Mr. President, I rise to speak about the pending

business before the Senate, which is the Department of Defense

authorization bill for fiscal year 2008.

This is a bill the Senate Armed Services Committee has worked long

and hard on over a period of several months. I am privileged to be a

member of the committee and now doubly privileged to be chair of the

Airland Subcommittee. I am proud of the work of the committee.

This is a bill that does the best we possibly can to support and

expand our forces during a time of war. Unfortunately, most of the time

that will be spent by this Chamber on this bill will not be about the

solid substance of the Department of Defense authorization bill but

will be on a series of amendments that will be offered to alter our

course or force our withdrawal from Iraq.

In my considered opinion, respectfully, this is a mistake. These

amendments regarding Iraq, I believe, are untimely, they are unwise,

and they are unfair.

They are untimely in the sense that they are premature and should

await September, when, as ordained by this Congress itself in the

supplemental appropriations bill, General Petraeus and Ambassador

Crocker will come back to report to us fully.

They are unwise, if ever adopted, because they would essentially

represent a retreat from Iraq, a defeat for the United States and the

forces of a new Iraq, a free Iraq, and a tremendous victory for Iran

and al-Qaida, who are our two most significant enemies in the world

today.

Offering these amendments at this time, in my opinion, is unfair:

unfair, most of all, to the 160,000 Americans in uniform over there--

men and women, brave, effective, in my opinion, the new greatest

generation of American soldiers, committed to this fight, believing we

can win it, putting their lives on the line every day. They have made

tremendous progress already in the so-called surge, counteroffensive.

To snipe at them from here is, in my opinion, unfair.

That is why I will oppose all the amendments I have heard about thus

far and why I wish to discuss them today.

I suppose, in terms of timeliness, if one felt the surge,

counteroffensive--which began in February, and has just been fully

staffed a couple of weeks ago--had absolutely failed, then one might

say: OK, we won't wait until September, as we promised we would do; we

will try to force a change in policy or a retreat right now. But the

facts, as I will discuss, will show the surge is showing some success--

in some ways some remarkable success--and does not justify these

amendments of retreat being offered at this time.

Six months ago, this Chamber voted unanimously to confirm GEN David

Petraeus as commander of our forces in Iraq. The fact is--which we all

acknowledge--before that, the administration had followed a strategy in

Iraq that simply was not working. It was a strategy focused on keeping

the U.S. force presence as small as possible, regardless of conditions

on the ground, and of pushing Iraqi forces into the lead as quickly as

possible, regardless of their capabilities to do so.

General Petraeus oversaw--let me step back. General Petraeus was part

of a process, along with others, that presented a dramatically

different strategy to the President of the United States, the Commander

in Chief. He accepted that dramatically different strategy, which was

to apply classic principles of counterinsurgency that have been

successful elsewhere, so that instead of our main goal being to get out

of Iraq, our main goal became to protect the civilian population that

the terrorists were persistently attacking, bringing chaos throughout

the country, including particularly in the capital city of Baghdad, and

making it impossible for a new Iraqi Government to take shape.

As a result, over the past 5 months, many problems, many crises, many

challenges in Iraq that had long been described as hopelessly beyond

solution have begun to improve. In Baghdad, the sectarian violence that

had paralyzed the city for more than a year began to drop dramatically.

In Anbar Province, which the chief of Marine Corps intelligence in Iraq

described 9 months ago as ``lost''--and he was right at that point--a

city which I was not allowed to visit when I went to Iraq in December

because it was too dangerous--our surge forces have moved in

effectively.

Working together with Sunni tribal leaders and their Sunni followers,

we have al-Qaida on the run. As a matter of fact, they have effectively

run from Anbar Province, the province they said they intended to make

the capital of the new Islamist extremist Republic of Iraq.

When I was in Iraq a month ago, I was not only allowed to visit

Ramadi and walk its streets but was tremendously impressed by the peace

and rebirth that is occurring there.

As John Burns of the New York Times recently put it, the capital city

of Anbar, Ramadi, has

Despite

these gains in Baghdad and Anbar, critics of the new strategy

nonetheless insisted that it was not working, pointing to the fact

that, yes, al-Qaida is on the run, but it is running and causing

devastation in other parts of Iraq--now in Diyala Province, for

instance.

But what happened? General Petraeus, now with the other generals and

additional personnel brought under his command by the surge

counteroffensive strategy, was able to leave some troops in Anbar,

fortified by Iraqi security forces and the Sunni tribal forces, and

move the surge forces to Diyala, to Bakuba there, where they now have

al-Qaida on the run.

Our forces in the field are, of course, still facing some daunting

challenges and a brutal, inhumane foe prepared to blow themselves up to

make a point, to kill others, hating us and others more than they love

their own lives. But the plain truth is that Iraq in this month, July

2007, is a very different and better place than Iraq in January or

February of 2000, and it is because of the so-called surge

counteroffensive strategy. Those who refuse to recognize that change

and nonetheless go forward with the same policies of defeat and

withdrawal that they have been talking about for months have, I would

say respectfully, closed their eyes, not to mention their heads, to the

reality of what is actually happening on the ground in Iraq.

General Petraeus has persistently appealed to us to have some

patience, to not rush to judgment about the success or failure of a new

surge strategy. It is only right that we do so. But instead of

respecting those pleas, withholding our judgment, and remaining true to

what we ourselves put into the supplemental appropriations bill, which

was a requirement for an interim report this week and a full report on

paper about the benchmarks and in person by General Petraeus and

Ambassador Crocker in September, instead of waiting for that to happen,

I regret that some of my colleagues have decided to go ahead and submit

these amendments which, to me, represent the continuation of a longtime

legislative trench warfare against our presence in Iraq no matter what

the facts on the ground there are. Rather than giving General Petraeus

and his troops a fair chance to succeed--and it is not just for them,

it is for us--I regret that efforts will be made here to undermine our

strategy, which is now a successful strategy in Iraq, to dictate when,

where, and against whom our soldiers can fight and when we should get

out.

I suppose this would be justified if somebody concluded that the war

was lost in Iraq. The war is not lost in Iraq. In fact, now American

and Iraqi security forces are winning. The enemy is on the run in Iraq.

But here in Congress, in Washington, we seem to be--or some Members

seem to be on the run--chased, I fear, by public-opinion polls.

I know the American people are frustrated. I understand that. I know

what they see every night on the TV, the suicide bombs. I know how much

they want their loved ones to come home. No one wants that more than we

do here. But the consequences of doing that would be a disaster for

Iraq, the Middle East, and for us because the victors would be Iran and

al-Qaida, our two most dangerous enemies in the world today, and trust

me, they would follow us back here to this country.

I said one might pursue a policy of changing course, directing a

retreat, a withdrawal, accepting defeat if one thought the war was

lost. The war is not lost. In fact, I will say to my colleagues today

that this war in Iraq will never be lost by our military on the ground

in Iraq. The war in Iraq can only be lost with the loss of political

will here at home and, perhaps, with the loss of political will in

Iraq. But that story is not finished yet.

Perhaps there are some who would say the war is not lost but it is

not worth winning. I think we have to think of the consequences of

defeat. I know that in the midst of the consequences of defeat are a

victory for Iran and al-Qaida, chaos in Iraq, slaughter that will

probably begin to look like genocide, instability in the region, and

the danger that we will be forced to send our troops back into the

region in greater numbers to fight a more difficult war.

I think the amendments on Iraq to be offered on this Department of

Defense bill are mistaken. What are the alternatives my colleagues are

going to propose in these amendments? One of the amendments would

demand a total withdrawal of American troops from Iraq as quickly as

possible. Its sponsors argue that we can continue to fight al-Qaida in

Iraq and defend our other key interests in the Middle East by operating

from bases elsewhere there. With all due respect, this is fantasy.

As my friend, Senator Lugar, pointed out a short while ago, a

complete American withdrawal from Iraq is likely to have devastating

consequences for American national security. Everyone knows Senator

Lugar is a skeptic about our strategy and events in Iraq. Yet, in his

words, a complete withdrawal from Iraq would:

So spoke the distinguished Senator from Indiana, Mr. Lugar.

Another amendment would keep some forces in Iraq, pull most forces

out by next April 1. Their numbers would be dramatically reduced and

the mission dramatically redefined.

Some argue that American soldiers should withdraw from Iraq's cities

and instead focus on the training of Iraqi forces, targeting

counterterrorism, and protecting the remaining American troops there.

Let me say that is a vision I would embrace for the future but not as a

substitute for the surge counteroffensive strategy we are following now

but as a consequence of a successful implementation of that strategy,

for if we in this Chamber and in Congress mandate the withdrawal of our

troops down to a core group with a new mission before the Iraqi

security forces are ready to provide security, we are going back to the

exact strategy some describe as the Rumsfeld strategy which didn't

work, which was roundly condemned by most people in both parties over a

period of years.

I repeat my confidence that the number of American troops will be

reduced, but it will be reduced best when it is reduced as a result of

the successful implementation of the surge strategy as carried out

heroically by American forces.

I conclude with these words: Our responsibilities in this Chamber

ultimately do not allow us to be guided by our frustrations or even by

public-opinion polls when we respectfully believe those public-opinion

polls do not reflect what is best for our Nation. We were elected to

lead. We were elected to see beyond the next election, to do what is

best for the next generation of Americans. We were elected to defend

our beloved country, its security, and its values. All of that is on

the line in Iraq today.

So I appeal to my colleagues, let's not undercut our troops and

legislate a defeat in Iraq where none is occurring now, where hope is

strong, where the momentum is, in fact, on our side. If you question

that, at least show the fairness and respect for General Petraeus,

Ambassador Crocker, and all the people working for us there to wait

until September, which is what we said we would do, until we take a

serious look at these amendments. If we go down the path the amendments

entice us toward, what awaits us is an emboldened Iran, a strengthened

al-Qaida, a failed Iraq that will become not just a killing field but

will destabilize the entire Middle East and also, I fear, imperil our

security here at home.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.