Mr. President, I have two topics I wish to speak about

this evening: One on Iraq and one on higher education. First, on Iraq

and Afghanistan. President Obama on Friday told marines at Camp Lejeune

and the world how the United States plans to end the war in Iraq. The

President's plan turns out not to be so different than the agreement

President Bush signed with Iraq just before he left office. Add Senator

McCain's name to the list because on Friday he generally supported

President Obama's decision. For the first time, I think it can be said

we have a bipartisan consensus--and a consensus between the Congress

and the President--about how to honorably and successfully conclude the

war in Iraq.

Ironically, this is a bipartisan consensus that comes 2 years later

than it could have. Because what President Bush and President Obama and

Senator McCain seemed to agree on today is also a course that is

consistent with the recommendations of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group

headed by former Republican Secretary of State James Baker and former

Democratic House Foreign Affairs Chairman Lee Hamilton. That is not

just my judgment. I asked Secretary Rice, the former Secretary of

State, whether the agreement

President Bush signed with Iraq is generally consistent with the

principles of the Iraq Study Group, and she said yes. I asked Secretary

Gates, who has been Secretary of Defense both for President Bush and

now for President Obama and who, for a little while, was also a member

of the Iraq Study Group, whether the direction in Iraq that President

Bush had agreed to go in is approximately the same as the principles

recommended in December of 2006 by the Iraq Study Group, and he

answered yes.

Unfortunately, instead of having, for the last 2 years, a consensus

between the Congress--a Democratic Congress--and the President--a

Republican President--we instead made it clear to our enemy and clear

to our troops that we were divided in Washington about the course of

the war and that we couldn't agree on how to conclude. I don't know

whether we had reached agreement earlier by, for example, adopting the

legislation that Senator Salazar and I and 17 Senators offered and that

about 60 Representatives offered in the House, that would have made the

principles of the Iraq Study Group the course upon which the United

States would embark to successfully conclude the war in Iraq--I don't

know whether, if we had done that in 2007, 2 years ago, the war would

have been more successful or Iraq would have been better stabilized; if

troops would have come home sooner and perhaps even American lives

might have been saved; or if Iraqi lives might have been saved. I don't

know about that. But I do know that we put in jeopardy--by our failure

to agree between the Congress and the President over the course of the

war in Iraq--we put in jeopardy the ability of the American people to

have the stomach to see this mission all the way through to the end,

which is an essential requirement, in my view, of any military endeavor

in which the United States should engage.

President Bush, nevertheless, persevered, and it became, in the view

of many Democrats and others, Bush's war, and it seriously damaged the

Bush Presidency. It seriously divided the country. At least we can use

this failure to agree, this failure to come to some consensus, as a

guide about how to conduct ourselves in future conflicts, starting with

the war in Afghanistan.

President Obama is sending 17,000 more Americans to Afghanistan. He

is doing so after only a month in office. He says, quite candidly, he

hasn't yet got a strategy, approved a strategy or, in his words Friday

night in his interview with Jim Lehrer, an exit strategy. I assume that

also means he hasn't yet decided upon what is even more important,

which is a success strategy. The lesson of Iraq and of our failure to

come to some agreement over the last 2 years is that we should give our

new President time and support in his efforts to develop a strategy and

then we should insist--we in the Congress--that we agree with him on a

strategy; and if we can't agree with the one he comes up with, that he

adjust it until we can, so we as a nation can have a compelling

purpose, a clear set of goals, the money to supply more than enough

force to reach those goals. So our enemies and our troops can hear

clearly that the American people have the stomach to see the mission in

Afghanistan all the way through to the end. In other words, it is

important for our country not just for the success of the Obama

presidency; it is important for our country that what some called

Bush's war not be followed by what others might call Obama's war.

The Iraq Study Group was created by Congress in 2006. It had a

remarkable group of members, including Lee Hamilton and Jim Baker who

both cochaired it. Ed Meese, the former Attorney General for President

Reagan, was there. Vernon Jordan was a member. Secretary Gates was a

member for a while. The first President Bush's Secretary of State,

Larry Eagleburger, was a member. Leon Panetta, President Clinton's

Chief of Staff and now CIA Director, was there. President Clinton's

Secretary of Defense was a member. Sandra Day O'Connor, former Supreme

Court Justice, was a member. They spent many months and went to Iraq,

and they talked to a variety of people. They tried to see if they could

come to a consensus about how the U.S. could honorably conclude the war

in Iraq. They were bipartisan and unanimous in their 79

recommendations, which would be boiled down to three major points.

I remember being very disappointed in early 2007 when, following

that, President Bush didn't take advantage of the opportunity during

his State of the Union Address to embrace the report. He knew then that

a majority of Americans didn't support his strategy. He knew the

strategy would have a more difficult time being sustained without their

support. I think all of us knew, then, if he could get Congress to

agree, the American people would be more likely to agree.

The President could have invited the distinguished members of the

Iraq Study Group to sit in the gallery during his speech and, as

Presidents do often, introduce them. The President could have said:

This is not my recommendation, it is theirs. I accept it for the good

of the country, and I ask the American people now to accept it.

If one goes back and reads the recommendations of the Iraq Study

Group report made in December 2006, here is basically what it said we

should do: Get the U.S. troops out of the combat business in Iraq and

into the support business in a prompt and honorable way--maybe over the

course of a year, they said. General Petraeus amended that to a little

longer than a year. The Iraq Study Group said reduce the number of

American forces in Iraq. The Iraq Study Group said there should be a

limited military presence for the longer term in Iraq, and that would

signal to the rest of the Middle East to stay out of Iraq. It said it

would give support to General Petraeus and his troops for a military

surge to make Baghdad safer. This was before President Bush authorized

the surge.

It would expand diplomatic efforts to build support for Iraqi

national reconciliation and sovereignty. The Iraq Study Group would

recognize, as Prime Minister Blair said, that it is time for the next

chapter of Iraq's history to be written by the Iraqis themselves.

Democratic Senator Ken Salazar--who is now a member of the Obama

administration as Interior Secretary--and I wrote legislation that

would make the Iraq Study Group recommendations national policy. As I

mentioned, it attracted about nine Democrats and eight Republican

Senators. In the House of Representatives, there were 27 Democrats and

35 Republicans.

At that time, we were having vote after vote on Iraq. Some Senators

said there should be an immediate withdrawal. Others wanted victory of

the kind we had in Germany and Japan. I thought the Iraq Study Group

recommendations made the most sense; and, apparently, today, so does

President Bush, so does President Obama, and so does Senator McCain.

Now, it is fair to say each of those men I just mentioned could find

something in the Iraq Study Group report with which to disagree. I

would respect those disagreements. But the 17 of us in the Senate could

find within that report a course to agree about, just like the

Commission itself of widely varying Americans could find enough

unanimously to agree about, so they could say to the troops, to the

enemy, and to the world: Here is our course forward.

I suggest we would have been better off if we had done that. I

pointed out that President Bush would not support the report. I

respected that, but I disagreed with it. At the same time, Speaker

Pelosi and the Democratic leaders would not allow our amendment to come

to a vote. We asked and asked--but their reaction was, ``No, no, we

won't do that.'' I guess they had their reasons. We don't question

their motivation. President Bush persevered in the war, and Democratic

leaders persevered with their opposition to the war. They didn't allow

the Iraq Study Group resolution to come to a vote. So then we had an

election.

Senator Salazar said about the only way we could have united the

President and the Democratic leaders was in their opposition to the

Iraq Study Group--a set of recommendations that are now largely the

principles upon which we are preceding as we seek to end the war in

Iraq. But is the country better off for us not having had that 2 years

of agreement?

Here are some lessons: One, the Iraq war reminds us that nation

building costs many billions of dollars and many lives. Whenever

possible, we

should use our military forces to defend America and use our ``shining

city on a hill,'' which President Reagan talked about so often, as an

example to spread freedom. If we must become involved in another

country, as we are in Iraq and Afghanistan, then we must have a

compelling reason, a clear mission, an overwhelming force to make

certain we reach our goals.

The second lesson is this: In order to reach those goals, we have to

persuade the American people to have the stomach to see the mission we

have adopted all the way through to the end. It is much better if the

President and the Congress, even if they are of different political

parties, agree on that mission. Technically, the Commander in Chief can

wage a war, leaving us not much to do but fund the troops, which almost

all of us, regardless of party, do. We saw in Iraq the failure to agree

between the President and the Congress--which made the war harder and

longer and President Bush's presidency much less successful. We were in

the position often of being the oldest democracy lecturing Baghdad, an

infant democracy, for not coming up with a political solution when we

ourselves could not come up with one.

Finally, we learned a lesson in Iraq about how to honor those who

serve our country. Sometimes in airports now--unlike in the Vietnam

era--passengers burst into applause when a group of service men and

women appear. A great many Tennesseans have been to Iraq and

Afghanistan. More are going this week to Afghanistan. Many have served

two or three tours already--including men and women from the Tennessee

National Guard and the 101st Airborne--and 100 have given their lives

in Iraq and Afghanistan. Hundreds have suffered wounds that will change

their lives. They have performed heroically. I am glad to see that

after 6 years, we finally seem to be united on a path which will bring

the war to successful conclusion and hasten the time when most of those

serving can come home. But it is disappointing that we did not take the

advantage 2 years ago when we might have done it to agree on the

principles of the Iraq Study Group. We had that opportunity. It might

have shortened the war. It might have stabilized Iraq more rapidly. It

might have saved lives.

We should remember that as we look ahead to Afghanistan. We do not

want to succeed Bush's war with Obama's war. Whenever we go to war, it

should be an American war and the President should make certain he has

bipartisan support in Congress.