Madam President, 4 years ago today, as we know, the

President stood on an aircraft carrier underneath a banner that read

``Mission Accomplished.'' He declared that the major combat operations

in Iraq were over. When he spoke those words, 140

American troops had been killed in Iraq. Since then, over 3,200 more

American troops have given their lives. Just today, we learned that

April was the deadliest month this year, with 104 Americans dead.

With every passing day, it becomes more obvious that the President

really should have said: My fellow Americans, major combat operations

in Iraq are just beginning. On that day, he should have had a plan to

match the rhetoric with reality. But we are where we are, as the saying

goes, and it is even more tragically clear to all but a few that if we

want to accomplish our mission in Iraq--and we all do--if we want an

Iraq that has any chance of stability and some sense of democracy, any

sense of it, we have to change course.

In the past 4 years, we have lost at least 3,342 of our best young

men and women, and nearly 25,000 others have been wounded and many

wounded severely. We have spent nearly $400 billion, and the cost is

rising at a rate of over $2 billion per week. There is no end in sight.

ADM William Fallon, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East,

recently said:

And even General Petraeus, the top commander in Iraq, now says that

we can expect the situation to get worse before it gets better.

We were treated to a spectacle a week and a half ago with news

reports, a front-page story, I think, in the Washington Post, that

Stephen Hadley, the President's security adviser, was casting about to

find a general to be the sort of supreme organizer, if you will, of the

war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq.

What struck me about that story is here is our Nation at war, here is

a series of four-star generals whose lives are committed to Nation, to

service, to duty, and to military, who under normal circumstances would

be honored to be asked to become the point person to organize our

Nation's efforts in two wars in a front that is of serious consequence

to this Nation. Yet all four retired four-star generals said no. One

was even quoted publicly as saying they don't know what the hell they

are doing, or they don't know what direction they are going in.

That is a pretty remarkable statement for a career military person to

make about the current effort. But we also know the history of what has

brought us here with retired generals--a whole host of them--who

publicly rebelled postservice against the leadership of Secretary

Rumsfeld, who is now gone.

It is a rather remarkable statement about the lack of planning, about

the lack of candor, about the scapegoating that has gone on, about the

unwillingness of people's careers to be judged not by their ability to

tell the truth but, rather, their willingness to tell the civilian

leaders what they want to hear.

As we know from our own intelligence agencies, the war in Iraq has

increased the threat of terrorism by creating a breeding ground for

terrorists that didn't exist before the invasion and by serving as a

rallying point for extremists around the world. In fact, the State

Department's annual terrorism report released yesterday shows that

terrorist attacks worldwide were up 25 percent last year after

increasing nearly fourfold the year before that.

How does the leadership come to the country and suggest that this war

is accomplishing our larger goals? How does it help the war on terror

to be creating more terrorists? How can you tell the American people we

have made you safer, when the number of terrorist incidents have gone

up and the number of terrorists who want to kill Americans is larger

today than it was on 9/11?

Any businessperson, any tourist, anybody of any curiosity who has

traveled abroad and who has asked a few simple questions or read the

newspapers and listened to the news knows that our Nation, which we

love passionately, is now less followed, less listened to, and less

feared--less listened to by our friends and less feared by our enemies.

The fact is, we are less safe as a result. We are less unified at home,

less respected abroad, and we are less strong as a result.

Obviously, there is no way we can make up for what has happened in

the last few years, certainly not in terms of the lives lost and the

pain and suffering endured by those wounded and by families who have

suffered those losses, but the fact is, we can find a responsible

strategy to try to deal with not just Iraq but the whole Middle East

and, indeed, releverage America's position in the world.

The President today, tonight, is going to veto crucial funding for

the troops passed by both Houses of Congress, legislation that gives

our soldiers all they need to complete the mission and receive the care

they deserve once they get home. The President is going to veto it, but

that is not all he is going to do. Then he is going to try to pin the

blame on those who have pushed for a new direction. He is going to try

to pin the blame for his failures, for his lack of planning, for his

lack of leadership on those who are providing the only way to try to

resolve what is happening in Iraq.

Instead of pressuring Iraqi politicians, this administration is

practicing the politics of division at home, a brand of American

sectarianism that undermines our national unity, a unity required to

make decisions in time of war.

Last week, Vice President Cheney accused Senator Harry Reid of

putting politics ahead of our national security. I suppose we have

grown used to this Vice President, who has pioneered the politics of

fear, who oversaw the politicization of the intelligence used to

mislead the country into war, who claimed that we would be greeted like

liberators, who told us the insurgency was in its last throws, who

continues to insist that everything is on track and growing fine, I

think we have grown used to this Vice President not being candid with

the American people.

Clearly, he didn't hesitate to impugn the integrity of the Senate's

majority leader who is standing for an appropriate new direction with

respect to our policy in Iraq.

Certainly, we can disagree about those tactics or strategies without

impugning the motives and challenging the integrity of those who speak

those different possibilities.

If the President insists on continuing down the wrong path, it seems

to me Congress has no choice but to be as resolute in demanding the

right path forward for our troops, for our country, and for the Iraqis

themselves. I believe we have to continue to fight for the legislation

that gives us the best chance of bringing our troops home with some

measure of success in the region.

Four years after ``mission accomplished,'' it is time for us to

acknowledge the implications of what General Petraeus and every other

military commander, the Secretary of State and even the President have

told us. All of them have said there is no military solution to the

violence in Iraq. I don't know how many times I have heard that on

Sunday shows, I hear it out here in the corridors with individual

Senators talking to the press. Everybody mouths the words: ``There is

no military solution.'' But if there is no military solution and we are

all agreed on that, then what is the military doing? Why is the

military and an escalation in the number of troops so critical if there

is no military solution?

The administration, even after telling you there is no military

solution, then gives you a rationale for a military solution, which is:

We have to put additional troops in to have the security, in order to

have the compromises. But the fact is, the security which, first of

all, is proving illusive and probably impossible to secure with the

troops alone, cannot be secured without the political compromises. This

is a classic chicken-and-egg situation: Which comes first? You are not

going to get the security until the stakeholders in this civil struggle

feel confident enough that what they are struggling about can be

resolved to their safety and future security. That is sort of a

fundamental issue. You are not going to change the on-the-ground

security situation and stop people from bombing and militias from

killing unless those fundamental stakes are properly addressed and

defined.

It is long since time that we started to measure progress on the

ground in Iraq by the one metric that will ultimately determine our

success or our failure, and that metric is this: Are the Iraqis making

the tough political compromises necessary to keep their country

together?

It has been nearly a year since the Maliki Government took power. At

that time, General Casey and Ambassador Khalilzad said that the Maliki

Government had 6 months to make the political compromises necessary to

win the public confidence.

So here we have the commanding general of our forces and our trusted

Ambassador to Iraq both saying they have 6 months to make the

compromises. But guess what. The 6 months went by and nothing

happened--nothing happened in Iraq to make those compromises happened,

and nothing happened afterwards because the compromises didn't happen.

That sends a message that there is no consequence to delay, there is no

consequence to procrastination.

After that, the Iraqi Government agreed to a set of benchmarks

because people were growing frustrated and those benchmarks, guess

what, were pegged to specific dates for making progress toward national

reconciliation.

In January, the President announced the troop escalation, and he told

the American people the following:

But, once again, no real consequences, no real leverage, no real

diplomacy. The result is, those benchmarks proved meaningless. You can

take a look at the benchmarks the Iraqis agreed to. What did they agree

to do at that point in time?

October 2006, over 6 months ago, that was the deadline for Iraqis to

approve a new oil law and a provincial election law. As of today, the

oil law has yet to even be introduced in Parliament, and that is an

improvement over the provincial election law which hasn't even been

drafted yet.

November 2006 was the deadline for new debaathification law to help

bring Sunnis into the Government. A draft proposal was recently

denounced by Ayatollah Sistani and a national commission to oversee the

process, and guess what. It is nowhere near completion. In fact, 5

months after the deadline, the Shiite leader of the SCIRI Party

recently described the Baathists as ``the first enemy of the Iraqi

people.'' So much for debaathification and reconciliation.

December 2006 was the deadline for the Iraqis to approve legislation

to address the militias. To date, absolutely no progress has been made

on this crucial legislation, and the militias continue to wreak havoc.

January 2007 was the deadline for Iraqis to complete a constitutional

review process. There was supposed to be a referendum on constitutional

amendments by March. Guess what. The constitutional committee hasn't

even drafted the proposed amendments, and the Iraqis remain far apart

on key issues such as federalism and the fate of the divided city of

Kirkut.

We are no closer to a political solution today than we were when the

Maliki Government took power 1 year ago, but there were more than 940

additional American troops who gave their lives in that process to wait

for the Iraqis to procrastinate.

Did the President actually hold the Iraqi Government to those

benchmarks as promised? No. I hope the President tonight, when he

addresses us after the veto, will address the benchmarks and where we

are with respect to the failure of the Government to make the choices

they said they had to make while our soldiers continue to die.

The administration still refuses to get genuinely tough with Iraqi

politicians. They keep moving the goalposts, deflect the criticism of a

failed strategy which they refuse to abandon. Instead, we get more

vague assertions that our presence is not open-ended and outright

rejection of any proposal that would leverage that threat.

The administration, it seems to me, has reached a point where it has

to stop pretending the lack of political will in America is the

problem. It is not the lack of political will in America that is the

problem, it is the lack of political will in Iraq that is the problem.

It is impossible to make any other judgment when you look at that

entire series of benchmarks. I remember Secretary Rice coming before

the Foreign Relations Committee, I believe, several months ago now, and

I asked her the question about the oil law. She said: Oh, yes, the oil

law is almost done, just about done; wrapped up, we are about to

proceed forward, we are confident it is going to be done in a few

days. Here we are, several months later, and there is no oil law. It is

not even before the Parliament yet.

The administration needs to accept the basic reality that the

Congress has acknowledged: Iraqi politicians, if they are capable, if

they are capable of making these decisions, have shown they will not do

it without a reason to do it, without a rationale that feels some heat.

A deadline is the only thing they have responded to so far. It took a

deadline to be able to get them to do a constitution. It took a

deadline to have each of their elections.

Incidentally, they protested against each of the deadlines. Each time

they said: Don't do this to us; we can't meet it; we can't make it; it

is too much. But each time, because we set the deadline and kept

pushing, they did meet it.

American security is not a security blanket for Iraqis who want to

procrastinate while American soldiers die. The longer the President

continues to give them the sense that he is not going to change, he is

not going to move on them, the more they are secure in the sense that

they can just continue to jockey and play their political game at the

expense of American dollars and American interests and American lives.

Without real deadlines to force them, there is no way to actually

determine that we can make the progress we need to make. Since January,

when the President decided to disregard key elements of the Iraq Study

Group and announced the escalation, over 340 American troops have died,

and there is still no fundamental progress.

The legislation we have sent to the President would change this

dynamic. It would force the Iraqis to either stand up for Iraq and meet

the political benchmarks they have agreed to or decide they can't do it

and have their fight.

It calls for a flexible timetable for the redeployment in 2008, and I

underscore ``flexible.'' Every time we try to do something, we get into

this totally phony, polarized debate where the President and his

henchmen go out and talk about reckless abandonment and surrender and

defeatism when, in fact, what we are proposing gives the President all

the discretion in the world--to leave troops there to finish the

training of Iraqis, which is the fundamental reason we are there; to

leave troops there to chase al-Qaida, to prosecute the war on terror,

which is in our interests, and to leave troops to protect American

forces and protect American facilities. After 6 years of the war, what

other fundamental mission should there be for American forces?

It seems to me the real debate is one that should center around the

failures of this administration to face that reality and the few

choices we have now to try to achieve success. The most important

choice that has to be made to achieve success is to engage in full-

throated diplomacy, not dissimilar to the kind of meeting that will be

held in Sharm el-Sheikh this week. We hope Secretary Rice will take

advantage of that and that the countries of the region will come

together around a new security arrangement and a new understanding of

what has to happen.

The timetable for the redeployment in the legislation sent to the

President is not arbitrary, and it is not precipitous. It is consistent

with the Iraq Study Group's recommendations and with the timeframe for

transferring control of Iraq to the Iraqis that was set forth by

General Casey. It also has the schedule agreed upon by the Iraqi

Government itself. There is nothing arbitrary in a schedule to which

your own commanding general and the Iraqi Government have agreed.

Even the President has said, under his new strategy, responsibility

for security would be transferred to Iraqis before the end of this

year. So they are willing to set a date. The administration can set a

date for the transfer of the security, but it is unwilling to set a

date for the beginning of the drawdown of some troops so you guarantee

that date for the transfer of security is actually meaningful. The

President has said it. Our generals have said it. The Iraq Study Group

has said it. Now it is

time for the President to embrace legislation that makes those words

reality.

Instead of accepting the change that is necessary, we keep hearing we

need more of the same; we have to give the surge time to work; the

Iraqis need just a little more breathing space to start making

political progress.

General Petraeus has said, however, that he won't be able to make any

progress assessment on the ground until September. Guess what. We hear

that Iraq's Parliament, which has only been able to muster a quorum to

even consider legislation about once every week or two--the Iraqi

Parliament plans to take a 2-month vacation this summer, a vacation in

the middle of a civil war. You sort of wonder what Abraham Lincoln

would think of that. Iraq is descending further into chaos as thousands

of Iraqis die each month. If the Iraqis go on vacation without making

the key political compromises, it will absolutely guarantee that there

is not going to be any meaningful political progress until next fall. I

do not believe that America should be sending our troops to die for

somebody else's vacation.

How many more American soldiers are going to give their lives without

any hope of achieving a real political solution? 300? 400? 500? How

many more doors are going to be knocked on and phone calls made? How

many more visits to Arlington and other cemeteries across America,

while the Iraqis procrastinate and refuse to settle their differences?

How can any of us in the Chamber look in the eyes of the parents of

any young American killed and tell them: Your son or daughter died so

the Iraqis can take the summer off?

With every passing day it becomes clearer this Iraqi Government is

not going to get the job done. It is not truly a unity government, it

is a figleaf for politicians who are pursuing sectarian interests

instead of protecting the nation they are charged with saving. Now it

is starting to crumble under the weight of its own ineffectiveness and

corruption.

Last week some prominent Iraqi legislators came out and said publicly

that they have lost confidence in the Maliki government. That is not

surprising since we recently learned that Prime Minister Maliki was

responsible for a politically motivated purge of Iraqi military leaders

who had the gumption to actually act against the Mahdi militia.

Yesterday the largest block of Sunni Arabs in the Parliament

threatened to withdraw its Ministers from the Shiite-dominated Cabinet

in frustration over the Government's failure to deal with Sunni

concerns. As one Sunni legislator said:

This Government we are supporting is spiraling downward into greater

and greater ineffectiveness. In the process, Iraq is spiraling deeper

and deeper into its sectarian divide.

It is not just the Iraqis. Last week we learned that several

prominent Sunni countries are balking at complete debt relief for Iraq

because of the lack of progress in political reconciliation. This past

weekend the Saudis refused to allow Prime Minister Maliki to visit

their country because he has not delivered on his promise to seek real

reconciliation with Iraqi Sunnis. How can we expect progress and

political reconciliation if the Iraqis have lost confidence in the

Maliki government? How can we expect diplomatic progress when Iraq's

neighbors have lost confidence in Iraqi leadership? This is a very

serious issue.

The administration has finally done what they should have done years

ago: engaged, this week, in the kind of diplomacy that is desperately

needed. On the eve of the summit, we learned that some of the major

players have no confidence in the political process. So if we really

want to bring about the political and diplomatic solution that is the

only solution, the time has come now for new leadership in Iraq.

When I was in Iraq in December, Prime Minister Maliki told me he was

working on forming a new coalition that would isolate extremists

unwilling to compromise and empower moderates who were. Since then we

have heard from time to time that these negotiations continue behind

the scenes. But nothing has happened. It is time to get out from behind

the scenes. It is time to have a government that can put the pieces

back together.

As one Iraqi Minister said yesterday, Mr. Maliki ``said he was going

to appoint new Ministers; he needs to do that. . . . What is he waiting

for?''

That is a question the U.S. Congress should echo. We simply cannot go

on like this, day after day, news cycle after news cycle--more bombs,

more murders, more assassinations, more suicide bombings, more

killings, more American soldiers dead. We can't go on like this and

expect the situation to miraculously get better. Time is not on our

side. Time is not on anyone's side in the end because if this does go

downward into greater sectarian violence, all of the Iraqis will lose.

If we are serious about a political solution, we need a fresh start.

That is why I believe it is time for Prime Minister Maliki to make

wholesale changes in his Cabinet. He already has to replace the six

Muqtada al-Sadr Ministers, the Sadrist Ministers who recently resigned.

He should use that as an opportunity to fire any other Minister who is

not committed to political reconciliation and replace them with

Ministers who are.

We should make it clear this truly is his last chance. If reshuffling

the Cabinet does not produce meaningful political progress within a

relatively short period of time, then he should step down and allow a

new leader to step forward. Putting Mr. Maliki's personal political

future on the line is perhaps one of the few ways left to try to create

the leverage necessary to find out if he is capable of moving the

reconciliation procession forward. If he proves unwilling or unable,

then clearly someone else should be given a chance--if there is someone

else.

This is the moment to put that to the test. I recognize that Iraqis

must take responsibility for their own future and that any government

we impose will lack legitimacy with their fellow Iraqis. But we can use

our own influence behind the scenes to encourage the Iraqis to make the

leadership changes so clearly needed in order to give their Government

a chance to succeed. We certainly have a right to make that request,

given the degree to which that Government is dependent on our troops

and our money and our presence.

Congress has finally done what this administration has stubbornly

refused to do. I am proud of my fellow Members of this body who had the

courage to vote for this legislation. I know how divisive it can be. I

know how the other side uses it and how people tend to try to

personalize and even denigrate people's patriotism and concern for the

Nation. The fact is, the Congress has done what needed to be done

because this administration has not done it.

People say don't micromanage. Someone has to manage. They have

clearly mismanaged every step of this war, and they have been absent

from the diplomacy necessary. It is time to have a new strategy, time

to hold Iraqi politicians responsible for their country's future, time

to get deadly serious about finding a political solution, and finding

it now.

Somehow this President still chooses to take a different tack. If

President Bush vetoes this bill, which we understand he will, then he

is the one standing in the way of a bipartisan strategy on Iraq. The

Iraq Study Group was bipartisan. The Iraq Study Group had former

Secretary of State Jim Baker, a Republican, a great friend of President

Bush's father. It had Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger. It had Al

Simpson, former Senator from Wyoming and Republican leader in the

Senate. It had Bill Perry, former Secretary of Defense; Chuck Robb; it

had Ed Meese, former Attorney General and Chief of Staff to a

Republican President. All of these are moderate, thoughtful, respected,

trusted voices in foreign policy and in the affairs of our country.

They all came together in a consensus. That consensus was summarily

rejected by the President, just pushed aside.

The President decided to go his own road, which even the generals and

even Prime Minister Maliki did not want to do. I read one Senator's

comment that there is no plan B, that there is just plan A, which is

the surge. I disagree with that. Plan B is what plan B should

have been all the time, which is to engage in the legitimate kind of

intervention on a diplomatic level and to put on the table all of the

issues of the region in a way that proves the kind of sincerity and

seriousness of purpose that raises the level of credibility of the

discussion so people can trust that we, in fact, are going to be moving

in a common direction, which is in their interests.

The reason Saudi Arabia is sending such public messages of discontent

for the policies of this administration today is because, given what

has happened, that is the way they have to play it in order to deal

with their own politics of the region and their own politics of the

street and their nation. It is our absence from a creative, diplomatic

effort, it is our absence from a credible and legitimate diplomatic

lift that has left no choice even to our friends than to begin to

distance themselves from our country.

With this veto, the President will deny our troops the vehicles they

need, for the time being; he will deny them the basic care they

deserve, for the time being, because all of us know the Congress will

come back and we will fund those things. But the most significant thing

he will deny us is the kind of leadership and the kind of consensus the

country deserves in order to move forward in our policy in Iraq.

We honor the lives lost in Iraq, not with words but with lives saved.

We honor the lives lost in Iraq not with words and with the political

partisanship here but with a policy that is right for them and for the

region. We honor their sacrifice by creating a situation in the region

where we protect America's and the region's interests at the same time

and begin to recognize the degree to which our presence in Iraq is

playing into the hands of the terrorists, is advancing the very cause

we seek to fight, which is diminishing the ability of the United States

to be able to leverage, not just the Middle East issues, but a host of

other issues in the world.

I believe we need to change course, and it is only by changing course

that we will honor their sacrifice, respect our interests, and bring

our troops home with honor.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and suggest the absence of a

quorum.