Mr. President, as we look out the window in most of our

great country, we can witness the season change, the change in the

season, and we can feel it. The air has become crisp with autumnal

chill. The leaves on the trees change their color; from the exuberant,

green lushness of the summer months to the tired, brown, yellow, and

red of the autumn, much like the graying hair of a man advancing in

age.

Nature can sometimes mimic human events with a subtlety that no words

can quite convey. As our country heads into the season that is

celebrated with the love of family and the love of home, Americans

should also look across the landscape of America and reflect upon the

loss of so many young Americans in the 12 months since autumn last fell

upon us.

Think about it. In the past year, more than 820 service members have

lost their lives in Iraq.

The evening news features pictures of American troops who have

perished in service to our flag, in service to our country. I am struck

by these colorful mosaics of these troops, amen; the green and blue of

their uniforms set against the background of the bold colors of our

flag, Old Glory, Old Glory. Each of these proud troops holds an

expression of pride and courage, even though many of them appear to be

so young. Note their ages--18, 19, 20, 21--just starting out in life,

having one full glance of what is around them.

I can only imagine the grief of their loving families during this

time of the year, as the somber tones of fall contrast with the joy of

being with family during the upcoming holidays. I pray that God,

Almighty God, will comfort those who have suffered losses, that He will

bless the fallen in their everlasting life, and that His hand will

protect those who still serve in harm's way.

That so many have sacrificed during this war in Iraq is reason enough

to ask questions about our Government and about our Government's policy

in that faraway land. Our troops continue to shed their blood, and our

Nation continues to devote enormous sums of our national wealth to

continue that war.

The Constitution protects the American people from unjust laws that

seek to stifle the patriotic duty to question those who are in power.

But it is the courage of the American people that compels them to

actually speak out when those in power call for silence. If anything,

attacks on patriotism of freedom-loving Americans may result in even

more Americans fighting against attempts to squelch the constitutional

protections of freedom.

Since our country was sent to war on March 19, 2003, 2,073 American

men and women have been killed. Yes, 2,073 Americans have died. Nearly

16,000 troops have been wounded.

Our military is straining under the repeated deployment of our

troops, including the members of the National Guard. They come from all

walks of life. They are lawyers. They are teachers. They are preachers.

They are coal miners. They are farmers. More than $214 billion has been

spent in Iraq and the end is not in sight. More than $214 billion spent

in Iraq and the end is not in sight. Urban combat takes place each day,

every day, in Baghdad, all day long. Every day and night.

Veterans hospitals in our own country are threatened by budget

shortfalls, and yet Americans are still left to wonder, when will our

brave troops be coming home? When?

I opposed this war in Iraq from the outset. From the beginning I

spoke out against our entry into this war. I pleaded with my

colleagues. I pleaded with the White House. I asked questions that have

not been answered. I spoke out against the invasion of a country which

did not pose an imminent threat to our national security. I said so

then--and I was right. I opposed the war in Iraq from the outset. From

the word go, I opposed it. But our troops were ordered to go to Iraq

and they went.

The question is, now, when will they come home? The administration

has so far laid out only a vague policy, saying our troops will come

home when the Iraqi Government is ready to take responsibility for its

country. When our troops are no longer needed, when the job is done,

they will come home. We will not stay a day longer than we are needed.

That sort of political doublespeak is small comfort to the mothers

and the fathers of our fighting men and women, the mothers and fathers

who turn and toss upon their pillows, whose tears wet the pillows,

whose prayers break the silence of night. Oh, when will they come home?

Bring my boy home. Oh, God, this awful war.

Wednesday evening the Vice President of the United States, even

claimed that criticism of the administration's war in Iraq was

dishonest and reprehensible. Did you hear that? Hear me, now; let me

say that again: On Wednesday evening the Vice President of the United

States, the man who is within a heartbeat of being the President of the

United States, the Vice President of the United States even claimed

that criticism of the administration's war in Iraq was ``dishonest and

reprehensible.''

Since when are we not to lift our voices? Are the American people not

to lift their voices in criticism of the administration's war in Iraq?

Is it dishonest on the part of the American people to do that? Is it

reprehensible on the part of mothers and fathers of sons and daughters

who were sent to that most dangerous country in the world? Is it

reprehensible? Did the Vice President measure his words? The Vice

President's comments come on the heels of comments from President Bush,

who said:

Listen to that. The President and the Vice President need to reread

the Constitution, take another look at that inimitable document. Asking

questions, seeking honesty and truth, and pressing for accountability

is exactly what the Framers had in mind. What would George Washington

say? What would Alexander Hamilton say? What would James Madison say?

What would Gouverneur Morris say? What would James Wilson say?

Questioning policies and practices, especially ones that have cost

this Nation more than 2,000 of her bravest sons and daughters, is the

responsibility of every American and is also a central role of Congress

as our duty as the elected representatives of a free people. We--you,

you, you and I--we are the elected representatives of the American

people, the people all over this vast land, its plains, its prairies,

its mountains, it valleys, its lakes, its rivers, its seas. Yes, we are

the men and women who are tasked with seeking the truth. Is that

irresponsible to seek the truth?

But instead of working with the Congress, instead of clearing the

air, the White House falls back to the irksome practice of attack,

attack, attack; obscure, obscure, obscure; attack. The American people

are tired of these reprehensible tactics. If anything is reprehensible,

it is these tactics.

Circling the wagons will not serve this administration well. What the

people demand are the facts. They want the truth. They want their

elected leaders to level with them. And when it comes to the war in

Iraq, this administration seems willing to do anything it can do to

avoid the truth, a truth I believe will reveal that the Bush

administration did, indeed, manipulate the facts in order to lead this

Nation down the road to war. War. War.

The administration claims that the Congress had the same intelligence

as the President before the war and that independent commissions have

determined there was no misrepresentation of the intelligence. But

neither claim is true. The intelligence agencies are under the control

of the White House. All information given to the Congress was cleared

through the White House. And the President had access to an enormous

amount of data never shared with the Congress. There was a filter over

the intelligence information the Congress received. That filter was the

administration, which is actively engaged in hyping the danger and

lusting after this war, this terrible war in Iraq.

Remember the talk of weapons of mass destruction? Remember the talk

of mushroom clouds? Remember? Remember the talk of unmanned drones? The

so-called proof for war was massaged before it was sent to Congress, to

scare Members, and leaked to reporters to scare people.

No independent commission has stated that the case for war was

indisputable. Commissions have looked at how the intelligence fell

short, but none have yet examined possible political manipulation.

Even the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence slowed its

examination, stalled its examination of possible White House

manipulation. My colleague from West Virginia, the ranking member of

the Intelligence Committee, Senator Jay Rockefeller, is rightly

pressing for answers.

Right now we are engaged in a mission with no definition. That is

troubling because without a clearly defined mission, it is impossible

to determine when our effort is truly accomplished.

This week, the Senate had the opportunity to establish some very

basic benchmarks for progress in Iraq, benchmarks that would have

clearly outlined goals and provided accountability in meeting those

goals. The proposal, offered by the senior Senator from Michigan,

Senator Carl Levin, was a modest, flexible approach that would have

given our troops, their families, the American people, and the Iraqi

people some basic guidepost. Unfortunately, the Senate turned its back.

It could not see the wisdom of this approach. It could not bring itself

to see the wisdom of the approach.

So, my fellow Senators, it is vital that we have benchmarks against

which to gauge our progress. That is how we can measure effectiveness

and, most importantly, how we know when the job is done. The

administration's strategy of keeping our troops in Iraq for as long as

it takes--have you heard that before? Keeping our troops in Iraq for as

long as it takes?--that is the wrong strategy. Who knows how long it

will take for the Iraqi Government to institute order in that

fractured, unhappy, miserable country?

Unfortunately, the questions that the American people are asking

about the missteps and the mistakes in the war in Iraq are not being

answered by this White House, not being answered by the administration.

Vice President Cheney has dismissed these important questions as

``making a play for political advantage in the middle of a war.''

Now, listen to that. The Vice President of the United States has

dismissed these important questions as ``making a play for political

advantage in the middle of a war.'' How about that?

Perhaps the Vice President should question White House aides about

using war for political advantage. For example, on January 19, 2002,

the Washington Post reported that Karl Rove--get this--advised

Republicans to ``make the president's handling of the war on terrorism

the centerpiece of their strategy to win back the Senate and keep

control of the House in this year's midterm elections.'' Does the Vice

President have anything to say about that?

Let me say that again. On January 19, 2002--I read about it at the

time; I did not miss it--the Washington Post reported that Karl Rove

advised Republicans to ``make the president's handling of the war on

terrorism the centerpiece of their strategy to win back the Senate and

keep control of the House in this year's midterm elections.'' That was

said on January 19, 2002. That was quoted in the Post on that date.

Yes, does the Vice President have anything to say about that?

The Vice President also lashed out at those who might deceive our

troops:

Now, listen to that. Was the Vice President trying to clarify some of

his past statements on Iraq? Was he?

On March 24, 2002, the Vice President said that Iraq ``is actively

pursuing nuclear weapons at this time.'' There was no doubt about it,

to listen to the Vice President--no doubt.

On August 26, 2002, the Vice President said:

Let me go back and read the quote. Let me repeat it.

On August 26, 2002, here is what the Vice President said:

Get that--

That is the end of the quotation.

On March 16, 2003, the Vice President said:

Do you remember that?

On March 16, 2003, there it is, the Vice President said:

Are these the ``pernicious falsehoods'' that the Vice President

believes our troops have been subjected to? That is, of course, a

rhetorical question. Far from questioning his own statements about the

war in Iraq, the Vice President's comments are a ham-handed attempt to

squelch the questions that the American people out there are asking

about the administration's policies in Iraq. The American people should

not be cowed. They should not be intimidated. And Senators should not

be intimidated by these attempts to intimidate. The American people

should not allow the subject to be changed from the war in Iraq to

partisan sniping in Washington.

Instead, the American people must raise their voices--hear us--the

American people should raise their voices--hear us, listen to us--the

American people must raise their voices even louder to ask the

administration the same simple questions: What is your policy for Iraq?

Answer that. What is your policy? Is it stay the course? When will the

war be over? How many more lives will this war cost? When will our

troops return home?

Mr. President, the holiday season is almost upon us. Americans will

soon sit down at their Thanksgiving tables. They will gather together

to give thanks to Almighty God, give thanks to Him for the blessings

that have been bestowed upon America's families. As we gather, there

will be an empty seat at many tables. Some chairs will be empty because

a service member is serving his or her country in a faraway land. Other

seats will be empty as a silent tribute to those who will never, never

return.

Each of these troops has fought to protect our freedoms, including

the freedom of Americans to ask questions--yes, the freedom to ask

questions. Our troops have fought for that freedom--people back home,

their families, might ask questions, their friends might ask

questions--the freedom to ask questions of their Government, the

people's Government.

The whole picture, the truth is that the continued occupation of Iraq

only serves to drive that country closer to civil war. They do not want

us there. They do not want us there.

How would you feel, Senators, how would you feel if our country were

invaded by another country? You would want them out. You would do

anything you could to get them out. American troops are now perceived

as occupiers, not as liberators. The longer we stay, the more dangerous

Iraq becomes, and the more likely it is we will drive the future

government further from a democratic republic and closer to religious

fundamentalism and, not insignificantly, the more American and Iraqi

lives will be lost--forever.

I, for one, believe that it is time to say ``well done''--``well

done''--to our brave fighting men and women. May God bless them one and

all. Let us say, job well done, and start to bring the troops home.

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

quorum.