Mr. President, I thank the majority leader and the

Democratic leader for their cooperation in asking for this short period

of time.

Mr. President, today there was a hearing that was held by the

Democratic Policy Conference under the chairmanship of Senator Byron

Dorgan of North Dakota. It was a historic hearing. It is rare for

hearings to occur on Mondays. Usually the business of the Senate and

House is concentrated on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. But this

hearing was held on Monday in an effort, by the Democratic Policy

Conference, to call witnesses before our Senate to discuss an issue

which is on the mind of most Americans. That issue, of course, is the

war in Iraq.

Senator Dorgan extended an invitation to this hearing to the

Republican majority leader as well as the chairman of the Republican

Conference, Senator Kyl of Arizona, in an effort to have a bipartisan

hearing on the war in Iraq. Unfortunately, neither of those Senators

could attend. But Republican Congressman Walter Jones of North Carolina

did come over and join us in this hearing, so there was representation

from the Republican House and Democratic Senators at this Democratic

Policy Conference.

The reason I bring this to the attention of those who are following

the business of the Senate is that I believe this hearing was historic.

I believe it is

the first time since our invasion of Iraq that we had an opportunity to

hear from generals and officers who were in Iraq, who worked on that

war and were willing to give us a critique, an analysis of their

experience and their view of where we are today.

MG John Batiste from the U.S. Army, retired; MG Paul Eaton, U.S.

Army, retired; and COL Hammes of the U.S. Marine Corps, retired, came

and testified about what has gone wrong in the war in Iraq and what we

need to do from this time forward. One might think, if you listen to

the talk shows, that this is common fare in the Senate, but it is not.

In fact, it is one of the few times, if any, that we have allowed an

oversight hearing on the policy in Iraq.

If you chart the history of this country through our great wars,

starting with the Civil War and forward, it is not uncommon for this

Congress, regardless of party, to bring the leaders in that war to

Washington to ask them questions about the progress that is being made.

But, sadly, since the invasion of Iraq, that has not been the course of

action.

What we have found, time and time again, is that this Congress has

called before it for testimony those at the highest levels of the

administration. Of course, the Secretary of Defense, the Under

Secretaries, and the generals in the highest command are brought

forward. But we never reach the next tier and the next rank and the

next level because the perspective changes. The perspective of these

men who testified today was the perspective of those who had been in

charge of important operations in Iraq and had the responsibility of

carrying out a mission and protecting the lives of American soldiers

that were at risk.

What they had to say was chilling. In stark testimony, each of these

officers, now retired from service, having attended West Point and

graduated, having attended Annapolis and graduated, said the first and

highest priority that we had as a nation was to change the leadership

at the Department of Defense. They felt the approach that is being

taken by Secretary Rumsfeld and those in his close-knit team was

inconsistent with success and victory in Iraq.

They told of their own personal experiences when they would question

some of the decisions that were made by the administration and by

Secretary Rumsfeld, only to find that they were ignored or shunned.

These generals gave eye-opening testimony, testimony that I wish every

Member of the Senate could have heard. These were good witnesses to

call--good witnesses because the members of the Armed Services

Committee should hear their testimony. All of the Senators should hear

that testimony, when they talk about what we face.

When Colonel Hammes of the U.S. Marine Corps, now retired, said he

expects the United States to be in Iraq for another decade, 10 years or

more; when we hear from each of these officers that we have not

provided the necessary troops in the field to accomplish our mission;

when each of them reflects on our efforts to build the Iraqis into an

army that can defend its own country and then says that the United

States would not invest the resources to build the Iraqi Army at that

critical moment in its history and now is paying a price for it--their

testimony, which was covered by major news media, will be reported by

some but should be reported to all the Members of the Senate.

We have a responsibility in the Senate and in the House. We serve as

that third branch of Government with a checks and balances system to be

involved in the appointment of judges but, yes, to serve in oversight

of the executive branch.

Unfortunately, that has not been the case over the last 4 years

during the course of this war. Very few, if any, Senators have stepped

forward to question this administration's policy in Iraq. The

Republican leaders in the Senate have not scheduled hearings with

officers and former officers who could give us firsthand, candid,

honest testimony about what is going right and what is going wrong.

There is a fear in this administration of hearing unpopular expressions

from those who have served in our military.

We owe it to our soldiers; we owe it to our Marines, our airmen, our

sailors, and all who serve under America's flag, and we owe it to their

families to ask the hard questions, to demand the answers from this

administration.

Before the hearing today I contacted the Department of Defense for an

update, an update on a very grim statistic. I asked how many American

lives had been lost, our brave soldiers in Iraq. The number as of this

morning: 2,702. Almost 20,000 have returned with serious injuries. We

have spent over $325 billion on this war and continue to spend at the

rate of $1.5 billion per week.

It is a grim reminder of what this war has cost, first and foremost

in human life, but also in human suffering--the prayers and anxieties

of American families, those who have returned with injuries that they

will deal with for a lifetime, and for taxpayers across the country who

have seen our national deficit reach record levels as this

administration refuses to accept the honest assessment of the cost of

this war and to tell the American people the sacrifices that must be

made for us to come home with our mission truly accomplished: 2,702 of

our soldiers.

That hearing was important. I am glad that Congressman Walter Jones

came over so that it was a bipartisan hearing. But it is time for more.

It is time for us to bring those officers and soldiers before us who

are living this war in Iraq to tell us what is really happening on the

ground. If there are ripoffs and profiteering by Halliburton and other

companies, we should all take that personally. It is not only

taxpayers' money wasted, it is money that is not being spent for the

defense of our troops. It is money that is being misused when it could

be used better so that our troops could get their job done, and done

more effectively.

When Colonel Hammes of the U.S. Marine Corps talks about the

deterioration of production capacity in the United States, he marvels

at that time in history when we were producing 4,000 planes a month,

during World War II, and now we find, for the best armored vehicle that

we need to move our troops, the best America can do is produce 48 a

month? It is a good, valid question: why this war effort has not meant

more dedication from our elected officials and the public sector as

well as the private sector.

It is interesting that each of these military leaders pointed a

finger at Congress and at political leaders as well. All the criticism

was not reserved just for the Secretary of Defense and military

planners who brought us into this war. They said to us in stark terms

that we have not communicated to the American people what it will take

to win. They believe, and I share their belief, that the American

people, when challenged, will rise to the challenge. We have done it

time and again throughout our history.

This hearing, which lasted a little over 2 hours, attracted a number

of Senators and Congressman Jones from the House and should have taken

place a long time ago. As Major General Batiste said--he has been out

of the military after 30-plus years of service. He has been critical of

what has happened. Today was the first time anyone had invited him to

Capitol Hill to testify. We need to bring in these men and women who

will share with us the responsibility of holding our Government and our

leaders accountable in time of war.

When so many lives are at stake, when so much is at stake, this

Congress has to rise to the challenge and rise to the occasion.

Unfortunately, that has not occurred. We have done little or nothing

when it comes to accountability for taxpayer dollars, for the course of

this war and strategy, and most importantly for the lives that have

been lost. We can do better.

We need a new direction when it comes to our policies in Iraq, a

direction which doesn't call for immediate withdrawal but a direction

which says there will come a day--and soon--when American troops can

come home with their mission accomplished. And it is time for us to

begin to initiate that conversation.

I thank Senator Dorgan for those who attended today. I think it was

time well spent.

I hope, when we return after this election on November 7, we can in a

bipartisan fashion have real oversight of this war, ask those important

questions which our troops deserve to have

answered, ask the important questions our taxpayers need to have

answered about the cost of this conflict, and ask those important

questions as to how we can reach a time--and soon--when our soldiers

can return home victorious, with their mission truly accomplished.