Mr. President, like most Americans, I welcomed the news

over the weekend that the Iraqi political leaders had created parts of

a new government. It is certainly a useful step toward the kind of Iraq

we all want to see.

Like most Americans, I hope this new government will be able to bring

security and order to a country wracked by insurgency, extremist

attacks, and sectarian strife. We know more work needs to be done, both

with forming this government and with fashioning a secure and stable

Iraq. Three of the most important security ministers are still unnamed.

That is hard to comprehend. We have been waiting and waiting for a

cabinet to be formed, but is it really a cabinet? As unbelievable as it

may seem to many, there is even talk of disgraced Ahmed Chalabi filling

one of those security posts. That is hard to comprehend, but that is

what the news accounts indicate.

I wonder how much longer this administration will insist that the

burden of securing Iraq continue to fall squarely on the backs of our

heroic U.S. troops, troops such as John Lukac and William Salazar.

Secretary Rumsfeld was asked the question in Senate hearings last week.

It turned out to be a question he could not answer. This past weekend,

when he was asked about the possible redeployment of U.S. forces in

Iraq coming home, going someplace else, Secretary Rice said that it

depends on the outcome of discussions with the Iraqi Government.

Apparently, Secretary Rice believes Iraqi leaders should decide the

fate of our troops.

We are almost at the midpoint of 2006, the year a bipartisan majority

in Congress said must be a year of significant transition. That is the

law of the land. It passed on a bipartisan vote during the Defense

authorization bill. An amendment was offered and passed on a bipartisan

basis saying that the year 2006 must be a year of significant

transition in Iraq, with Iraqis assuming responsibility for governing

and securing their own country.

Unfortunately, there appears to be little evidence of this

transition. In fact, we learned on Friday that there will be an

increase in U.S. troops to deal with the recent surge in violence. But

none of us should be surprised that this administration in this

instance is not following the law. It hasn't on many other occasions.

April was the deadliest month of the year for coalition troops. If

the current rate of violence is sustained, May will surpass April. The

situation is similar for Iraq's security personnel. More Iraq military

and police were killed in April than any time in the previous 6 months.

Economically, the trends are no better. Oil production is still about

400,000 barrels per day, less than it was prior to the war. Available

electricity in Baghdad dropped from 16 hours per day prior to the war

to its current average of 4 hours per day. Clean water is below prewar

levels, and because of mismanagement and violence, only 49 of the 136

U.S. funded projects in the water sector will be completed. The rest

have been abandoned. All of these factors reduce Iraq's support for our

activities there and fuel anti-American sentiment and insurgent

activity.

While we all should welcome this partially formed new government, we

recall other political milestones that were achieved and quickly

swallowed by more violence. For example, since the December election,

325 coalition troops have been killed.

In order to ensure the milestone produces a different, more lasting

result, Iraqis, working with the Bush administration, must address

outstanding issues surrounding their Constitution. They must form a

police force and diffuse the sectarian conflicts which have left their

country on the brink of civil war, if not in a civil war.

Let's not forget that while the President and his team have chosen to

focus this Nation's attention on Iraq, we see resurgent Taliban

activity in Afghanistan. Iran and North Korea are thumbing their noses

at the international community, and there has been a surge in terror

attacks across the globe. Also, the mastermind of the deadly attacks on

this Nation, Osama bin Laden, remains at large, while his al-Qaida

network has morphed into a global franchise operation.

This is a time of great challenge for our Nation and for the Iraqis.

Great challenges require strong leadership. Today's speech by the

President was yet another missed opportunity to provide that

leadership. We heard little about his plan to engage Iraq's neighbors

in finding a regional solution to

Iraq's problems. We heard little about his diplomatic efforts to end

the sectarian strife. We heard little about his thoughts on how to put

Iraq's reconstruction back on track. We heard little of what he is

doing to counter extreme ideology making such dangerous inroads in Iraq

and around the world.

Instead of kicking the can down the road and letting future

Presidents find our way out of Iraq, as we have been told by Secretary

Rice and the President himself will happen, it is time for the

President to lay out the comprehensive strategy that our troops, our

families, and the American people have been waiting for. They have been

waiting a long time.

The Nation should no longer have to guess what is on the President's

mind and grapple for some insight on what ``condition based''

withdrawal actually means, a phrase the Defense Secretary does not even

understand. We should all understand, a full-page ad in major

newspapers around the country, paid for by current CEOs, says Secretary

Rumsfeld should go. These are CEOs of some of the major companies in

America. ``Condition based withdrawal'' is a phrase the Defense

Secretary does not understand. It is time for a clear plan that is as

good as the men and women who serve our Nation each day. It is time for

the Iraqi people to take control of their own country, their own

affairs, and long past time for this administration to come up with a

plan that places the burden of securing Iraq forces on Iraq itself. The

burden of securing Iraq should be on Iraqis, not the United States. We

have done a lot. Even though the news over the weekend creating part of

the new government is a step forward, we still have a long way to go.

I apologize to my friend from Iowa for taking as much time as I did.

I appreciate very much his courtesy, as usual.