Mr. President, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is

testifying today at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. She will be

meeting with the full Senate later for a classified briefing.

I am sure one of the topics that will be discussed at length will be

the Iraqi constitutional referendum of this last Saturday. That vote

was an important milestone. The voting by so many Iraqis was again a

demonstrable act of courage. It is my most sincere hope that in the

months to come, the political process in Iraq moves forward, that a

stable government takes control in Iraq, and that Iraq takes control of

its own future.

But similar to many of my colleagues, and a growing majority of

Americans, we will not be satisfied with the status quo or the stay-

the-course answers that we hear over and over from the White House when

it comes to the situation in Iraq. The most fundamental questions we

have to ask of this President and this administration are, What is your

plan for victory? What is your plan for success? What is your plan to

bring American troops home from Iraq?

It now seems evident that the constitution will pass. It also seems

evident that despite substantial opposition from the Sunni minority, no

province will reject this constitution or, if any do, there will not be

enough to, in fact, reject the whole document.

Sunnis make up 20 percent of the population but 90 percent of the

insurgency in Iraq. Sectarian violence is claiming the lives of

thousands of Iraqis. We can't even calculate how many. Some are fearful

that this country could still fall apart.

Saturday's election is no guarantee of long-term democracy in Iraq,

but it was an important step forward and one that I applaud. The

government that may now emerge needs to build legitimacy in Iraq and

with its neighbors. It needs to take back control of its country from

insurgency, chaos, and lawlessness so that American troops can come

home.

Iraq cannot succeed if the Sunnis--one in five of the Iraqis--feel

disenfranchised and alienated. It is a challenge to their leaders to

put together a government now that truly reflects their country, to

build not just a coalition of tribes but a nation. This must happen

because the cost of destroying and now replacing the governing regime

in Iraq has been so costly.

Saturday was a good day in Iraq, for sure. But the elections last

January 30 also represented a good day for Iraq, and 543 Americans have

lost their lives in Iraq since that election last January. Mr.

President, 15,063 American service men and women have been wounded in

Iraq, and 1,979 Americans have been killed. We are closing in on that

awesome figure of 2,000 of our best and bravest soldiers having given

their lives in Iraq.

Iraq passed an important milestone Saturday with the constitutional

referendum. The process was a refreshing demonstration of democracy at

work in a region unaccustomed to such a display of civic participation.

But the product, some have argued, is flawed. Nonetheless, Iraqis, with

their vote, have taken a step in this political process forward. This

opportunity for Iraq has come at a high cost for America.

As the number of Americans killed continues to grow, and the number

of injured increases as well, do we have a clear plan in place? At what

moment in time will the Iraqi Army battalions be prepared to step

forward so that Americans can step back? At what point in time will the

Iraqi police force, the Iraqi security forces, say, ``We can now

control our own country and now Americans can go home''?

This administration gives us the vaguest notion that it is somehow

wrong to think about when that date may come. Perhaps it is wrong to

announce it but not to have a plan to reach it. It is something that

concerns me.

A few weeks ago, Generals Casey and Abizaid told a meeting in

Congress that only one battalion was prepared to stand and fight by

itself in Iraq today--only one battalion of the Iraqi Army. It is a far

cry from 150,000-plus American soldiers who stand and fight today, who

risk their lives today.

Today, the trial of Saddam Hussein is beginning. We were greeted this

morning with all the major news organizations showing the closed-

circuit videotape and film of the trial. It is a good thing that he is

standing trial because he is a vicious murderer, a thug, and a monster

of a human being.

However, Americans are questioning, still, whether or not we have

paid too heavy a price for this day to have arrived and asking of this

administration, now that he is standing trial: How much longer will we

be standing trial in Iraq as we wait for the outcome each day of the

bloody fighting?

What has changed since May of 2003 is that the costs of the war have

risen, are still climbing; the trust the American people have placed in

the President has been shaken. What has also changed is, while the cost

of war continues to grow, the alleged justifications for the war have

multiplied, and the clarity of our purpose has diminished dramatically.

This is a terrible and tragic combination.

Saddam was a monster. That is true. But we must never forget that of

all the many reasons given to us by this administration to invade Iraq,

the evil nature of Saddam was the only one that has proven true. Except

for the brutality of Saddam Hussein--as bad as it was, as horrible as

it was--all the other reasons for going to war the administration put

forth turned out not to be accurate. There were no weapons of mass

destruction. We still, many years later, have found no evidence of that

claim, made over and over and over again at the highest levels of this

administration.

The 9/11 Commission showed us there was no support for al-Qaida in

Iraq. Yet as recently as last Sunday, Secretary of State Condoleezza

Rice tried to again link al-Qaida and 9/11 with Saddam Hussein.

The 9/11 Commission made it clear, there is no linkage. The war has

not increased our own security. Some can argue--and I think

convincingly--that it has made the world a more dangerous place. It has

created a training ground for terrorism in Iraq where insurgents come

from surrounding countries to train themselves in killing American

soldiers, to go out and do even worse to Americans and others all

around the world.

The only reason left for this war was the removal of Saddam Hussein.

Two-thirds of Americans, when they measure that benefit against the

enormous cost in blood and treasure, conclude it may not have been

worth that price. Nearly $200 billion has been spent, nearly 2,000

Americans have been killed, and the pricetag goes up every day in terms

of American lives and American treasure.

Our national interest has suffered in other ways as well. The war has

altered the international strategic environment to our disadvantage.

Let's begin with Iran. Iran gives every sign that it is determined to

acquire nuclear weapons. Such a development threatens regional

stability and our own national security. It is not in our interest or

the world's interest. In August, the Bush administration went to the

diplomats of more than a dozen countries and presented an hour-long

slide show on Iran's nuclear program. This PowerPoint briefing

incorporated satellite imagery and other data to try to convince other

nations that Iran's nuclear program is aimed at producing

weapons, not energy. But who could look at such a slide show and not

think back to February 2003, when Secretary of State Colin Powell made

a similar case to the United Nations about the existence of weapons of

mass destruction in Iraq? An embarrassing moment. That was, in my

opinion, the low point in a very distinguished and noble public career

of national service of Secretary of State Colin Powell. Indeed, it was

the stature of Secretary Powell alone that lent such force to that

argument. To learn later that the facts were not there had to be a

crushing blow to this man who has given so much to America.

Two years later we found no weapons of mass destruction. Mohamed

ElBaradei and the International Atomic Energy Agency told us there were

no weapons of mass destruction. We ignored them. They asked for more

time to prove their point; we rejected it. The Bush administration

decided we had to invade. We couldn't wait for allies. We couldn't wait

for proof. We couldn't wait. Now ElBaradei and the IAEA have been

proven right and recently were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The damage to our national credibility by presenting a distorted case

for the war has been severe. Our ability to persuade the international

community is now diminished. So is our ability to draw in allies to

join us in this effort. And the beneficiaries of our policies sadly

have been many rogue nations. Like the boy who cried wolf, America now

must overcome the damage done to our credibility by false claims that

we laid before the world as the justification for the invasion of Iraq.

At the same time, the dangers of terrorism to our Nation, our

personnel, and citizens abroad, and our friends and allies have grown.

The war in Iraq drained away financial resources, military forces, and

intelligence experts from the war on terror. Osama bin Laden still

remains at large, over 4 years after September 11. Where terrorists

once had training camps to hone their skills, they now have a war

itself in Iraq. Sadly, our soldiers are their targets.

Recently, the Director of National Intelligence released a letter

apparently from Ayman al-Zawahiri, the No. 2 leader in al-Qaida, to Mr.

al-Zarqawi, the group's top agent in Iraq. The letter provides a

chilling portrait of a cold-blooded terrorist. I know many people will

try to use this letter to solidify their arguments of why we need to

stay in Iraq. I don't advocate a precipitous tomorrow-like withdrawal

from Iraq. I think that would be disastrous. But the Zawahiri letter is

one more piece of evidence that Iraq has now become a center of

terrorist activity, whereas before the war it was not. The horrible

irony of this war is that President Bush's invasion has created more

energy behind terrorism in the Middle East.

The President is offering America a false choice when he says we have

to decide between resolve and retreat in Iraq. We must not just

withdraw, but we cannot simply stay the same course that has brought us

to this place in time. If we simply withdraw now, the current

instability in Iraq would balloon into a full civil war, and we will

have produced another failed state, owned and operated by terrorists

like the Taliban in Afghanistan. If we just keep doing what we have

been doing, we will continue to spend American tax dollars and, more

importantly, sacrifice the lives of our brave soldiers. We must take

positive action to try to alter the strategic equation that has fueled

terrorism and placed a heavy strain on our Army, National Guard, and

Reserves, constrained our options toward Iran and North Korea, and cost

us nearly 2,000 American lives in Iraq.

Diplomacy has to be part of this new campaign. Our military leaders

make it clear, they cannot defeat the insurgency. The way to defeat

insurgency is politically and economically and diplomatically. Right

now there are almost no troops from Muslim nations who are fighting at

the side of the Iraqi government. There are almost no Arab diplomats in

Iraq. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice must reach out to the Arab

gulf states and others and convince them that a secure and stable Iraq

is in their interest as well as ours and that they must assume some of

the risk and burden of this enterprise. That is no easy sell, given the

way we have approached this war to date. But it is an effort that we

must undertake, along with the Iraqis themselves.

The President needs to let the Iraqi people know that we will not

remain indefinitely in Iraq, and communicate that message to the rest

of the world as well. The Iraqi government and its security forces need

to prepare for assuming all the functions expected of them by a free

and sovereign Iraqi people to defend their own nation so American

troops can come home. The administration's admission, however, that

only one battalion of the Iraqi army is capable of operating on its own

does not really bring us any closer to meeting this goal. It is the

responsibility of the administration to make it clear why we have not

done better in training and preparing Iraqi soldiers to replace

American soldiers, and it is the responsibility of this administration

to train Iraqi security forces so that, in fact, our soldiers can come

home. It is time for the people and leaders of Iraq to take control of

their own country and their own destiny.

We are not abandoning Iraq. Indeed, we and Iraqis themselves must

reach out to other partners, especially the predominantly Muslim

countries, to collaborate in the consolidation of Iraqi security and

democracy. We are not setting a date for departure. We are simply

letting the Iraqis know, in the clearest possible terms, that we intend

to bring our forces home. Reminding all concerned that we will not stay

refutes the assertion that we intend to establish permanent military

bases in Iraq, an allegation that, unfortunately, fuels the insurgency.

We should do nothing that would mislead the Iraqis into thinking they

have unlimited time to take control of their own destiny. An unending

American occupation is neither in Iraq's interest nor in ours. If the

Iraqis made progress on Saturday, moving toward a constitution, moving

toward a government, moving toward a nation, we must tell them that

there is a responsibility of nationhood that goes beyond the obvious

establishment of government. The most important responsibility is to

secure your own borders, to protect your own people, to provide for the

common defense of your own nation. Now that is a responsibility that

must be shouldered by the Iraqis. If we are uncertain in speaking to

this new Iraqi government about our plans and our timetable in Iraq,

then I think they will count on American soldiers to be there risking

their lives indefinitely. That is unacceptable.

This administration has to make it clear that Iraqi army soldiers are

prepared to shoulder that burden and to give relief to American

soldiers so that they can return home to a hero's welcome and to their

families who wait anxiously for that day.

I yield the floor.