Mr. President, I want to take this opportunity to concur

with the sentiments that have been expressed earlier by a couple of my

colleagues regarding the heroism of our Armed Forces in Iraq. However,

I also want to point out our proper admiration for their extraordinary

patriotism and courage and our sad but necessary condolences to the

families of those Americans who are still losing their lives in

increasing numbers in Iraq or who are suffering serious life-

threatening and lifelong disabling injuries from those battles, those

appropriate tributes and condolences and our unanimous bipartisan

support in this body for our troops--who continue to risk their lives

there and in Afghanistan and Bosnia and Kosovo--should not prevent us

from questioning the Bush administration's policies or lack of policies

which are exposing those courageous Americans to those continuing

attacks and ask what are the administration's plans to respond to the

present escalation of attacks in Iraq. What are the administration's

plans to bring all of our courageous men and women home with their

victory secured?

In fact, we owe it to them, those whose lives are on the line on our

behalf, whose families are enduring every day and night the fear it

could be their loved one who will be next to give up his or her life in

the service of their country or their bodies, we owe it to them, those

serving, and to their families to ask the hard questions of the

administration and not hide behind platitudes.

I am, for one, tired of sitting in secret and top-secret briefings,

either as a Member of this Senate or as a member of the Senate Armed

Services Committee, and being told how well everything is going over in

Iraq, given the chorus line again and again, just to find out, often

the next day, that that is not true.

Last Tuesday a week ago, late afternoon, then Wednesday morning in

Iraq, I was given those same kind of assurances by representatives of

the highest level of the administration, the Department of Defense, and

our military officials. Hours later, American contractors were ambushed

in Iraq and bodies mutilated and displayed in obscene ways in that

country. And hours after that, American marines were attacked and, in

fact, were surprised, so that if it had not been for the intervention

of U.S. commandoes, private security forces, even worse casualties

could have occurred.

In the next few days, the escalating attacks in Iraq have caused the

largest number of Americans to be killed of any time in this last year

since the war began. It seems clear, based on the information I have

been provided, that our military intelligence was unable to anticipate

those attacks or to forewarn our Armed Forces of their imminence, their

severity, which also resulted in additional casualties.

I am deeply troubled by reports in the press that the administration

has

been intentionally trying to downplay the seriousness of those

insurrections. Last Wednesday, as Americans were being mutilated, the

only public event on the President's schedule was a meeting with

members of the Baseball Hall of Fame. That night, he conducted a

fundraiser for his reelection. Last Monday, as other Americans were

losing their lives, including a Minnesota soldier who was 19 years old,

from Moose Lake, MN, giving his life in Iraq, the President threw out

the opening pitch at the baseball game in St. Louis, MO. That night, he

held another fundraiser for his reelection that raised $1.5 million.

Then he flew on to, according to reports, his ranch in Crawford, TX,

for the rest of the week.

I don't think you can downplay, or should try to downplay, the

seriousness of these attacks. I think we should face the realities that

are occurring, and the Congress and the American people should be told

what is happening, why it is happening, and how it is we are going to

respond to these atrocities without any greater loss of American life.

That is absolutely essential. We are heading to a weekend of great

religious significance, following a weekend of great religious

significance to many of our citizens, and at this time what we are

doing there is something that is deeply troubling to this Senator, as I

know it is to many of the people I represent in Minnesota. We want to

see a victory there. We want to see the sacrifices that have been made

by American troops justified, and we want it preserved as a victory

that will last. But we want to know from this administration what the

plan is, what the timetable is, what is going to happen, and what we

are doing to forestall these events and warn our forces so they are not

ambushed or caught unaware and lose their lives.

We in Congress deserve to get the facts and the truth. Starting

tomorrow morning, when we have a briefing from the Secretary of Defense

and others in the military command, it is time to give us the facts,

the truth, the real situation, and not put on any whitewash or window

dressings but to tell us what we as elected representatives of the

people of this country have a right to know, and what the people of

America have a right to know. What is happening? Why is it becoming

more severe? What are the consequences to the troops? And what are the

administration's intentions to deal with them?