than

amendments to change course in Iraq have secured to date. Senators

Voinovich, Hagel, Snowe, Smith, Collins, and Dole joined 44 of the 46

Democrats who were present to produce a 50-vote majority in favor of

our amendment.

I am confident that at least four of the five absent Senators would

have supported our amendment, as they have done in the past. So we

would have had 54 votes in favor of our amendment, which would have

been the most votes thus far for this type of a policy change in Iraq.

Now, what does that majority Senate vote mean, last night's majority

vote? What message does it send to the White House, the American

people, the Iraqi political leadership, and the Iraqi people?

I believe the message is that more and more Senators are embracing

the view that the American people reflected during the last election a

little over a year ago; namely, that we want to change course in Iraq,

and we want to have a reasonable timetable for the return of most of

our troops, and that we have reached the limits of our patience with

the Iraqi political leadership. I hope the President takes full notice

of last night's majority vote, although the majority will was thwarted

by a filibuster. I am sure he is aware of the vote, since the

Republican leader said the President would veto the legislation if it

contained our amendment.

I hope the American people understand a growing majority of the

Senate agrees with their view that we need to establish a goal for the

reduction of most of our forces in Iraq and the goal should be most

should leave Iraq by the end of next year.

I hope the Iraqi political leaders understand a growing majority of

the Senate is willing to vote to change course in Iraq as a way to

bring pressure on them to make the long-promised political compromises

that virtually everyone agrees are required to end the violence in

Iraq.

I hope Prime Minister Maliki, in particular, understands what the

U.S. Department of State said on November 21 about him and the other

political leaders in Iraq. This is an extraordinary finding by the

Department of State. I hope it gets somehow or other through to Prime

Minister Maliki. Here is what the Department of State report said:

I wish the President of the United States would read his own State

Department report so that not only would the majority of the Senate

adopt resolutions intending to put pressure on the Iraqi leadership by

telling them the open-ended commitment of American forces is over, but

that the President of the United States would tell the Iraqi leaders

what his own State Department said in that November 21 report. It is so

important that I am going to repeat it:

I hope the members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, the Iraqi

Parliament, understand they must find a way to bring about

reconciliation or face the consequences of squandering that window of

opportunity provided by the military successes of the surge that, as

General Odierno notes, will not be open forever. As I did after my trip

to Iraq last August, I once again express my personal hope that the

Iraqi Parliament will replace Prime Minister Maliki with someone who is

willing to strongly push national reconciliation and to replace that

Prime Minister with someone less connected to a sectarian group.

Finally, I wish to note that while last night's vote relative to Iraq

was the last such vote this year, it is not the last vote the Senate is

likely to hold on our policy in Iraq. The $70 billion approved last

night is only about one-third the amount the administration has sought

for Iraq and Afghanistan. The next time the Congress considers funding

for the war in Iraq, of the many factors that Members will no doubt

consider, none will be more important than whether Iraqi political

leaders have compromised with each other and assumed responsibility for

the future of their own country.

Thanking Staff and Senator Salazar

As others of my colleagues, let me add my thanks to our staffs, the

Senate staff, our pages, all the people who make it possible for us to

try to do the

best job we can do. We don't often express our thanks to our staffs, to

our pages, but this is surely the appropriate time of year to pause for

a moment to express that gratitude to them. Without their support,

without their assistance, it would not be possible for us to function.

They make it possible for us to do a lot better than we otherwise would

and even to make it possible for us to do some important things once in

a while.

I wish to also express my thanks to the Presiding Officer. General

Salazar I almost called Senator Salazar--Senator Salazar has been of

invaluable assistance to me on so many matters, and I know that feeling

exists with other Members of the Senate. As I talk about Iraq this

afternoon, looking at our Presiding Officer, Senator Salazar, I am

reminded of the countless numbers of times and the efforts Senator

Salazar has made to try to pull this body together to see if we

couldn't make a difference in terms of Iraq policy. That effort to

achieve a bridge across the aisle, to bring Senators together, is

something which Senator Salazar does as well as any Member of this

body. Even though we don't often or always succeed in achieving

bipartisan results, we would achieve them far fewer times but for the

assistance and help of our Presiding Officer. So I wish to add my

thanks to him as well.