Mr. President, it is time for us to review our policy

in Iraq. We have been aware this day was coming for some time.

To recap how things have occurred, we had hearings in the early part

of this year to confirm General Petraeus. This has been General

Petraeus's third tour in Iraq. I first had the opportunity to meet with

him when he commanded the 101st Airborne in Mosul. He was part of the

initial invasion--a brilliant combat commander who impressed all of us

on our CODEL.

I later visited him in Iraq when he was in charge of training the

Iraqi military and their police. It was a critical moment in their

development. He was asked to go back early to do that, and he agreed to

do so.

He then returned to the United States and wrote the counterinsurgency

manual for the Department of Defense. Before the ink was dry on that

manual, the President asked him to go back to Iraq, for the third time,

to lead this critical effort at this critical time.

So I wish to first say how disappointed I have been that some have

seen fit to attack this man, attack what he might say. I am afraid,

frankly, the purpose of that was to sort of preemptively smear his

testimony. I saw most of his testimony this afternoon. As a member of

the Armed Services Committee, I expect to see more of it tomorrow and

to be there tomorrow when he testifies before our committee and to hear

it all in complete form.

So let me say this: It is right and just and appropriate this

Congress, which sent him there in January, I believe, which voted on

May 24 to fund the surge--we had a lot of debate about this surge,

whether we should do it, whether we should increase our troop levels.

The situation in Baghdad was not good. The situation in Al Anbar had

made some improvement but was not where we wanted it to be. The country

was in a difficult time.

The President said: Let's step up the troop level. Let's have a

surge. We had much debate about it. I know our leader, Harry Reid, went

to the White House along with Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House.

They came out with an agreement, and only 14 Senators opposed--in a

truly bipartisan vote--funding of this effort.

So I have been disappointed that some announced it a failure even

before it got started good. But we all committed to one thing; and that

is that General Petraeus would come back and he would report to us and

we would hear from him.

Some thought we needed more than that. So we as a Congress included

in our funding legislation a requirement that another commission be set

up, an independent commission, with retired officers and so forth. GEN

Jimmy Jones, former Commandant of the Marine Corps and former Supreme

Allied Commander Europe, chaired that commission. He reported last

week.

Also, we had the Government Accountability Office do an independent

analysis of the benchmarks in Iraq.

Now we are having General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, who is

clearly one of the best respected Ambassadors in the State Department

with experience in this region of the world. They are giving us their

report today and tomorrow.

If Congress concludes this effort ought not to go forward, so be it.

But we ought to do it after listening to our generals. In fact, I

noticed some of the polling data showed more than two-thirds of the

American people prefer to have their decision process be informed by

the military, and only less than 10 percent, I think, or maybe 20

percent, said the Congress should set the military standards.

Here is an article by Bing West I noticed in the National Review in

May. He has been to Iraq multiple times. He has written two books on

the Iraq war. He said:

I think there is a good bit of truth in that. I think we have seen a

more coherent, focused strategy under General Petraeus's leadership.

With regard to his testimony and its truthfulness, I remember

interviewing him before he was to testify in January, before being sent

to Iraq, and he said: I will tell you one thing, Senator. I am going to

tell you the truth as I see it if you send me there.

So the next morning I thought I would ask him that very question

before the committee while he was under oath. I said:

He replied to me this way:

I believe this man told us the truth today as he saw it and will tell

us the truth before the Armed Services Committee tomorrow, as God gives

him the ability to do so. He finished near the top of his class at West

Point. He was No. 1 in his class at the Command and General Staff

College. He has a Ph.D. from Princeton. He has been in combat. He has

led one of the Army's finest combat divisions in combat. He has trained

the Iraqi Army. He knows most of the Iraqi leaders pretty well because

of his time there. We could not have a better person. We need to listen

to him and then make our independent judgment after he testifies.

So I thank the Chair for this time. I hope all Americans will

participate, as Congress should, in evaluating where we are today.

Then, once we make a decision about what our next step will be, I would

call on my colleagues to not do things that undermine the strategy once

we have established it. Don't come up 2 weeks after we have voted on

what to do and then say it is a failure. Let's don't do that this time.

Let's agree to--no matter what it is, no matter how it comes out--have

our debate and then our vote, and let's establish a policy and stick

together and work hard to make it a success.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.