Mr. President, this is going to be a very busy day. I have

comments that will relate to what will happen when we bring the bill up

on the floor, but I thought I would take this time to talk about two

things that are extremely important. First, with respect to the bill, I

am the lead Republican cosponsor, with the Senators from North Dakota

and South Dakota, on ag disaster. We have been 3 years without an

agricultural disaster bill. We have had 3 years of agricultural

disasters. Those of us from the Midwest know that we have been

afflicted with droughts, tornadoes, tremendous losses by farmers,

livestock producers, and others in agricultural production. I visited

southwest Missouri this January and saw what some people described as

countywide tornadoes. The ice storms were so severe they broke down

trees, collapsed sheds, knocked out power, broke down fences, and put

many livestock and poultry producers on the verge of financial

disaster.

Similarly over the years, when drought has struck, the ag producers,

livestock and poultry and crops, were hit severely. This ag disaster

package is absolutely essential. I appreciate the lead of the chairman

of the Appropriations Committee in including our request for ag

disaster.

In addition, I am a very strong supporter of the amendment of the

ranking minority member of the Appropriations Committee to strike the

limitations on the ability of General Petraeus to conduct the war in

Iraq. Let us remember that General Petraeus came before the committees

to outline his new ideas, his new plan for moving forward in Iraq.

People had been saying: We need a new plan. Yes, clearly, we need a new

plan. The Bremer plan, debaathification, firing the Army, sending them

home without pay and with their weapons, turns out to have been the

absolute wrong thing to do. But General Petraeus, who was unanimously

confirmed by this body, has gone back to Iraq with his new way of going

forward.

They have made some significant changes in the rules of engagement.

Now no longer are Shia death squads or militia off-limits. Moqtada al-

Sadr has seen the light or felt the heat, and he has gone to Tehran. We

are talking action against Jaysh al-Mahdi and others who are engaged in

sectarian battles. We have a new plan of going in, holding, and

clearing, the conventional and now-proven theory of dealing with

insurgencies. You cannot just go in and wipe out people who are causing

chaos and killing their political enemies. You have to stay there and

maintain peace, security. That is what we are supporting the Iraqi

forces doing. The Iraqi forces are there. They are the ones who are

going to have to take over. The training of the Iraqi forces is the

critical element for us to assure stability in the region.

Many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and on mine

embraced the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. For example, the

distinguished majority whip on December 8 on CNN said:

This new plan the President and General Petraeus have put forward is,

by and large, the Iraq Study Group's plan. After receiving the report,

when you look at the recommendations, they track with what we are doing

now, from sending reinforcements to Baghdad to increasing the number of

embedded American advisers, to holding the Iraqi Government responsible

for specific security and political milestones. The differences between

what we are doing now in Iraq and the Iraq Study Group recommendations

are insignificant. Sending reinforcements to Baghdad, the principal

tenet of the new plan General Petraeus has put forth, is referenced in

general by the Iraq Study Group, which said it could support a short-

term redeployment or surge of American combat forces to stabilize

Baghdad, recognizing the level of violence in and around Baghdad has

crippled the ability of both the al-Maliki Government and the U.S.

military to restore basic services and establish a modicum of law and

order. I quote:

There is one other very important point that is of concern to

everybody in this body and all Americans. The Iraq Study Group said:

President Bush said of his plan and its implementation:

It is clear we have a new way forward. The language in the underlying

legislation before us says we ought to set a timetable, a political

timetable. We ought to determine in this body exactly the dates when we

start removing troops from Baghdad, from Iraq, changing our policy.

I have a novel idea: Wars cannot be run from these hallowed and

comfortable and sanctified chambers 10,000 miles away from the war

zone. How about allowing the officers, the men, and the commanders in

the field--who are engaged daily, risking their lives to bring peace

and security to Iraq--to determine when and how we can best turn over

to the Iraqi security forces the critical job--the critical job--of

assuring security and a relatively peaceful country? Nobody is saying

it is going to be a Jeffersonian democracy. What we are seeking is

peace and security.

We had an open hearing with the leaders of the intelligence community

in January before the Senate Intelligence Committee. The top leaders of

that intelligence community said, unanimously, it would be very unwise

to establish a short-term political timetable for withdrawal prior to

the

time the Iraqi security forces take over.

If this body, in its ``wisdom''--an oxymoron in this case--says pull

out on such-and-such date, and the Iraqi security forces are not ready

to take over, what would happen? Three things--all of them bad.

No. 1, the killing, sectarian violence between Shia and Sunnis would

escalate. You would see many more thousands killed, as we would no

longer be there to serve as a buffer and as adviser to prevent that

from happening.

No. 2, the goal of al-Qaida, as expressed by Osama bin Laden and his

No. 2 man, Ayman al-Zawahiri, to achieve the headquarters of the

caliphate in the ``land of the two rivers,'' i.e., Baghdad, would be

achieved. They would have a safe haven. They would have a safe haven

from which they could train, recruit, perhaps even get back to turning

on the dual-use facilities Saddam Hussein set up for turning out

chemical or biological weapons.

Now, the third thing that would happen, which is a true disaster,

would be the neighboring countries would have to come in to back up

their co-religionists. If the Sunnis are being oppressed by the Shia,

then the Sunni states will be ready, and they will come in. If they

come in, Iran and its Shia partners are all ready to come in.

What happens then? We have a conflagration in the Middle East

bringing in many countries in a region-wide war that will draw,

unfortunately, perhaps hundreds of thousands of American troops to

prevent the disaster from spreading, to support our friends in Israel.

General Petraeus has promised, in his confirmation hearings, that he

will tell us if the new plan, the new rules of engagement--putting the

Iraqi security forces out front, with American advisers continuing to

supply American troops to go after the high-value targets, the radical

Salafist jihadists of al-Qaida and other entities--we will continue to

hunt them down so they do not overwhelm the Iraqi security forces.

General Petraeus will tell us. He should know by this summer if it

fails. If it fails, he said he will tell us, and I would trust he would

begin making such changes as are necessary, without tipping off the

enemy what they are planning to do. The important thing is not telling

the enemy what our timetable is.

I think it is perhaps illustrative to share with you some comments

from an e-mail I received from a marine who has been in Iraq and who is

going back. He was commenting on a timetable. He said: I haven't polled

all of them. I don't speak for all of them, but I can tell you, a

lion's share think a timetable is a disastrous idea. I don't know what

possible benefit you can assess that would come from a timetable. Where

is the help toward mission accomplishment?

He said: Iraqis understand that progress is being made. I think the

Iraqi forces are getting ready to take over and with our help should be

able to do it sometime in 2007. But if we tell everyone exactly when

that is going to be, it gets a lot easier for the merry mujahedin to

claim victory, lay low, and then wreak havoc when the coalition packs

up shop.

This particular marine said: I'm not wild about going back to Iraq,

but I would sure as heck rather do that than essentially invalidate

everything we've done to date by leaving too early and inviting chaos.

That is the choice. Does a political timetable give Members cover

back here? Maybe. But I have even heard that ridiculed. I have heard

that ridiculed. I ask this body to strike the language, let General

Petraeus run the war, let him pursue every avenue to assure Iraq is

stable and secure. He and the President have said, if it does not work,

we will change policy. But let's give it a chance to work.

Mr. President, I appreciate the indulgence of my colleagues and yield

the floor.