Last week, Senator Lieberman and I traveled to Iraq, to

Baghdad. When I visited Iraq a year and a half ago, our Senate

delegation in Baghdad and other cities, Basra and Tikrit, boarded armed

Humvees and with military escort drove throughout those respective

cities. Last week, we were confined for security reasons to the heavily

fortified green zone, which is the command post of the United States

military, our Government representatives, and the Iraqi government.

The necessity for those restrictions was made apparent because one of

the opposition political leaders with whom we were supposed to meet and

where we envisioned traveling for 5 minutes outside of the green zone

was the target of an assassination attempt the previous day. He was not

harmed, but a suicide bomber killed himself and nine other Iraqis

outside the location where the meeting was to occur, which underscores

the perilous nature of the environment and the impossibility of

providing the necessary and complete security for our own forces who

are performing heroically and continue to risk their lives, and in some

cases give up their lives, tragically, to protect the Iraqi people from

the insurgent forces which are brutal and sometimes lethally effective

in what they are intending to do in that particular country.

Sunday, I had the occasion to meet with a few hundred Minnesotans,

family members of loved ones who are presently serving in Iraq. They

asked the same question over and over again: When are our husbands,

wives, sons, fathers, mothers, coming home?

Although I opposed the Iraq war resolution in October of 2002 and

continue to believe, unfortunately, we have on an overall basis

weakened our national security, not strengthened it by our action, we

are there, with 150,000 of our Armed Forces committed. It is imperative

we succeed. It is also imperative that we start to devise--we should

have already--a strategy to bring our troops home safely as soon as

possible with the victory secure. The only way victory will be

ultimately secured is by the Iraqi people.

When Senator Lieberman and I met with the Deputy Prime Minister of

Iraq he said exactly that: The security of Iraq can only be gained by

the Iraqi people. The process from being subject to a brutal dictator,

tyrannical oppression for over a quarter of a century, to self-

determining democracy is an enormous social transformation, one that

will probably take several years.

When we justify, by those who are responsible for our continued

presence in Iraq, what we are doing there, they need to be very clear

about the parameters. First, we were looking for weapons of mass

destruction which turned out not to exist there. Then it was an alleged

link between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaida which has never been

demonstrated to exist. Then it was opposing an evil dictator, which

Saddam Hussein certainly was, which was achieved in the first 3 weeks

of magnificent effort by our military. For the last 21 months it has

been protecting as much as possible the country and protecting the time

necessary for the Iraqi people to form a government, which they are in

the process of doing.

Holding the election on January 30 as scheduled is essential to doing

that. Training and equipping the Iraqi forces--police, military,

national guard--to be able to do what the people of any country have to

do to have a functional country under any form of government, which is

to protect and defend their own country, has been regretfully a very

slow process. I asked the United States military command and our

civilian leadership in Iraq as well as the Iraqi Government authorities

how far they thought we had progressed from a starting point to 100

percent Iraqi self-sufficiency regarding their own self-security and

the answer was variously between 40 and 50 percent. We have initiated

and engaged in and this Congress has funded to the full extent

requested by the administration the Iraqi security training programs

for over a year, about 15 or 16 months.

It is obviously a difficult assignment, given that the previous

military structure of the country was removed by the Provisional

Authority, but that decision has been made and now that process of

retraining new forces has been underway for 15, 16 months and we are

told it is not even half way there.

The Iraqi people need to be responsible for their own country. They

must be responsible for their own country. They must decide to stand up

for themselves. Many are doing so and even giving their lives to

conduct this upcoming election and engaging in various security

actions.

But the brunt of that responsibility, the burden, the fighting, the

bleeding, the dying, is still being incurred by our own forces. We need

to know when that is going to be able to stop. We need to know how that

transition and when that transition is going to occur. We need to put

the Iraqi people and our allies on notice that we are not going to be

there indefinitely and that they need to be willing to step forward to

provide what I think everyone wants, most of the world wants: a stable,

secure, and successful Iraq.

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I have been

increasingly frustrated by our inability, either in the committee,

whether in public or secret briefings, whether as a body or through

other discussions, to get what turns out to be accurate and reliable

information from the civilian command, from the administration.

Yesterday afternoon we had an Armed Services Committee hearing,

a secret hearing, for 3 hours. I received information regarding the

force capabilities of the Iraqi police and military that was at

significant variance from what I was told a week before in Baghdad,

which itself was at considerable variance from what we were told 2

months before, which then was half of the force level we were told

existed a year before that.

What the numbers are, what the training capabilities are--I hesitate

to use this word on the Senate floor, but it applies here--I don't like

being lied to. I am elected to represent the people of Minnesota. I am

elected to look out for their best interests. I met on Sunday with a

few hundred Minnesota family members who were depending upon me to look

out for the interests of their sons and daughters, husbands and wives.

I take that as a life-or-death responsibility, as it is to them and

their loved ones and all the members of the U.S. Armed Forces, putting

their lives on the line every day.

They deserve to know, we deserve to know, the American people deserve

to know from this administration their plan, what is their timetable,

and what kind of progress are we making. We deserve to know the facts.

We deserve to be told facts today that hold up as the truth tomorrow. I

regret to say that is not occurring. It has not occurred, not only in

this instance yesterday but in other significant respects throughout

the last several months.

I appreciate enormously and admire tremendously the leadership of the

Senate Armed Services Committee under its chairman, Senator Warner, and

its ranking member, Senator Levin. Senator Warner has convened any

number of hearings and briefings on the situation in Iraq and other

places around the world, on the prison abuses at Abu Ghraib, on the

armoring and rearmoring of the equipment and personnel for service in

Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the last month, we have found, according to the private

contractors, there was an unused capacity in their production

capabilities of 25 percent for armored Humvees and these rearmoring

kits for those Humvees that are over there in Afghan and Iraq that are

unarmored, a 25-percent unused capacity because of a lack of production

orders from our military, when we were told--and we asked, Republican

and Democratic members of the Armed Services Committee alike,

repeatedly: What do you need? What money, laws, procedures? What do you

need to maximize production and immediate distribution to protect our

men and women serving in Iraq?

We were assured, again and again and again, there was 100-percent

production, that everything was being done, and that they did not need

anything. And then we find out there is significant variance to that,

in fact, in the truth.

Chairman Warner convened several hearings in the last 6 months on the

alleged prison abuses at Abu Ghraib. There were rumors of abuses

occurring elsewhere in Iraq and elsewhere in the world. We were assured

again and again by the administration and the other authorities who

spoke before us that it was limited to those isolated instances in Iraq

and in the Abu Ghraib prison. Now it comes to light, in the last month,

there were documented reports through the chain of command, information

that people who testified before our committee had to be aware of when

they told us in committee hearings information that was at variance

with those reports.

Similarly, the status of the Iraqi security and military forces--

being told by the Secretary of Defense, who I think believed what he

was telling us because that was the information he was given, a year

ago that force level was at 202,000; and then to find out last

September 15, in public remarks he made elsewhere, that number was

about half that level; and then to get published reports that the

actual number is some 78,000; and then to get a report last week that

the number is somewhat above that; and then to get a report yesterday

that the number is some tens of thousands above that. Having that

number not being able to be confirmed by those who are testifying

before us is a great travesty of justice and legality, and their moral,

ethical responsibility to tell us the truth and give us the facts so we

can make those judgments that we are elected and held responsible to

make, along with them, so that hopefully the collective wisdom of all

of us serves the best interests of this country, its foreign policy,

and the lives of its men and women who are serving us overseas, and

who, for every day we keep them over there, are continuing to risk

their lives, and some of them losing their lives or losing limbs,

bodily functions.

This is life and death, and it is time we stop being lied to. I want

this administration, I want the Pentagon command, to tell us the facts,

tell us the truth about the situation in Iraq--what is going right, but

what is going wrong, to tell us the truth and the facts about the

capability of the Iraqi forces to replace ours, to take over

responsibility for the law and order of their own country, to tell us

the truth and the facts about the economic recovery projects, which

ones have started, which ones have not, how much money has been

expended, how much money has been wasted, how much money has been

stolen.

It is shameful this body, which has the history of Harry Truman

setting up a special committee during World War II to investigate the

proper contracting, the proper expenditure of taxpayer dollars for a

defense effort, where again American men and women were relying on that

equipment, relying on getting it right away, and living or dying as a

result--Harry Truman said: I don't care whether they are Democratic

contractors or Republican, let the chips fall where they may and the

truth be known. He went on to become the Vice President and then the

President of the United States because he had that kind of integrity

and that kind of courage.

We ought to see that today on the other side of the aisle, to be

willing to investigate these matters. Whether it is a Republican

administration or a Democratic administration, I don't care; it is an

American administration. Those are American soldiers putting their

lives on the line. We are all responsible, and we can't even get

anybody to look into what is happening or not happening there, and we

can't get anybody to tell us the facts, the truth. It is deplorable. It

is unconscionable. It is un-American. And it is intolerable.

I think this body collectively needs to stand up and demand that we

get the facts and the truth so we can go back home and tell those sons

and daughters and fathers and mothers and husbands and wives what is

happening to their loved ones over in Iraq, and when they are coming

home with the victory they worked for, lived for, bled for, and died

for secured, and how we are going to do that and when.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.