Mr. President, the distinguished Republican leader, with me

and a few others, met with the President yesterday. I told the

President how much I thought of him, personally. I told him, even

though my fondness for him is significant, I disagree with a number of

his policies, not the least of which is what is going on in Iraq.

He announced his new plan last night, and it was basically what he

told us there at the White House yesterday. The President admitted he

had made some mistakes, and I think that is commendable, the right

thing to do, because there have been mistakes made in the waging of

that war. But by calling for escalation of this conflict, I think he is

on the verge of making another mistake.

As I made clear in a letter to the President last Friday, along with

Speaker of the House Pelosi, I oppose his new plan because it sends the

wrong signal to the Iraqis, to the Americans, and to the rest of the

world. President Bush is Commander in Chief, and his proposal deserves

serious consideration by this body, and we will give it serious

consideration.

In the days ahead, we will give his proposal and the overall

situation in Iraq a thorough review. I received a call late last night

from one Democratic Senator who has a proposal, early this morning from

another Senator, a Democratic Senator, who has some ideas. We heard,

yesterday, from Senator Coleman. He opposes the surge. Senator

Brownback is in Iraq and issued a press release saying he opposed the

surge.

But we are going to have hearings. Those hearings are starting today

on the war that is raging in Iraq. Tomorrow, there will be further

hearings by the Armed Services Committee. In those hearings, experts

will be asked about his proposal. And when the process is complete, we

will have a vote in the Senate. As to when that will be, under Senate

schedules, sometimes it is difficult to determine, but we will have

one. I will not prejudice the outcome of the vote on the President's

plan, but I will say this: Putting more U.S. combat forces in the

middle of an Iraqi civil war is a mistake.

In November, voters all across the country spoke loudly for change in

Iraq. That was the issue. In overwhelming numbers, they delivered a

vote of no confidence on the President's opened-ended commitment and

demanded we begin to bring this war to a close.

Last December, the Baker-Hamilton Commission--a respected panel of

foreign policy experts who studied the law, patriots all--echoed the

voters' call for change. The Commission, which included both Democrats

and Republicans, determined the time has come to transition our forces

out of Iraq, while launching a diplomatic and regional strategy to try

to hold together this destabilized region.

But last night, the President--in choosing escalation--ignored the

will of the people, the advice of the Baker-Hamilton Commission, and a

significant number of top generals, two of whom were commanders in the

field.

In choosing to escalate the war, the President virtually stands

alone.

Mr. President, we have lost more than a score of soldiers from

Nevada. The same applies to every State in the Union. From the State of

Pennsylvania--I was speaking to the junior Senator from Pennsylvania--

they lost more than 140. So many have sacrificed so much. They have

done their job, these brave men and women. It is time for a policy, I

believe, that honors their service by putting the future of Iraq in the

hands of the Iraqis.