Mr. President, for more than 4 years now, President

Bush has been declaring victory or progress in Iraq. The thousands of

soldiers who have lost their legs, gone blind or suffered horrible

nightmares might be finding it hard to celebrate. The families of those

men and women might not be cheering very loud about the President's

view of success. Thousands more whose children, whose mothers and

fathers are lost forever might be finding it hard to share in the

latest cries of victory.

Yes, the number killed last month dropped to 37, and we certainly

rejoice in the fact that fewer soldiers are dying. That is still

another 37 families who have no reason to rejoice. More American troops

have died this year than any other year.

No matter how much military progress has been made in Iraq, that kind

of security can only go so far. No amount of troops will force Iraqi

politicians to agree on a fair distribution of oil revenues. No Abrams

tank can build trust between Shiites and Sunnis.

The whole point of this surge was to create the conditions necessary

for Iraqis to make political progress. But 2 weeks ago, the Washington

Post ran a headline that said: ``Iraqis Wasting an Opportunity, U.S.

Officers Say.''

Iraqi security forces are still unable to operate on their own. Any

cease-fire between factions could evaporate in minutes. We started

drawing down troops to pre-surge levels, but we have to wonder whether

we are going to be told again we have to re-surge, do it all over again

because the Iraqi Government and security forces are largely still at

square one.

Our generals in Iraq have been the first to admit that a solution to

the country's conflict has to be more than a military solution; it has

to be a political solution. A political solution is up to Iraqi

leaders. Right now there has been practically zero progress on the core

critical issues necessary to bring a lasting peace.

The administration set 18 benchmarks for the Iraqi Government to

meet. They have barely met three. So is it time to turn up the pressure

or let them keep squabbling while Americans pay and Americans die?

There is more corruption in Iraq than almost anywhere else on the

face of the Earth. We simply don't know where our money is going. It is

a pit of quicksand when it comes to money. Some estimates say that as

much as a third of the money we spend on Iraqi contracts and grants

winds up unaccounted for or stolen--a third of billions of dollars,

with a lot of it going straight to Shiite or Sunni militias. Let me

repeat that: $1 out of every $3 we pay gets either lost or stolen--lost

or stolen. Even after billions and billions and billions of dollars in

funding, Iraqi society is still dysfunctional.

American money went toward improving, for example, municipal water

systems in Iraq. The Iraqis now break open the pipes and steal the

water. American money went toward books for schools. Iraqis steal them

from the Ministry of Education and sell them on the street at three

times the price. Government officials have sold the furniture right out

of their offices. That is what the American taxpayers are funding.

So is it time to change our strategy, or do we ignore the corruption

while Americans pay and Americans die? Here is the message we send to

Iraqi politicians by sending them a blank check with no expiration

date: Continue your squabbles. We will continue to see the loss of

American life and continue to empty our treasury for you for as long as

you like. That message is: You can sit back while Americans pay and

Americans die. I think it is time for a different message, Mr.

President.

After seeing a surge in the military that has lasted for months do

nothing about a splurge of corruption that has lasted for years, the

conclusion we have to draw from that is clear: The only way Iraqis will

take charge of their own country and make the tough compromises

necessary to form a functional society is when they believe we won't be

there forever. That is the only way. It is long past time for the Iraqi

Government to take charge, and the only way they are going to step up

is if we begin to transition out. A reduction in fighting is not an

excuse for a reduction in planning for our involvement to end.

The fact is, the violence has not stopped and the costs of this war

have only gone up. The war is costing us $10 billion or so per month.

The debt our Government is taking on, and that taxpayers are going to

be responsible for, is exploding at the rate of $1 million a minute. I

heard our colleagues earlier today, when I was Presiding Officer, talk

about fiscal responsibility and what we bequeath to the next

generation. Well, we are bequeathing them $1 million a minute of debt,

because none of the money the President asked for is paid for--none of

it. Yet when we try to invest in America, we are told there is no money

for it. But it is okay to continue to saddle the next generation of

Americans with a huge debt, $1 million a minute.

When the numbers are that high, every American taxpayer has to ask

him or herself a basic question: How does the President plan to pay for

the war?

Well, last week, we got a small part of that answer. He wants to cut

funding for counterterrorism at home. According to a leaked

administration document, President Bush wants to cut counterterrorism

funding for cities by more than half. When I saw that article, I had to

do a double-take. When I read that, I thought the report had to be

wrong. It had to be wrong. Coming from the State of New Jersey, which

lost 700 people--700 of my fellow citizens on that fateful day, and

coming

from a nation that lost 3,000 fellow Americans--to hear that we are

going to continue to pump money into this war, a blank check, unpaid

for, but that we will not take care of our security here at home, that

had to be wrong.

His reported budget would slash funding for police, firefighters, and

rescue workers. It could mean fewer security guards at ports, less

reliable detection of explosives, and less training for security

personnel. Basically, it would undermine the entire effort to prevent

terrorism that our Nation realized that September day, one of the most

urgent challenges we have ever faced. Cutting counterterrorism funding

is simply outrageous.

Now I certainly hope the Congress is not going to stand for it, and

the people who live in those cities definitely will not stand for it.

But is it necessary to remind the President how important it is to

protect our homes and families from terrorist attacks? Do we have to

say that we must do everything within the bounds of possibility and the

law to prevent a terrorist attack from happening again? And this

suggestion that we are ultimately spending our efforts and lives and

national treasure there so we don't have to spend it here is a

falsehood. That is a falsehood.

Is anyone here in America going to feel safer at the end of the day

when counterterrorism funding is cut for their hometown security, which

as we found out on that fateful day on September 11 is how we

responded--with local police, local firefighters, local emergency

management? It was not the Federal Government but the local public

safety entities. Is that a risk President Bush wants to take, to cut

what amounts to .06 percent of the Federal budget, especially when the

war in Iraq has eaten up $455 billion and counting; when the amount he

wants to take away from police and firefighters, the people who

respond, should, God forbid we have an attack, is an amount we spend in

Iraq every 5 days? The money we are talking about for protecting us

here at home in America is what we spend every 5 days in Iraq. What are

our values? What are our priorities, Mr. President?

The President has requested $1 billion for the Iraqi police, but he

wants to cut funding for the community-oriented policing program that

fights crime in America's communities. So he will spend anything on the

streets of Baghdad, but he suddenly thinks we should be stingy when it

comes to security on the streets of our hometowns. The President wants

a blank check for Iraq, but nothing for America.

That ties into what you have been seeing on the floor over the last

several days. The reason we can't get appropriations bills out is

because Republicans object to the type of domestic priorities the

American people elected a new majority to achieve. He wants a blank

check for Iraq, but nothing for America. From children's health to

cancer research to crucial water resources, the President has vetoed

what is most essential: our health, our safety, and in essence, our

liberty. He has repeatedly said it is all too expensive. Meanwhile, he

is requesting $200 billion more to fight a war in Iraq that has

achieved nothing for any of us; that has ultimately seen the deaths of

thousands of Americans and has left us more disliked around the world

as a nation than at any other point in recent history. He wants a blank

check for Iraq, but nothing for America. If he submits a budget that

cuts funding for counterterrorism, I think he will truly be laying a

final brick in the Department of Homeland Hypocrisy.

In high school many of us read George Orwell's book ``1984,'' which

was about a nightmare world where words mean the exact opposite of what

they should mean. America is starting to understand what the word

``security'' means to the President. He apparently thinks funding

firefighters, police officers, and emergency responders is excessive,

but he wants to spy on Americans without warrants, he wants to tap

people's phones without any oversight, he condones procedures even the

U.S. Army itself considers torture, he wants to throw people in jail

without trials, and he basically ignores the most basic tenets of the

justice system of the United States since the Constitution came into

effect in 1789.

President Bush wants to cut funding to stop terrorism in order to

fund a war that has created terrorists. We didn't have al-Qaida in Iraq

before we invaded Iraq. We have al-Qaida in Iraq after we invaded Iraq.

America isn't just ready to turn the page on this administration; we

are ready for a whole new book. I hope, as we move forward, we can get

some of these domestic priorities that the Nation wants to see. I

cannot believe we would spend $200 billion for Iraq but not a fraction

of that to be able to ensure that millions of American children can

have health care. I cannot believe we would spend $200 billion more for

Iraq but not enough to handle police, firefighters, and emergency

management in our communities across the landscape of this country. I

cannot imagine approving $200 billion for Iraq but not being able to

deal with the alternative minimum tax relief, a measure Senator Reid

has tried to bring to the floor.

On issue after issue, the obstructionism, the roadblocks, the

coordination between the White House and our colleagues here in the

Senate to impede the progress the American people want to see is

incredible, as it is equally incredible to continue this course by

asking for a blank check for Iraq, but nothing for America.