Madam President, today is a very significant day. Right

now we are actually looking at the sixth anniversary of the Operation

Iraqi Freedom. We sometimes have forgotten about the butcher from Iraq

and how bad that was. I had personal experience during the first Gulf

War of being there and seeing some of the things that went on, the

horrible torture and the things that this particular dictator had done

to that country. When we went in 6 years ago, it was a very difficult

time because we went in with a military that had been downgraded during

the Clinton administration. If you take a straight line in terms of

what the expenditures were the day he took office, that is how much we

reduced it in force strength, in our modernization program. In fact,

this euphoric attitude people were talking about, saying the Cold War

is over, we no longer need a strong military, that is the environment

we had. I think, under those circumstances, we did an incredible job.

I have never been so impressed with an all-volunteer Army. I happen

to have been a product of the draft. I believed that offered more

discipline. When I went there--and I honestly believe I have made more

trips to Iraq and Afghanistan than any other Member as the second-

ranking member of the Armed Services Committee--I was privileged to be

in places such as Fallujah during all the elections that took place and

to see our young people, not all that well equipped, take on difficult

odds. The marines in Fallujah were part of this, and it was incredible

to watch. It was more than the World War II door-to-door style of

combat.

Then I was very proud to be a part of the training of the troops over

in Afghanistan. I say that because it was Oklahoma's 45th Division that

was involved in training the Afghans on how to train themselves in the

A&A. I feel that to have witnessed this, to have been over there in

Bagdad, in Kabal, in that whole theater during this time was so

impressive to me.

I can remember going into the various mess halls, with our troops

there--and at that time, IEDs, at an unprecedented rate, were killing

and maiming our soldiers--and the bravery they had. One of the

questions they used to ask me, in the early stages of this war--6 years

ago and 5 years ago--was: Why is it the American people do not

understand what we are doing here? Why don't they understand if we do

not stop the terrorism here, it is going to be back at our borders the

way it was on 9/11? My response to them was I think they are. We are

not getting good reporting out of the media. That started changing as

improvements came along.

As I witnessed the opportunities that were there, our troops, all of

a sudden, during this surge anyway, were gaining a lot more support,

and that completely turned it around. GEN David Petraeus did a

remarkable job. In fact, all our generals over there did.

So I think it is incumbent upon us today to remember this is the 6th

year. This is something that was absolutely necessary for the safety

and the freedom we enjoy here in this country. We should be applauding

all our troops as they come back.

To me, it was a little unconscionable, just 3 or 4 days ago, when the

White House was coming out with a program that would have impaired our

wounded veterans coming back from Iraq and the Middle East from access

to VA health care. Because of all the people--I am sure the phones are

ringing off the hook at the White House--last night they backed away

from that. But, nonetheless, we are not getting the support we should

be getting now for our military at this time.

Keep in mind, if we went through an 8-year period of dropping down

the support, and then we look at the budget that is in today, it is an

inflated budget in spending in every possible area except defense. I

think it should be our priority now, as we remember what happened 6

years ago today.

With that, I yield the floor.