Mr. President, I will take my leader time to comment on

the privilege I had last week of spending some time with hundreds of

South Dakota Guard members and their families.

I wanted to say a few words today about the selfless and courageous

sacrifice of the South Dakota Guard and, indeed, all of our soldiers

who are placing their lives on the line so that the

children of Iraq can inherit a nation safer, stronger, and freer than

that of their parents.

Too often, the contributions of our Guard members and reservists have

gone unrecognized. But today, the brace soldiers in our Guard and

Reserve have become indispensable to protecting our national security.

With the end of the Cold War and the decision to draw down active

duty forces, the Nation has dramatically increased its reliance on

reservists. Guard and Reserve soldiers have been called up to active

duty more frequently, and have been taken away from their families and

communities for longer periods of time, than perhaps at any other time

in our history. As a result, the line between active and reserve duty

has become blurred.

The service of the South Dakota National Guard and Reserve provides a

perfect illustration. Two-thirds of South Dakota's National Guard

members have been called up since September 11. On a per capita basis,

South Dakota has had more of its Guard members activated than any other

State. These call-ups have fallen heavily on South Dakota's Army Guard

units. According to Governor Michael Rounds, nearly 8 of every 10 South

Dakota Army Guard members have already been called up for active duty.

The South Dakota National Guard has six units and 1,200 soldiers in

the Iraq theater, including the 740th Transportation Company, the 842nd

Engineer Company, the 2nd Battalion of the 147th Field Artillery, the

153rd Engineer Battalion, the 1742nd Transportation Company, and the

216th Engineer Detachment. These soldiers have the gratitude and

admiration of our State and our Nation.

Late last week, we were reminded of the dangers they face each and

every day. As I noted on the floor Monday, Army Specialist Dennis

Morgan, a member of the South Dakota National Guard, was one of the 12

American soldiers killed in Iraq this past weekend. Specialist Morgan

was the sixth South Dakota soldier to die in this war, and the first

member of the South Dakota National Guard. While South Dakotans'

thoughts and prayers are with Specialist Morgan's family and, indeed,

the families of all of those who have lost loved ones in Iraq, we also

pray for the safety of the soldiers who remain in Iraq.

Two South Dakota units have received the most public attention as of

late--the 740th Transportation Company of Milbank and Brookings and the

842nd Engineer Company of Spearfish, Belle Fourche, and Sturgis.

Unfortunately for the soldiers of these units and their families, the

reason these units are in the news is not a happy one. Last week,

nearly 300 soldiers from the 740th Transportation Company and the 842nd

Engineer Company learned that they would not be coming home when they

complete their year-long tour of duty.

According to Jay Brozik, husband of 1LT Sally Brozik who serves in

the 740th, members of this unit had been informed they would be heading

home soon. Their personal belongings had been packed for the trip home.

The troops had completed the medical briefing required prior to leaving

the Iraq theater. Their equipment had been transferred to a replacement

unit. Their families were eagerly awaiting a joyous return.

All that came to a crashing halt late last week, when the Department

of Defense announced that the tours of duty for this unit had been

extended at least three months longer than promised.

The story is similar for the 842nd Engineering Company and about

20,000 other active and reserve troops who were in formed that the

administration had broken its commitment of one-year,

in Iraq.

Although I am confident all involved will continue to serve their

country in the same exemplary fashion they have to date, the

administration's decision was difficult to bear for the soldiers and

families involved. In the words of Spearfish Mayor Jerry Krambeck,

Jay Brozick said,

And Ryan Lovrien

spoke of his girlfriend, SGT April Semmler of the 740th:

Mr. President, the cost of failure in Iraq is beyond comprehension.

Given the stakes involved for the people of Iraq, the region, and the

world, we have no choice but to maintain our commitment and do all we

can to bring about a safe, secure, and democratic Iraq. But we do face

a choice about how we fulfill this commitment.

I urge the President to redouble his efforts to expand the

international presence on the ground. We have the finest forces in the

world. Breaking our commitment to these forces is not only unfair, it

is shortsighted. Already we see soldiers re-enlisting at lower rates

than in the past. Considering that the demands placed on our already

overextended forces are unlikely to fall in the future, failure to at

least sustain current force levels would undermine our national

security.

Mr. President, I know the Senate joins me in commending the service

of the men and women in the South Dakota Guard and indeed all of our

troops involved in the current conflict in Iraq. I particularly want to

express my appreciation for the sacrifices made by the troops of the

740th and the 842nd and their families. They came when they were

called, performed as requested, and, under any circumstances, will

continue to perform magnificently.

But the burden should be shared--so that we can sustain our current

forces and give those who've already sacrificed so much a well-deserved

rest.

I yield the floor.