Mr. President, this is an important week not only because

we are going to finish the housing bill this week but also because

General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will testify. There are a

number of questions they must be asked by Members of the Senate. The

first one is will our troops come home soon or when will our troops

come home. And I think they should be asked if the Iraq war has made

America safer.

When the surge began more than a year ago, President Bush labeled the

strategy ``return on success.'' As the surge succeeds, according to the

President, our troops would come home. We

are already hearing General Petraeus has recommended to freeze the

troop levels. In fact, there will be more troops after the freeze takes

place than before the surge started. I assume President Bush will

accept this request by General Petraeus. By the President's own

measure, without our troops returning, there will be no success.

General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will be asked a number of

other questions. We have seen what happened a week or 10 days ago in

Basra: al-Sadr was attacked by the Iraqi armed services. Al-Maliki, the

leader of Iraq, didn't notify the American troops or anyone else and

simply took off after al-Sadr. That attack was basically a failure. The

police didn't police. The Iraqi police didn't police. At least 1,000

Iraqi soldiers laid down their arms and quit. In fact, they didn't lay

down their arms, they gave them over to al-Sadr's forces. Because of

that, British artillery was asked to engage, and they did. U.S. troops

were asked to come in, and they did. U.S. air support was asked to come

in, and they did. We lost a number of soldiers and a significant number

of soldiers were wounded.

As some of my colleagues will recall, when this attack by al-Maliki's

forces took place, President Bush said: This is what it is all about.

This shows the success of what I have been telling everyone.

Our troops in Iraq face a civil war that is growing more violent by

the day--by the day. Any notion of renewed commitment to peace among

Iraqi factions is betrayed by the news every day. Yesterday, five

American soldiers were killed. In one attack, 2 were killed and 31 were

wounded.

General Petraeus has to be asked the question: Why is this happening?

The battle, as we see in the papers today, is intensifying between al-

Sadr and al-Maliki. We have heard today's news that the Sunnis are

becoming more violent. The Green Zone, which is supposed to be a safe

haven, the safest part of Iraq, has seen a series of attacks over the

last couple weeks. People have been killed in the Green Zone. Our

soldiers are now being killed in the Green Zone.

The chorus for a smarter strategy in Iraq is growing among defense

and military experts. COL John Gentile, a West Point history professor

who has served two tours of duty in Iraq, has said directly about

Petraeus's action in Iraq, as reported in headline news today in the

Wall Street Journal, among other things:

General Petraeus must respond to the criticism of Lieutenant Colonel

Gentile.

General Petraeus is responsible solely for the conditions in Iraq. He

has responsibilities nowhere else. But others, including Secretary

Gates, Admiral Mullen and Congress and the President must consider Iraq

in the context of America's interests throughout the world. So General

Petraeus must be asked: Has the war made us safer?

Based on every measure, the answer is a resounding no. Because of

Iraq, our military's readiness for full-spectrum combat is stretched

dangerously thin and becoming more so every day. Our troops are serving

their second, third, fourth, fifth--and some are believed to be headed

to Iraq for the sixth time. This is taking a tremendous toll on them

and their families and the overall status of our military.

We are not ready for an unexpected crisis that could arise overnight

someplace other than Iraq. Each additional tour results in

substantially higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder. On one

tour, 12 percent of the soldiers are coming back with post-traumatic

stress disorder; three of four tours, approaching 30 percent.

I, in my office last Friday, was leaving, and a young man and his

wife were there with a baby. The young man married this very pretty

lady, his wife, the mother of his child, when he was 15. She was 19. He

joined the Army and went to Iraq. I said: How are you doing? He said:

Not very well. These were his words: My cognitive abilities are gone.

He is having trouble thinking. That is what post-traumatic stress

disorder is all about.

The military is in such dire need of recruits. I can remember when I

practiced law I did some criminal defense work. One of the things we

would try with some of these young men who were in trouble was to see

if we could get them in the military. The answer was no; they had

criminal records. It is not the case anymore. If you haven't graduated

from high school, the military will still take you. If you have

committed a felony or a serious crime, the military will still take

you. In fact, one out of every eight of our new recruits--that is 13

percent--have received a waiver for past criminal misconduct. Some of

these are felons, these people who are going into the military after

having committed a crime. But even with these people who have no high

school diploma, those who have been involved in serious crimes, we are

still struggling in meeting our recruitment goals.

As has been reported in all the print press and the electronic media

today, we are losing our combat-hardened leaders, those with

experience--sergeants, captains. There was a good report on the radio

this morning about what are we going to do for colonels and generals 15

years from now, if all the captains are leaving.

We recognize General Petraeus's responsibility is Iraq, but in these

hearings, these meetings with General Petraeus, he is going to have to

understand we have taken our eye off the ball in other crucial areas of

the world, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Korea, Iran, all

through the Middle East. America's No. 1 enemy, bin Laden, remains

free. Al-Qaida is going strong. Because of Iraq, courageous men and

women of our National Guard don't have the manpower and equipment to do

their job and protect us here at home. Because of Iraq, our moral

authority is lost in the eyes of many. Our foreign allies are unwilling

to stand by our side. General Petraeus is going to have to respond to

some of these questions: When will our troops come home? Has the Iraq

war made our country safer? These are the questions that matter. The

American people deserve a fair assessment of both.