Mr. President, I would like to step back for a few

minutes and reflect on the debate that occurred here a few nights ago

with respect to the war in Iraq. One of the things I like to do is to

try to see if we can't find consensus--rather than just disagreeing on

issues, to try to find ways to bring us together. I have been

reflecting a good deal on that debate.

I had an opportunity, along with two of our colleagues, Senator Ben

Nelson and Senator Mark Pryor, to have a breakfast meeting with

Secretary Gates at the Pentagon earlier this week. That was the first

time I had ever had a chance to spend any personal time with Secretary

Gates, who came to us as one of the people who served on the Iraq Study

Group. You may recall that, Mr. President, he served there for most of

its time and has been president of Texas A&M. He served in a number of

leadership posts here in earlier administrations and was a senior

official in intelligence. He is a very bright, able guy and also of

very good heart, someone who, over breakfast with us, was remarkably

candid in his observations, not someone who tried to sugar-coat what is

going on in Iraq but who just was as honest and forthright with us.

That was enormously refreshing.

He is a person of strong intellect, obviously, and a person who dealt

with a faculty senate at Texas A&M and I think is not uncomfortable

dealing with the U.S. Senate. I have been told by any number of people

who have been presidents of universities that the transition to working

here in this body is not all that hard. If you can work with a faculty

senate, you can work with the U.S. Senate. We have a couple of people

here, ironically, who have been university presidents and now serve

here, among them Lamar Alexander from the University of Tennessee.

I left the breakfast meeting actually feeling encouraged about maybe

the prospects, somewhere down the line, of finding consensus.

Here in the United States, our patience grows thin with respect to

our involvement there. We have been involved for over 4 years. We have

lost thousands of lives, we spent hundreds of billions of dollars--

money we have largely borrowed from folks such as the Chinese, South

Koreans, and Japanese because these are moneys we don't have, so we

simply increase our Nation's indebtedness to pay for this war.

Meanwhile, those in this country who pay the taxes, whose sons and

daughters, husbands and wives have gone over and been shot at, in some

cases been shot, hurt, wounded, in some cases killed--they paid the

price and have borne the burden. In many cases, they are tired of it,

as I think most of us are. We would like to see the beginning of the

end and, frankly, a new beginning at the same time for the people of

Iraq.

I think for the most part most of us realize we are going to have a

military involvement there, we are going to have a presence in Iraq,

maybe for several years. If you look at Kosovo, we have been out of

Kosovo for 10 years, but we are still there militarily. The war ended

in Korea over 50 years ago; we still have a significant military

presence there. I think it is likely we are going to have a military

presence in Iraq for some time. The question is, What should they be

doing? What should our troops be doing?

Today, as you know, we are policing a civil war, trying to keep

Sunnis and Shiites from killing each other while at the same time going

after insurgents and training Iraqi troops and trying to help secure

the borders of Iraq. My hope is a year from now--and I suggest a year

from now--we will still have troops in Iraq, probably tens of

thousands, hopefully not 140,000 or 150,000 troops. What will they be

doing? My hope is they will not be policing a civil war. My hope is

they will not have to be involved in trying to keep Sunnis from killing

Shiites and vice versa. My expectation is there is going to continue to

be a need to train and equip and supply Iraqi armed forces and police.

There will be a need for our troops to protect U.S. assets, the

embassy, and other physical infrastructure we have, that we own or

occupy. There will be a need in some cases to join the Iraqis in

counterinsurgency operations against the really bad guys. There may be

an opportunity and need for us to help police the borders of Iraq with

Syria and Iran, borders which leak like sieves today.

Those are the kinds of responsibilities I suspect our troops will be

called upon to perform. But my hope is we will not need as many of

them, not nearly as many of them, that they will not be as numerous nor

as visible and hopefully not as much in danger as they have been the

last 4 years.

On the Iraqi side, what I heard 4\1/2\ weeks ago, about a month ago

when I was last there, is a lot of the Iraqis don't want us to be there

in such great numbers. They don't want us to be as visible. They don't

want us to be as numerous. Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki suggested about

a week ago that whenever we are ready to step out they are ready to

step up. I wish that were true. He later sort of spoke again or someone

stepped in, one of his spokespeople stepped in and said that is not

exactly what he said or what he meant.

I believe the Iraqis are not of one mind with regard to our presence.

Some would like it if we would leave tomorrow, but a number realize we

have sacrificed and given our life's blood, a lot of money, a lot of

patience with them, and I think for a lot of the folks there they

realize that and they appreciate that. But they don't want us to be as

numerous or visible, and eventually they want to have their country

back with us not as an occupying force, although some may see us as

that, but have us playing a diminishing role.

What I think we have here is a growing consensus in this country to

begin

reducing our presence--not this month, not this summer, maybe not until

later this year. I think we need to send a signal, our President needs

to send a signal to the people of our country, to the Congress, that

this is not going to continue forever. We don't want it to, it is not

sustainable, and it should not be our responsibility forever.

Eventually, the Iraqi people have to decide whether they want a

country. They have to step up. They have to be willing to make the

difficult choices that at least to this point in time their leaders

have been reluctant or unable to do.

I don't want to provide a strong defense for inaction on behalf of

the Iraqi Parliament and Iraqi leaders, but I remind us, and we have

seen it here this week, the U.S. Senate, an institution that has been

around for over 200 years, how hard it is for us to come to consensus

on difficult issues. We saw that as recently as last night. We saw that

as recently as 2 nights earlier, when we were up all night. We, in a

country that has worked with democracy and democratic traditions for

over 200 years, should not be surprised that in a country where they

have basically 2 years of experience, in the middle of a war and

insurgency, sometimes they struggle through a democratic process to

make difficult situations. It is not a surprise to me, and I don't

think it should be a surprise to them or to any one of us.

Having said that, I am impatient with their inability to make tough

decisions. Around here, sometimes we will hold off making a difficult

decision unless we are almost staring into the abyss, we have almost no

choice, they have figuratively a gun to our heads, and then when we

find ourselves in that predicament, Congress--House, Senate, Democrats,

Republican, the administration--will come to a consensus.

The Iraqi Parliament, Iraqi leaders are, in my view, at that abyss.

When I was over there a month ago with Senator McCaskill, we met with,

among others, the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, an impressive fellow.

He is a Kurd, from the northern part of the country. His name is Salih.

We were talking about a sense of urgency and the fact that the Iraqi

leaders don't feel this sense of urgency about making the difficult

decisions, about sharing oil wealth and power, any decision with

respect to the greater involvement for the Sunnis, providing an

opportunity for the Baathist party folks, who enjoyed great power under

the old regime but who basically are enjoying no responsible role at

all, to give them a role to play--those kinds of decisions; municipal

elections out in the provinces--they are supposed to have them, and

they have not had them.

But I talked with Deputy Prime Minister Salih. We spoke about the

lack of a sense of urgency on behalf of his country's leaders. He

readily acknowledged that was the case.

I was looking for a sports analogy to draw with him and his

countrymen, and I said to him: Do you play basketball here? I know you

play soccer--you call it football, but do you all play basketball here?

I said: Do you recall that basketball is a four-quarter game? The

Iraqi leader and the Iraqi Parliament are acting as if you are in the

first quarter of the game. In truth, you are in the fourth quarter.

This is the fourth quarter of the game. It is not a game, but it is the

fourth quarter. We are late into the fourth quarter.

I said to the Deputy Primary Minister: Have you ever heard of

something called the shot clock? He had not. Well, in American

professional basketball, we have a shot clock that begins when the ball

is inbounded and you have so many seconds for the team on offense, with

the ball, to take a shot; if you do not, you lose possession of the

ball.

I said: We are in the fourth quarter. We are deep into the fourth

quarter here. The shot clock has begun to run. And the Iraqi team, half

of the team, is still on the sidelines. You are arguing about what the

rules of the game are, who is going to get into the game, what play to

call, who is going to take the shot. Meanwhile, the shot clock is

running.

What the Iraqis need to do, in the Parliament where the hatred

between the Sunnis and Shias is such that it makes them hard to ever

feel or think like a team, somehow they have to find a way to put that

behind them. They have to begin making the difficult decisions they

have been unwilling and unable to make.

The Iraqi people are waiting for leadership. As in this country or

any country with democratic tradition, the people yearn for strong

leadership, fair leadership. The Iraqi people are looking to their

leaders to show that they can work together, to figure out how to share

this enormous oil wealth of their country, a country where they are

capable of pumping today something like 300 million barrels of oil at

$70 a barrel. Do the math. I should say 5 million barrels of oil a day,

$70 dollars a barrel. That is $350 million. They are pumping less than

2 million. They are literally leaving oil on the table, something like

$180 million, almost $200 million a day on the table. These are

revenues they will not realize because they simply cannot figure out

how to work together. They need to figure that out.

The cabinet has figured that out. They submitted to the Parliament a

plan for sharing the oil revenue. The Parliament has to act on it.

We are going to take the month of August off, not the entire month

off. We will be in session until probably the first week in August, we

come back right after Labor Day, so we will be out about 28 days.

Meanwhile, I am told that the Iraqi Parliament was thinking about

taking 2 months off this summer. They since have said they will take

maybe August off. Our soldiers are not. Our soldiers, marines, our

airmen, are not taking August off. They are going to be there exposed,

at risk, every day for the month of August. The idea that the Iraqi

Parliament will not be in session is unconscionable at a time when our

troops are being asked to make such sacrifices. They need to be in

session. They need to be figuring out how to deal with these difficult

issues.

I am convinced if they do that, the Iraqi people will respond. As the

Iraqi people respond, it provides us with an opportunity to begin

redeploying our troops this year. There is plenty of work they can do

in Afghanistan. In some cases there is an opportunity for them to be

stationed not far away if needed. In other cases, frankly, there is

even a need to have them back here. As an old Governor, commander in

chief of my National Guard, I understand full well how much we relied

on the National Guard, especially in times of emergency. Whether in the

middle of winter or hurricane season as we have right now, there is

plenty of work for them to do. Plus, they have families here. Guard and

Reserves, they are being asked to do things that--as a former national

flight officer, having served in Vietnam, 18 years as a Reserve naval

flight officer--we were never asked to do. We are asking our troops to

make extraordinary sacrifices as Reservists and Guardsmen.

There is plenty of opportunity for meaningful engagement, both in

Afghanistan, in the Middle East region, not far away from Iraq, and

frankly back at home for these troops to do, and simply in some cases

to come back and be with their families after an extended separation;

in some cases to come back and go to work with their old employers; in

some cases to go back to their businesses, which are, in too many

instances, in trouble in some cases out of business, and be able to

resuscitate their business or breathe fresh life into it. There is

plenty to do.

In the meantime, the Iraqis have 350,000 people in their military and

police. Think about that. We have about 150,000 troops over there. They

have 350,000. We have been working to train them now for several years.

I am told some of the battalions have stepped up; they are able to go

out alone. Some of them can lead, but they need our help not too far

away. They have got to continue to improve their readiness and their

ability to go out and lead the fight. And my counsel to the Iraqis is:

You can do this, we can help, just like they say in the Home Depot ad:

You can do this, we can help. We will help. God knows we have done a

lot and we are prepared to do more.

The signal I hope the President would send us, once we hear from

General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in the middle of September, is

not we are going to surge for another year or two or three, but that we

are going to begin redeploying our troops.

They are not going to all be out a year from now. There will be

plenty for them to do. I have talked about the four or five major

responsibilities they can pursue a year or so from now and for some

time after that. But I think that sends the kind of signal the American

people are waiting to hear. I think it sends a real strong message to

the Iraqis as well that our patience is not infinite, that we have

expectations of them, that they need to step up. Again, another sports

analogy: They need to step up to the plate. This is their time. This is

their country. It is not our country, it is their country. If they want

to have a country, they have to make the decisions. If they want to

have a country, they need to do what is necessary to bring their people

together and to build an institution in their country that can survive

and persevere and hopefully can prosper.

As we end this week, a week that has seen a lot of ups and downs here

in the Senate, a week that has seen more than its usual degree of

acrimony, this is a place where we actually mostly like each other,

have a pretty good ability to work together with a fairly high degree

of civility and comity. A lot of times too often this week that

civility and comity has been lacking. Fortunately, when we left here

this morning about 1 o'clock, I felt some of the bumps and bruises were

now at least behind us, and we were back to a better footing. I hope as

we rejoin here on Monday, we will pick up where we left off early this

morning with the near unanimous passage of the Higher Education Act,

something Senator Kennedy and Senator Enzi and others have worked on,

crafting together a very fine bipartisan bill, that the spirit we

walked out of here with this morning will be waiting for us when we

return on Monday.