Mr. President, on Wednesday morning of this week,

following a discussion and debate--and we had a fairly robust debate--

about the issue of Iraq and the war in Iraq, on Wednesday morning of

this week, the President's Homeland Security Adviser, Frances Townsend,

was on the ABC ``Good Morning America'' program, and she said some

things about al-Qaida, about terrorists, that reminded me of a period

several years ago, prior to the start of the Iraq war. It reminded me

of being in a room where top secret, classified briefings are given to

Members of Congress--briefings by the now Secretary of State, briefings

by the Vice President, briefings by the head of the CIA. Condoleezza

Rice, Mr. Tenet, Vice President Cheney, and others participated in

these top secret briefings.

They told us things in those top secret briefings leading up to the

decision about the authorization to use force against Iraq. They told

us things we now know not to have been true.

Did they know that when they told us? I don't know. We now know, of

course, that their claim that Saddam Hussein was trying to acquire

yellow cake from Niger for nuclear weapons was bogus. Their claim that

he was acquiring aluminum tubes to reconstitute a nuclear threat was

not accurate. Their claim that he had mobile chemical weapons labs was

not accurate.

By the way, on that one, it only had a single source, a man we later

learned who had the code name of ``Curve Ball.'' We also later learned

that he was a fabricator and an alcoholic. Their claim was based on a

single source we now discover to have been a fabricator. He was a

former taxicab driver, for God's sake, in Baghdad. A single source gave

rise to the description to the world and to this Congress in top

secret, classified briefings that there were mobile chemical weapons

laboratories in Iraq.

The list of baseless or unsupported claims goes on. The

reconstitution of nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction,

connections with al-Qaida, we now know, of course, the facts were at

odds with what we were being told about these and the other claims they

used to support going to war.

The reason I mention this is that at Wednesday's appearance by the

President's Homeland Security Adviser, Frances Townsend, on the morning

show on ABC, reminded me a bit of what we experienced several years ago

from this administration. A description by Frances Townsend about

terrorism and the terrorist threat and al-Qaida is completely, and was

completely, at odds with what we know to be the truth.

Let me go through a bit of what the President's Homeland Security

Adviser said when she was being interviewed about the National

Intelligence Report issued this week.

First, the report said al-Qaida is rebuilding, retraining, and

getting ready to strike in the United States again. In light of that

report, Ms. Townsend was asked if she still believed the United States

is winning the war against al-Qaida and terrorism. ``Absolutely,'' she

said. ``Absolutely, we are winning.''

She was asked about Pakistan and, specifically, about allowing al-

Qaida to have a safe haven in the country of Pakistan. She said: Well,

it is a sovereign country, and the President of Pakistan has been a

good partner in our war against terrorism.

When asked, she said: The United States is ``safer'' today against

al-Qaida because, she said: ``We have challenged them and we are on the

offensive and the game is overseas.''

It is almost as if the President and his top homeland security

adviser failed to read the National Intelligence Estimate. It made

clear that al-Qaida is rebuilding its operational capacity and

terrorism is the number one threat to our homeland. Those are the

facts. That's reality.

But even if she failed to read the NIE, perhaps she could have been

expected to read the newspapers, because they too have made it clear

for a long time that al-Qaida is rebuilding and that the terrorists are

getting ready to strike us again.

Let me go through a couple of examples.

On July 16, if one was reading in recent days, one would read an

article by Joshua Partlow in the Washington Post. It said sectarian

violence, a civil war, was the war in Iraq, not al-Qaida. It spelled

this out with facts:

Pretty clear. Shiite and Sunni violence, not al-Qaida.

One might have read the newspaper reports on June 26, in the

McClatchy papers:

That is unbelievable. Al-Qaida is alive and well in Pakistan and

Afghanistan. Let me say that again: It is ``recruiting, regrouping and

rebuilding'' in this area. And bin Laden himself is believed to be

hiding there, in that sanctuary. This is not Iraq, Mr. President. Did

the President or his homeland security advisor read this article?

Or perhaps one could go back to a New York Times article in February

entitled ``Senior leaders of al-Qaida operating from Pakistan.''

Bin Laden and al-Qaida are ``steadily building an operations hub'' in

Pakistan is the report.

Now, to the adviser to the President in the White House on terrorism

issues, let me say this to her: August 2001, the Presidential Daily

Briefing Report put in the hands of President George W. Bush one month

before the attacks of September 11, the title was: ``Bin Laden

Determined to Strike in U.S.''

That was in August of 2001, the PDB, put in the President's hands.

What was the report in July 2007? The intelligence assessment from

the

U.S. National Counterterrorism Center in July 2007 says this: ``al-

Qaida better positioned to strike the West.''

Think of that. Six years have intervened--6 years. And the

President's Homeland Security Adviser, one who deals with this issue of

terrorism and counterterrorism, says that we are ``winning'' the war on

terrorism; things are going just fine; things are better. Yet, in 6

years, we go from this Presidential daily briefing entitled ``Bin Laden

Determined to Strike in United States'' in August of 2001 to this

assessment 6 years later: ``Al-Qaida Better Positioned to Strike the

West.''

I ask the question: Are we really winning? I think we would expect

the Homeland Security Adviser to be dealing with facts.

Let me describe the facts as stated by the National Intelligence

Estimate. The National Intelligence Estimate was released in both a

classified and unclassified version. The unclassified version says:

It went on to say:

Now we have a report that says Osama bin Laden and his top deputies

are in a safe haven. Six years after they murdered thousands of

Americans, they are in a safe haven.

There ought not be 1 square inch of ground on this planet that ought

to be a safe haven for the leaders of al-Qaida. Ms. Townsend says, when

asked about it, ``Well, Pakistan is a sovereign country.''

What does that mean? Therefore, a safe haven for al-Qaida and bin

Laden must be all right? No. Absolutely not. There is no sovereignty

anywhere in this world for Osama bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and the al-

Qaida leadership. There ought not be safe harbor or safe haven or

sovereignty anywhere in this world for them.

What have we done? Instead of deciding to destroy Osama bin Laden,

al-Zawahiri, and the al-Qaida leadership, our country decided, based on

information provided by the administration that I referred to earlier,

to invade Iraq. It was information we now know not to have been true--

deliberate or not, I don't know, but information about yellow cake,

aluminum tubes, chemical weapons labs, and about weapons of mass

destruction which was not true. Based on that, we decided to take

action against Iraq.

The facts are these: Al-Qaida was not in Iraq before we invaded. It

is there now. But, it is not the central feature in Iraq. Our

intelligence estimates tell us that. The central part of Iraq is

sectarian violence, with Shia killing Sunni, Sunni killing Shia, and

Shia and Sunni killing American soldiers. It is a civil war, a

religious war of sorts, with problems between the Shia and Sunni that

date back many centuries.

Now people ask this question, and reasonably so: Should we, 6 years

after 2001, the devastating attack against our country that killed

thousands of innocent Americans, should we expect or have expected that

we would have brought to justice, dead or alive, the leadership of al-

Qaida and destroyed them? In my judgment, the answer to that is yes.

The Homeland Security Adviser at the White House, Francis Townsend,

says: Well, we are winning. I wish that were true, but it is an

assessment that comes only by ignoring all of the facts. Just read the

National Intelligence Estimate.

This administration made a calculation that turns out to have been

wrong on many fronts. Instead of fighting terrorism first, which I

think most Americans would have understood and accepted and believed--

the most critical element in the fight to provide security for our

future--instead of fighting terrorism first, this administration

decided to take action in other areas. We now have more than 160,000

American troops in Iraq. Many are going door to door in Baghdad today

as I speak. It is the case that there is an al-Qaida presence in Iraq

because Iraq has attracted terrorists. As I said, the intelligence

community itself has said that is not the central feature of what is

happening in Iraq. The central feature of what is going on in Iraq is

the sectarian violence and a civil war.

That is why the majority of this Congress decided it is time to

change course. It has not been the case that the descriptions by those

who want to change course in this Chamber have said let's decide

immediately, precipitously, to withdraw all troops. That is not the

case. Troops would remain to fight the terrorist elements that do exist

in Iraq where they can be fought successfully, for force protection,

and to train Iraqi troops. After all, the Iraqi troops will be

necessary and the Iraqi soldiers and the police force will be necessary

to provide security in the country.

It is long past time for this country to say to the Iraqis: You now

have a new government. Saddam Hussein is dead. He was executed after a

trial for his crimes and atrocities. He is gone. He was a brutal

dictator. But, Saddam Hussein is dead. You have a new constitution, you

have a new government, and now the question remains: Do you have the

will to take back your own country and provide for your own security?

Are there sufficient able-bodied Iraqis to take back the security

responsibilities for their country? If not, there is no amount of time

in which American soldiers and this country can provide security for a

country in the middle of a civil war.

So we must change course. That change in course, in my judgment, is

what will allow us to fight terrorism first. If we do not do that, we

will, 6 years from now, continue to read about Osama bin Laden and the

al-Qaida leadership in a safe harbor or safe haven, living free,

escaping justice, and planning additional attacks against this country.

My point is, what has happened, in my judgment, is wrong. The first

and central fight is the fight against terrorism. We are not waging

that fight because those who attacked this country previously are now

in a safe haven planning additional attacks against our country. That

comes from the National Intelligence Estimate, not me. That NIE

represents the best assessment by our country's best intelligence

professionals from 16 different intelligence agencies.

One cannot solve a problem if one is going to ignore the facts or

distort the facts. I said that Ms. Townsend on Wednesday morning

basically misrepresented what is happening. It seems as if she has

failed to see, or refuses to see, all of the evidence that exists, the

evidence we have received in the National Intelligence Estimate and

other evidence as well, that al-Qaida and bin Laden are stronger today

than they have been for many years.

They are getting stronger, not weaker; they are planning more

attacks, not hiding; they are recruiting and rebuilding, not running;

and they want to strike us again as much as they every have.

But, they are in Pakistan, in a safe haven. They are in the border

area near Afghanistan, not Iraq.

It doesn't surprise me that this administration is on a course that

is not the course that represents this country's best interests.

President Bush has said on previous occasions that we will deal not

only with the terrorists who dare attack this country, we will deal

with those who harbor and feed them and house them. That was the

President's statement. The President said that, as a part of our

offensive against terror, we will also confront the regimes that harbor

and support terrorists.

When President Bush was asked about Osama bin Laden, he said:

But, Bin Laden and al-Qaida represent the principal threat to this

country. That is why Senator Conrad and I offered the amendment we did

on the Defense authorization bill last week.

The very day Ms. Townsend appeared on television, Wednesday, here is

the New York Times' headline: ``Same People, Same Threat.'' That's

right, ``Same People, Same Threat.''

If ever we needed good leadership, thoughtful leadership, leadership

that will act on the facts and understand the facts and not

misrepresent the facts, it is now, at a time when a terrorist

organization is planning additional attacks against this country. For

this administration to say that things are fine, we are winning, don't

worry, and there is a sovereign, apparently, safe haven for the

leadership for those who plan to attack us, that is unbelievable, and

it must change. If the administration won't change it, the Congress and

the American people must change it.