Mr. President, I rise today during morning business to

talk about a trip I made to Iraq. I think the Acting President pro

tempore made a similar trip during the August recess. I want to make a

few points regarding that trip.

I know a lot of people talk about these trips, and they talk about

the fact that they are choreographed and short term. I do want to say

my comments are in the context of many hours of committee hearings the

Acting President pro tempore and I have both sat through in Foreign

Relations and Armed Services and many other ways developing the

background prior to being in Iraq.

I know, again, much is said of these trips. I will say I do not think

there is anything--and the Chair probably would attest to the same--

like being there on the ground yourself and seeing firsthand our

troops, seeing our military leaders, seeing leaders of the Iraqi

Government, and also seeing many of the tribal leaders, the sheiks who

actually lead in these various areas throughout the country.

I wish to make three points, and then I wish to urge something in

conclusion.

No. 1, I think the Chair would agree with me the professionalism and

commitment of our men and women in uniform is absolutely overwhelming.

The way they conduct themselves on our behalf would almost lead you to

emotion just in seeing the way they do what they do on our behalf. I

have noticed that both in State, as I have traveled the State as our

men and women prepare, but certainly even more so on the ground there

in Iraq. I am indebted to them. I know the Acting President pro tempore

and all Americans are indebted to the way they conduct themselves,

regardless of how we may feel about the conflict that is underway.

Secondly, I do not think there is any question that we have had

military gains on the ground. I realize that is uneven. But I think

there is no question what General Petraeus, General Odierno, and others

have done on the ground, in beginning the work in a bottoms-up

approach, where we work with tribal leaders there on the ground to

secure their own areas, is the right approach. I do not think there is

any question we are seeing the results of that approach.

It seems as if a light has gone on where, No. 1, the tribal leaders,

the sheiks, and others there on the ground are realizing that we are

there not as occupiers but we are there as enablers.

We want to enable them to be able to secure their own destiny. We want

to leave that country other than providing the basic support they may

need on an ongoing basis.

Secondly, the terror, if you will, al-Qaida and some of the other

militant groups have wreaked on these villages has caused them to want

to band together with us and again try to make sure they do everything

they can to cause their villages to be peaceful. For that reason, we no

doubt are seeing gains on the ground as it relates to security.

I think the third thing we would all agree with is the central

Government itself has not made the gains we would have hoped more

security on the ground would have enabled them to do. I think most

delegations that went there met with various Iraqi officials. I know I

met with both a Shia and a Sunni deputy president there on the ground

and talked with them about the lack of benchmarks we had hoped they

would all meet.

Obviously, we also are aware the Prime Minister is meeting with the

President and two deputy presidents on a daily basis to try to reach

some type of reconciliation so they can move forward on these important

issues. But the fact is, those benchmarks have not been made in a way

that we here in the Government would like to have seen them approached

and progress made.

Our soldiers have been outstanding. There is no doubt that military

gains on the ground have occurred, and the central Government has not

conducted itself in a way that we would have liked to have seen happen.

In the next week or so we are going to see a number of reports, but

most important, obviously, to me anyway, is the report General Petraeus

and Ambassador Crocker will put forward. I urge my fellow Senators on

the floor to listen to what is going to be said. Obviously, there are

people here who have a lot invested in various amendments or proposals,

and there is a human trait we want to see our own proposal, if you

will, be the one people in the Senate and our country adopt.

But let me state I do not think there is any question that the

Petraeus plan is going to discuss redeployments. It is going to discuss

bringing men and women home from Iraq based on the successes we have

had on the ground in recent months. I do not think there is any

question we have seen a change in mission take place on a province-by-

province basis. In other words, one of the things we debated heavily in

previous debates this year on Iraq was changing the mission of our men

and women in uniform. Yet we are seeing this occurring province by

province, as tribal leaders are able, working with our military

leaders, to take the lead in their own security. So we are seeing that

change in mission.

I say to my fellow Senators, let's listen. I think we have an

opportunity in the Senate for Democrats and Republicans to come

together around a plan that would unify our country in such a way as we

are able to bring our country together around what is happening in

Iraq. I do not know what the details of the Petraeus plan will be. My

guess is he and others today are actually calibrating what the exact

redeployment ought to be and what the timing of that ought to be to

actually make sure we do not lose the successes we have had on the

ground. But my guess is, there will be redeployments, and I think those

will be gradual, again, to build on the successes we have had--again, a

continual and gradual change in the mission underway in Iraq.

I am of hope, of great hope--and maybe it is my newness to the Senate

that gives me this optimism still, but I have great hopes that if we

will all listen to the reports that are being given, and not to those

people who wish to see us divided, I think we in the Senate have an

opportunity to come together around a proposal in Iraq that gives us

the opportunity to build on the successes we have had and to change the

mission of our men and women so over time what we are doing is

basically supporting the operations of the Iraqis as they continue

their move ahead, hopefully, toward a more secure Iraq.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.