Mr. President, this morning I rise to discuss the

terrible situation we see in Iraq. While home in New Jersey over these

last few days, I was often approached by constituents on the street and

there was one topic that would come into the conversation almost

immediately, when people said: Senator, when are we going to get our

troops out of the crossfire in Iraq?

It is a great question, but the answer is certainly not clear.

Our constituents back home understand that President Bush has totally

mishandled the diplomatic and strategic parts of the Iraq mission and

our troops are the ones who are caught in the middle--caught in the

middle of an ethnic civil war between Sunnis and Shiites. From my home

State of New Jersey, we have already lost 74 people in Iraq; nationwide

the total is quite clear--over 3,000 have lost their lives, and there

are over 23,000 wounded with injuries that could disable them for the

rest of their lives.

To make matters worse, a disproportionate amount of the burden of

this conflict has fallen to Guard and Reserve troops. In fact, in early

2005, the National Guard and the Reserves made up nearly half of the

fighting force in Iraq, people who were to be called up when

emergencies arose. The Reserves were not there primarily to be a

replacement for long-term combat duty. This administration decided

early on that their agenda for the military was to shrink the size of

our Active Forces. We all heard that. ``We will get it down to being

lean and mean, and increase reliance on contractors for support.'' If

it were not so tragic, it would be a joke.

Now we see, in practice, the Bush long-term military plan has been a

disaster. We do not have enough active troops. We are relying way too

much on the Guard and Reserve. And contractors such as Halliburton have

been wasting taxpayer dollars right and left.

The proof of this waste was a fine, levied against Halliburton, of

$60 million at one time for overcharges for the care and feeding of our

troops. We continue to hear of irresponsible behavior of contractors

serving our needs in Iraq. Mismanagement of all forms has been a

hallmark of Defense Department supervision.

At every turn, this President has made terrible judgments. Tomorrow

we are going to hear another decision by President Bush. Why should the

American people trust him to understand what he is getting us into? We

heard the President say, ``Bring 'em on,'' one of the most disingenuous

statements ever made by a President. I served in Europe during World

War II, and I can tell you that we never wanted to hear a Commander in

Chief taunting the enemy from the comforts of the White House. Asking

more of the enemy to show their faces? We didn't want to see them at

all.

We saw the President's foolish display of bravado on the Aircraft

Carrier Abraham Lincoln when he declared, ``Mission accomplished.''

What a careless statement the President of the United States made that

day, over 3\1/2\ years ago. Mission accomplished? That meant the job

was finished, as far as most people were concerned. But it was not

through.

While the President was performing in 2003, leaders were warning of a

military crisis. General Shinseki, Army Chief of Staff, told a Senate

Armed Services Committee that we would need to keep a large force in

Iraq even after a war to curb ethnic tensions and provide humanitarian

aid. General Shinseki, distinguished military leader, said we needed

several hundred thousand troops there. His assessment was harshly

dismissed quickly by the President and by Secretary Rumsfeld. The

General's reality-based opinion got in the way of their ideologically

based mission of a smaller Active-Duty Force.

In the aftermath of the initial invasion, President Bush has made the

wrong move almost every time. Now we have walked so deep into the swamp

in Iraq that just adding more guns is not going to work. This so-called

surge is another bad idea--slogans, such as ``cut and run'' have to be

matched against the reality of ``stay and die.''

President Bush likes to say: I do what the generals tell me to. But

now we know that is not the case. The generals have been extremely

candid about their view of the surge idea. They think it is wrong. Now

we are hearing that the President intends to give another $1 billion to

Iraqi reconstruction projects. We want to fund every cent that our

troops need for their safety, for their return, for their health care,

for their well-being, but sending more money down the rat hole is not

going to do it. It is being diverted from programs at home, such as

education, stem cell research, health care for all our people, to name

a few, and the taxpayers of New Jersey do not want their money used to

build another civilian project in Iraq that is going to get blown up

the next day. Before we look to spend more money on civil projects in

Iraq, let's get the diplomatic situation straightened out.

The American people want to see us leave Iraq with some hope for

stability in our absence. That will require President Bush to use all

of the diplomatic tools at his disposal to force a dramatic change of

course for the Iraqi Government. The current Government in Iraq has to

take real steps to disarm the Shiite militias and show the Sunnis that

they will actually be empowered in the Iraqi Government. If we do not

do that, we could send a million troops to Iraq tomorrow, but it would

not make a difference. If the Sunnis feel the Iraqi Government has

nothing to offer and Prime Minister al-Maliki doesn't stop the Shiite

militias, the bloodbath will continue.

I hope the leaks about the President's plan are wrong and that he

will announce tomorrow a better course, a course that will allow us to

exit Iraq but with real hope of a more stable society left behind.

I conclude that with the history of planning for this war and the

statements coming from the White House and the leadership of the

Defense Department I ask: How can we trust their judgment with a new

plan to put more people in harm's way without some idea of when this

will end? It is not a good idea and we ought to get a better

explanation from the President and the Defense Department as to what

might the outcome be if their plan succeeds.

I yield the floor.