Mr. President, this week a historic discussion began

between Congress and the White House about the way forward in Iraq. On

Wednesday, a meeting occurred between the President and congressional

leadership following the President's veto of a spending bill that would

have made America more secure, fully funded the troops, and changed the

course in Iraq. It has taken almost 4\1/2\ years, but it appears the

President finally is willing to consider what most Americans and

Members of Congress have long known, that we must change course in Iraq

and move toward a strategy that will make our country more secure.

It took 6 years and 3 months for the President to accept Congress as

a coequal branch of Government. Prior to last Wednesday, the President

basically had ignored the constitutionally framed equal branch of

Government, the legislative branch. From that perspective, it was a

positive step forward.

During the first 6 years of this congressional term, the President

basically ignored us. There was a big rubber stamp. Anything the

Republican Congress thought the President wanted, they gave him. But

yesterday, the minority leader and I met with the President's Chief of

Staff Josh Bolton to further that discussion that started Wednesday in

the White House. I thought the meeting was constructive, comfortable.

It is clear, at this early point in the negotiations, that nothing is

off the table. We agreed to meet again early next week. Meanwhile, I

will be talking with members of my caucus, Senator McConnell, and with

our experts, and we will continue to work on ideas for a way forward in

the quagmire in Iraq.

I know many of my Republican friends in the Senate believe strongly

that a change of course in Iraq strategy is needed, one that holds the

administration and the Iraqis accountable for real results. I know many

of my Republican friends intend to be part of that solution on the way

forward. I look forward to working with them, as I have the last few

weeks. Work is now in progress, and we will work to reach agreement on

a bill that fully funds the troops while providing a responsible new

course that makes America more secure and leads to an early end to

America's involvement in the Iraq civil war.

Events on the ground give this challenge great urgency. The month of

April saw an American death toll of more than 100, making it the

deadliest month of the year for our troops in Iraq and one of the

deadliest in the 51 months of this war.

The President's own Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction

released his quarterly report last weekend which painted a dispiriting

picture of waste, ineffectiveness, and failure to achieve even

minimally satisfactory results. Despite burning through most of the 20

billion American dollars planned for reconstruction, most Iraqis are

without basic necessities such as electricity and clean drinking water.

Only a third of Iraq's children are regularly attending school, and 70

percent are suffering from symptoms of trauma that will likely paralyze

an entire generation on which we are counting to harvest the seeds of

democracy.

Iraqi Prime Minister al-Malaki, a Shia, is accused of sabotaging

efforts for peace and stability by firing some of the country's top law

enforcement officials for doing too good a job of combating violent

Shia militias. President Bush speaks of pressuring the Iraqi people to

take responsibility for their own future. Yet while American troops are

fighting and dying to secure the country, the Iraqi Government is

planning a 2-month summer vacation.

We throw around a lot of numbers and statistics to highlight the

failures and high stakes of the war. We must also remember that behind

each of these numbers--104 deaths during the month of April--is a

personal story.

Yesterday, a Las Vegas newspaper published an article about a 26-

year-old Nevadan named John Shoup. After surviving 7 months in Iraq,

John returned home to Nevada without apparent physical injury. Many of

his friends were not so fortunate, he said. At home, though, almost

immediately, John's wife Lori knew he was not well. She said:

John told his wife about the four roadside bomb attacks he survived.

The article goes on to say, among other things:

He continues to struggle with his illness and now awaits another

transfer from the hospital at Nellis Air Force Base near his home in

Nevada to Walter Reed here in Washington.

We all know that war comes with casualties. I have talked about John

Shoup. I have read quotes from Lori Shoup, his wife. She is also a

casualty. She had to be hospitalized. She had a nervous breakdown.

Our soldiers have always shouldered the burden when the mission is to

protect America's security. John Shoup did that.

What is our mission today? When he was asked that question, he

replied:

Our troops are interjected between warring factions, kicking down

doors, trying to sort Shia from Sunni or friend from foe. Meanwhile,

Afghanistan is deteriorating. Osama bin Laden remains at large, and al-

Qaida is rebuilding its strength. Our current strategy is not a

strategy for success. It is a recipe for more death and destruction,

overburdening our military and leaving America less secure.

Today's USA Today newspaper talked about a lot of John Shoups. In

fact, they said there are 150,000 brain injuries caused by what has

happened in Iraq to our troops; 15,000 is what USA Today reports.

We approach these discussions with the White House with an open mind

and sincere desire to move forward. But John and Lori Shoup and all

Americans deserve to know what our resolve to change course in Iraq

will be. Our course cannot be one to waiver from doing everything we

can to get the President to change the mission, to transition the

mission in Iraq. Fifty-one months of what has happened in Iraq has not

been good for the country, certainly not good for the world.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record the article

from the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in

the Record, as follows: