Madam President, yesterday was 9/11. I think all of us

recall that fateful day. I certainly do. Earlier that morning, I had

spoken to an education conference south of the Pentagon. I had driven

by the Pentagon right before it was struck. I came and parked on the

Mall in front of the Capitol. I came up the steps to a leadership

meeting. Security people were coming down the steps ordering people out

of the building, saying they were concerned about an attack on the

Capitol itself. I left here and my military aide met me as I walked

back to my offices--I guess, more accurately, I jogged back to my

offices because we were being urged to leave quickly. I could hear a

fighter plane overhead. My military aide turned to me and said: You

know, Senator, those are our guys. Those are the Happy Hooligans from

Fargo, ND. The first planes in the air to protect the Capitol were the

Happy Hooligans of Fargo, ND. You may be asking yourselves: How can it

be that a National Guard unit from Fargo, ND, are the first planes in

the sky to protect the Nation's Capital? The reason is they are given

that responsibility and they are aircraft flown by North Dakota pilots

who are based at a base close by the Nation's Capital. They fly what is

called the CAP over the Capitol to protect us, and they were the first

planes in the air to provide fighter protection to this Capitol

complex. It made me proud at the time to know those were the Happy

Hooligans of Fargo, ND.

When I went back to my office, I was doing a national radio interview

with a man named Ed Schultz who has a national radio show. We were

watching in horror as the Twin Towers started to collapse. Security

people ran in again and ushered us out, telling us there was a plane 8

minutes out and they were afraid it was headed for the Capitol complex.

That is the plane that ultimately crashed in Pennsylvania. I don't

think anyone knows for certain where that plane was headed. Most assume

it was either the Capitol or the White House that was the intended

target of that plane. I think we will always be forever grateful for

the men and women who were on that plane who fought back. You think of

the incredible bravery of those people, to know they were hijacked, to

have learned through cell phone contact that the World Trade Center had

been attacked, the Pentagon had been attacked, and they did not just

sit. They got out of their chairs and fought back. By doing so, they

may have saved either the White House or this Capitol. That was an act

of extraordinary heroism and courage.

Later that day, Members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats,

joined on the Capitol steps, and I will forever remember how

spontaneously at the end of the remarks of the leadership we sang ``God

Bless America.'' I remember that feeling at that moment: that we are

not Republicans, we are not Democrats; we are all Americans, and we

stand together and will defend this Nation and we will hold those to

account who did this dastardly deed. I hope we all think of ourselves

as Americans first.

I also think we have to remember that it has now been 2,192 days

since that attack. The President promised we would hold those

responsible to account. The President said very clearly that this act

would not stand. It is especially painful then to see Osama bin Laden

and Zawahiri and the other leadership of al-Qaida go on the air,

threatening to attack us again.

This is what the President said then:

The President was right in making that statement. That is precisely

what our focus should have been.

Then you see this Newsweek headline:

Somehow, we got confused about who attacked us. I just saw an ad

being run about Iraq saying they attacked us on September 11. That is

not true. Iraq did not attack us on September 11; al-Qaida attacked us.

In fact, there wasn't a single Iraqi on any of the planes that hit the

World Trade Center or the Pentagon--not one. We know from the 9/11

Commission that the attack was not directed by Saddam Hussein, as evil

and dreadful a man as he was.

No, that attack was directed by Osama bin Laden and was carried out

by al-Qaida, not Iraq. In fact, the 9/11 Commission tells us and our

intelligence tells us that al-Qaida was not active in Iraq at the time.

They have become active. Now we have al-Qaida in Iraq, but they were

not there at the time.

It is so important that we get these facts right. Al-Qaida attacked

us. Osama bin Laden led that attack. He is still on the loose and so is

his chief aide, Mr. Zawahiri. It is critically important that we get it

right who attacked us and whom we need to hold to account. I hope we

will never give up our efforts to hunt down Osama bin Laden and

Zawahiri and the rest of the al-Qaida leadership cadre because they are

plotting to attack us again.

I have always believed that Iraq was a fateful mistake, a diversion

of going in the wrong place, after the wrong enemy, at the wrong time,

instead of pursuing the people who did attack us, who did kill

Americans, who are plotting to attack us again.

We had, yesterday, very important testimony from General Petraeus and

Ambassador Crocker. Let me say I have high regard for General Petraeus.

I thought the ad that was run by some the other day was unfortunate and

wrong. General Petraeus is a patriot. General Petraeus is somebody who

deserves our respect. That doesn't mean you have to agree with every

position he takes. That is not the point. But he is somebody who is

among our finest. We should never in this country start turning on our

own, those who serve us bravely and well in the military. That is not

right. Ambassador Crocker is one of our finest diplomats. I don't agree

with every policy prescription they propose, but they don't deserve to

be personally attacked. That is not right. We have to remember and we

have to keep perspective somehow about how we advance our national

interest.

Let me say that yesterday the Washington Post ran a series of polls

reporting on what the Iraqi people think is going on. You know, there

is a cultural chasm here, I am afraid, between those of us raised in

the Western culture and the people we are dealing with in that part of

the world. I went to school and graduated from a high school at Wheelus

Air Force Base High School in Tripoli, Libya, North Africa. I lived in

the Arab world for 2 years. I have some sense of the enormous

difference in the way they see things and the way we see things. It is

instructive to ask what do the Iraqi people think is happening in their

country. After all, it is their country, and what they think has a lot

to say about what the outcome is going to be.

The Washington Post reported in depth a poll yesterday. The question

was:

In the deployment areas, the areas where we deployed the additional

troops, here is what the Iraqi people think. They think, by 70 percent,

that the surge has made things worse; 18 percent think it has made

things better; 11 percent think it has had no effect. In the areas

outside the deployment, elsewhere in Iraq, 68 percent think it has made

things worse.

Now, is anybody paying any attention here? We have gone,

theoretically, first of all, from eliminating weapons of mass

destruction that didn't exist, to eliminating a nuclear program that

didn't exist, to deposing Saddam Hussein, who did exist and has been

deposed; then we are told we are supposed to be making things better

for the Iraqi people. But the Iraqi people overwhelmingly think we have

made things worse. Now a substantial majority of the people in Iraq

think it is OK to attack American forces. We are caught in what is

primarily--not solely or exclusively but primarily--a sectarian

conflict, a civil war between the Sunni and Shia. This is a battle that

has been going on for over 1,300 years. Why we would want our young men

and women to be refereeing a fight between Shia and Sunni, at enormous

cost in lives and treasure, absolutely eludes me.

We have so much else to do--first of all, in terms of our own

security, going after the people who did attack us--al-Qaida and going

after the leadership of al-Qaida, bin Laden and Zawahiri, who are still

on the loose and still plotting to attack us. We are in Iraq being told

the idea is now that we are to give breathing room for the Iraqi

Government to make political progress to reduce the sectarian violence.

Yet the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people say this expanded

deployment has made things worse; 70 percent in the deployment areas

say we have made things worse, and only 18 percent say we have made

things better.

Who has a better idea of what is going on in Iraq? I think we ought

to be paying some attention to what the Iraqi people think is going on

there. When a majority of the Iraqi people say it is OK to attack

American forces, and we are there, theoretically, to help them, there

is an enormous disconnect here. There is an enormous disconnect between

what we apparently think we are doing and what we are actually

accomplishing.

I am one who does not favor setting a strict deadline for leaving. I

don't think that it is militarily wise to say to your opponents that we

are leaving by a specific date. But we have to change course in Iraq.

We have now lost thousands of brave men and women, with tens of

thousands badly wounded. We have committed over a half trillion

dollars, and we are told the President is now going to come and ask for

another $195 billion. But the President is telling us we don't have the

money, for example, for the Transportation bill we passed. The

President says we don't have the money for that. How many more bridges

have to collapse in this country before we have the money to take care

of our own citizens' safety?

The President says we don't have the money to maintain the COPS

program, which put 100,000 police officers on the street. The President

said we should cut that 90 percent at a time when crime is rising in

America. We have, apparently, $195 billion to spend in Iraq, but we

don't have the several hundred million dollars we need to keep those

police on the street in our country.

As I look at this, I am increasingly convinced we need to redeploy

our forces; we need to, as a matter of our national security, refocus

our effort on going after the people who did attack us on 9/11 and

fully intend to attack us again, and that is al-Qaida, not Iraq.

I hope we will think very carefully in the coming days, as the debate

intensifies, on what our future policy should be.