Mr. President, I have seen the television reports and the

newspaper articles, and I have spoken with people who recently returned

from Iraq. I have seen the escalating violence and the chaos that has

engulfed parts of that country.

And like all Americans I have watched the death toll of our young men

and women in uniform pass 1000. It is now more than 1050, with many

thousands more who have been grievously wounded.

Yet to hear the President and Vice President talk, one would think

that everything is going well. The President uses words like

and There is no question that all of us here wish that were true, but

unfortunately the rosy picture that the President paints on the

campaign trail is misleading and wildly off base.

Even worse, the President's statements are contradicted by

knowledgeable officials in his Administration, by leading Republicans

in the Senate, and by a growing number of national security experts

within his own administration.

Here are a few examples: Secretary of State Powell said that the

situation in Iraq is General Abizaid, the top U.S.

military commander in Iraq, said

he said

Senator Hagel said

And, according to a

recent article in the Washington Post, a lengthening list of career

military, intelligence and State Department officials believe that Iraq

is a mess and things are getting even worse, raising the specter of

civil war.

Faced with mounting evidence that things are going from bad to worse

in Iraq, what does the President do?

First, he attacks the messenger of the bad news by calling the

National Intelligence Estimate Next, he ignores the

problem by repeating the same old platitudes and wildly-optimistic

rhetoric. Then he and his political allies accuse those who dare to

disagree of giving aid and comfort to the terrorists. When all else

fails, the President engages in a time-honored tradition here in

Washington: He changes the subject and deflects attention.

This President and Vice-President are masters at changing the

subject. They have attacked John Kerry's distinguished military record,

even though neither of them saw combat and many others in

the administration used family connections or deferments to avoid

military service altogether. In fact, when asked about serving in

Vietnam Vice President Cheney said that he

Imagine what the President's campaign would be saying if John Kerry

had said that.

Why do the President and Vice-President constantly change the subject

when asked to explain why things are going so badly in Iraq? The answer

is simple. They have been consistently wrong about Iraq, and the

results speak for themselves.

The President was wrong about weapons of mass destruction, which cut

short the U.N. weapons inspections and got us into Iraq in the first

place. The Duelfer report found that Iraq got rid of its weapons of

mass destruction more than a decade ago, that Saddam Hussein did not

have the means to develop a nuclear weapon, and that the U.N.

inspections were working. Yet the White House insists that this

devastating report by its own export somehow supports the President's

decision to go to war.

The Vice President was wrong about our being greeted as liberators.

Think about that statement, and compare it to the daily--actually,

hourly--attacks against our troops in Iraq today.

The President was wrong about More than 900

Americans have died since that famous photo op on the aircraft carrier.

The President was not only wrong, but it is hard to imagine what he

was thinking, when he told the insurgents in Iraq to

The President was wrong about Iraqi oil revenues paying for the

reconstruction. It is American taxpayers who are paying most of the

costs.

And the President acts as if everything is on track for Iraqi

elections in January even as the insurgency grows steadily worse and

Secretary Rumsfeld is talking about holding elections in only parts of

the country.

Despite being consistently wrong, the President's strategy stays the

same--put the best face on it, insist that everything is going

according to plan even though there is no plan, and attack the

patriotism of anyone who dares to question or to criticize.

They have tried to keep the media from publishing photographs of the

planeloads of flag-draped coffins of Americans who have died in Iraq.

They rarely even mention the casualties--American or Iraqi--since

that, of course, would mean having to acknowledge the terrible price

that is being paid day after day.

They treated the Abu Ghraib prison scandal as an aberration--the work

of a few rogue recruits.

They have done their best to hide the policies to subvert the law

that were approved at the highest levels of government, and the fact

that Abu Ghraib was only one of several locations where foreign

prisoners were humiliated, tortured, denied the most basic human

rights, and even murdered.

They shut down distribution of a key security report, issued daily by

a U.S. contractor--which U.S. personnel in Iraq have relied on for

their own safety--because the news of escalating violence in these

reports did not square with the spin being put out by the Pentagon and

the White House.

Just as the President ignored those who predicted the widening anti-

American insurgency, he has sugar-coated the rebuilding of Iraq.

A year ago, he asked the Congress to appropriate $19 billion

immediately, in fact so immediately that he resisted every amendment

designed to ensure the aid dollars would be well spent.

The President opposed my amendment to put Secretary Powell in charge

of the reconstruction in Iraq, causing the Department of Defense to run

the biggest nation-building venture since the Marshall Plan. And they

bungled it miserably.

The President opposed an amendment that would have at least required

that the aid be paid for out of the President's tax cuts for the

wealthiest Americans--not left for our children and grandchildren.

The President opposed an amendment that would have created tough

criminal penalties for war profiteering in Iraq.

The President refused to consider any alternative approaches. His

attitude was And look at what a mess it has

gotten us into. It has been nearly a year since the Iraq supplemental

was signed into law, and only $1 billion of the $19 billion has been

spent.

Of those funds, it is estimated that only 27 cents of every dollar

has gone to benefit the Iraqi people. The rest has

ended up in the pockets of high-priced contractors and consultants, and

to pay for insurance and security and other overhead costs.

There are serious consequences resulting from this administration's

handling of the chaos in Iraq. One, which all Senators are increasingly

hearing about from our constituents, is the possibility of a return to

the draft. If Iraq continues on its downward spiral, there is growing

concern that it may be necessary at some point to reinstate military

conscription. I oppose returning to a military draft, I do not believe

it is necessary, and I believe it would lessen our military

effectiveness.

Yet the President needs to acknowledge to the American people that

our entire military forces, including the active Army, the Reserves,

and the National Guard, are stretched very thin right now because of

the choices the President has made. The military is finding it

difficult to get new recruits and has resorted to a backdoor draft,

forcing personnel to remain in the service through so-called stop-loss

orders.

The Pentagon at some point might decide that the only way to find new

recruits--unless we pursue more sensible policies--would be through a

draft. I sincerely hope not. This is only one of the many examples of

the life-and-death choices that the Nation faces in prudently

allocating our resources to combat terrorism.

A lot has been said about President Bush's consistency. His campaign

advertisements boast that he is a strong leader because

What good is consistency when it means sending 140,000 Americans into

a guerrilla war in a foreign land fueled by religious and ethnic

hatred, without justification?

What good is consistency when it means spending upwards of $200

billion on a policy that has not made us any safer, and that has turned

Iraq into a haven for terrorists eager to kill Americans who they see

as foreign invaders out to destroy Islam itself?

What good is consistency when it squanders the good will that we need

to effectively fight terrorism, to build a real coalition so the United

States is not paying 90 percent of the cost and suffering 90 percent of

the casualties?

What good is consistency, when all it really amounts to is hollow

rhetoric that bears no relationship to the facts?

The President and Vice-President have been consistent alright--

consistently wrong. There is no value in that.

The President and Vice President constantly assert that we need to

`stay the course.' My answer to that is that if you are captain of the

ship and you are heading for an iceberg, you change course. You want to

get to the same destination, but you do not want to plow into the

iceberg to get there.

It is this President's rigid adherence to a misguided ideology that

has gotten us into deep, deep trouble in Iraq.

The American people deserve better. They deserve competence and they

deserve honesty. They deserve leaders who know the difference between a

political decision, and the right decision.