Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Texas.

The President's remarks last night on the 1-year anniversary of

handing power over to the Iraqi Government was a good opportunity to

remind Americans why it is so critical that we stay the course in Iraq.

Interestingly, just a year ago, there was one Iraqi battalion. Today

there are 100 Iraqi battalions. That is a good metaphor for what we are

doing there and how we are going to succeed. And it is a good answer to

those who say we need a plan. We need an exit strategy.

People who talk about that have not been listening to the President.

His plan, as he outlined last night, is simple, and it is a plan that

we have been following since over a year ago, when the transfer of

power occurred. The plan is to enable the Iraqis to take over the

security of their own country, and then we can leave. We are not going

to leave before that job is done. No one knows exactly how long it will

take, but the fact that we have increased a hundredfold the number of

Iraqi units in the year since we turned over power is a good indication

of what we intend to do and what we have been able to do.

The President noted last night that not all of these units are

trained to the same level that the U.S. units are. That is obvious. But

as we are able to do so, those Iraqi units will be able to take over

more and more of the operation.

Eventually, as the President noted last night, the United States

might be able to do more by simply embedding some of our officers in

those units, thus reducing, again, the amount of American manpower

actually on the ground.

There is a way that the United States is approaching this that will

result in the United States withdrawing and the Iraqis being able to

take care of their own security. That is the plan, and it is a wise

one.

What is at stake if we were to either announce an early withdrawal or

pull out early? The President made it clear last night that you don't

announce to the enemy when you are going to leave. The enemy simply

takes note of that and says, fine, waits until you leave, and then does

all the bad stuff that it wants to do without any fear of retribution

by the United States. That is not workable. Nor would it be workable

for the United States to pull out too soon.

Think about what would happen. If the terrorists were to take back

over in

Iraq, even Saddam Hussein could be returned to power. That would become

a hot bed of terrorism in the Middle East. The progress that has been

made in surrounding countries such as Pakistan, the efforts that are

being made toward democracy in places such as Lebanon and Egypt and

Saudi Arabia, all of those would go up in smoke. The problems that a

country such as Pakistan would have would be horrendous. Countries such

as Syria and Iran would decide that to be on the winning side, they

want to continue their support of the terrorists. Our credibility would

be absolutely destroyed. An opportunity to create a democracy in that

part of the Middle East would have evaporated.

I can't think of anything worse than losing in Iraq. And since

victory is within our grasp, we need to pursue that course.

The President was on the right track last night. There will be some

who will never respond favorably toward his message because they are

simply in such disagreement with him politically that they can't force

themselves to acknowledge anything that he does is correct or good.

Those people are not going to be persuaded. But the vast majority of

Americans who were listening will appreciate the fact that we do have a

good strategy, that the President is not trying to engage in happy

talk. He repeatedly said this was going to be difficult. But it is also

important for him to point out the successes because the news media is

not likely to do that as fully as it should.

The President combined both a sober assessment of the realities, a

pragmatic assessment, along with a good report of the progress that has

been made, and we believe will continue to be made.

In all of these things, I believe President Bush should be

complimented and that we, as a nation, should join behind him, just as

the soldiers and the families of the soldiers at Fort Bragg did last

night. It was evident to me that they support the President. It is

important that the American people and we support the President as

well.