Madam President, I believe we have a very fine Armed

Services Committee. I have now been honored to serve on that committee

for a number of years. With regard to this year's authorization bill,

we have had 35 hearings in the committee or subcommittee. We have

undertaken to deal with complex issues facing our military. The

chairman and our committee have responded repeatedly to the requests of

Democratic Senators to conduct a plethora of hearings dealing with any

problems they can find, such as prisoner issues and that kind of thing.

We have also conducted those in the Judiciary Committee, in the

Intelligence Committee, in the House committees also. We have done

quite a lot, frankly, as we have gone forward.

I think it is time for us to give the highest priority, however, to

assisting our men and women in uniform, men and women we have sent in

harm's way to execute the policy of the United States of America--a

policy that was adopted by the House of Representatives, a policy that

was adopted by more than a three-fourths vote of this body. A majority

of both parties voted to adopt these policies to execute force, to

remove Saddam Hussein unless he complied with the U.N. resolutions, and

to otherwise carry out our roles and responsibilities.

We have done that, but we need to focus on how to help those soldiers

we have sent be successful in creating a good and stable and democratic

government in Iraq. It is important for us, it is important for the

world, and, most of all, it is important for the people there who have

suffered the greatest oppression for so many years.

I think our committees have served well. I think we have worked at

these issues well. We have now prepared a bill, a legislation piece,

that will empower our military to be able to do their job better. I

could not be more pleased than to serve under Chairman Warner and his

leadership in the committee. He works collegially with all members of

the Senate in our committee to move legislation along effectively. He

has worked hard to get this bill where it is today. Without strong

leadership, frankly, I am not sure we would be here today.

We have passed the Defense appropriations bill, but we have not

passed the Defense authorization bill. It would be unfortunate if we

were not able to do so this year. Hopefully, if our colleagues will

cooperate, if they have an amendment and bring it down and present it,

they will be able to have all the amendments that have been promised,

and we can get something done. We certainly do not need to delay or

drag these matters out.

I think this issue of our involvement in Iraq needs to be recalled a

bit--how we came to vote. They say--some do--there were lies that led

us into this war. But all of us talked about this possible conflict for

months--months. We knew it was coming. The President talked about it.

We talked about it openly on the floor.

In fact, in the 1990s, when President Clinton was President, we voted

and established a policy for the United States of America. That policy

was that we would effect a regime change in Iraq. And up until these

hostilities occurred--for years--American and British planes, enforcing

the no-fly zones to keep Saddam Hussein from oppressing the Kurds and

the Shiites, flew missions over Iraq, and were fired upon, sometimes on

a daily if not weekly basis.

We dropped bombs and missiles on them in retaliation, regularly, for

years. In fact, we were in a state of hostility because Saddam Hussein

had failed to comply with the agreements he made with the United

Nations in 1991 when he was kicked out of Kuwait after he had invaded

his neighbor--a peaceful, decent member of the world community.

He attacked them to seize their oil and to increase his power. We had

to create a world coalition to give him a demand to remove himself from

Kuwait. He refused to do so, and GEN Norman Schwarzkopf led the

coalition forces that defeated his army and removed him from Kuwait. He

made agreements so we would not continue marching on to Baghdad to get

our hands around his neck. He made these commitments to the U.N. and

agreements were reached. He did not comply with them. He was in

violation of 16 different resolutions of the United Nations.

So all that was there. Also, 9/11 had occurred. And we knew he was

violating the Oil-for-Food Program--a program that was set up to allow

him to sell oil, which was being embargoed because of his violation of

the rules and regulations of the U.N., and it allowed him to do that if

the money would be utilized to take care of food and medicines for the

people of Iraq because we wanted to help them.

I have been to Iraq three times. I know the chairman has been there

numerous times. You can see the palaces he built with that money that

was supposed to feed his people. We know he was reconstituting his

military. He declared he had been the victor in that war, not the

loser. It was clear he was reconstituting his military power because he

desired and had not given up his fantasy ambition to dominate the

Middle East.

These were the forces that were at work. These were strategic

realities that occurred at that time. The Economist magazine wrote an

editorial not long before we voted, and it talked about how the embargo

was failing, how, in fact, the embargo was really hurting the people of

Iraq more than it was hurting Saddam Hussein, but that it was falling

apart; that Saddam Hussein had a systematic plan to break the embargo,

and nations, such as France and others, were working behind the scenes

to undermine the effect of that embargo, and that if we did not do

something pretty soon, he would be unleashed again. They said the

question simply is, Do we turn him loose or do

we go to war? Our vote is to go to war, said the London-based Economist

magazine.

So those are the decisions we were dealing with. Every intelligence

agency in the world concluded that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass

destruction. I am not aware of any that did not believe he had some.

Certainly, that is what the President of the United States was told.

Certainly, that is what the Members of the Senate were told.

But the more troubling, deeper, strategic imperative, to deal with

Saddam Hussein, was what galvanized the attention of the President and,

I think, of the Senate. When I looked at my remarks from the time I had

discussed my decision to support a war in Iraq, I hardly mentioned

weapons of mass destruction.

It was this idea--that Saddam Hussein had not been faithful to his

agreements, that he was determined to get out of those agreements, that

he was determined to reconstitute his military, that he could be a

threat to the region and that he could easily, and we thought he did,

have weapons of mass destruction that he would use. We know he used a

weapon of mass destruction, poison gas, against his own people, the

Kurds. We know he used it. So it would have been unthinkable to think

he had none at the time. Whatever happened to it, I don't know.

We made a commitment in this Nation to remove Saddam Hussein, and

that has been done. We have had two elections in Iraq toward

establishing a democratic government. For that, I am most proud and

hopeful that this new election in December, which will create a new

permanent government, will help further to demonstrate the confidence

the Iraqi people have in that government and make attacks upon it even

more difficult to sustain and defend.

I ask my colleagues to remember this one thing--it is still a

dangerous place there. Our soldiers are there because we sent them. We

asked them to go there to execute the policy we in the Senate voted

for. We ought not do things and say things out of political anger or

partisanship that are exaggerated, unfair to the President or our

troops and how they conduct themselves, that puts their lives more at

risk and makes their job more difficult.

I am pleased that this authorization bill came out of Chairman

Warner's committee unanimously with a bipartisan vote. As we go forward

with it, we will improve the quality of our military, their

effectiveness, and help execute more effectively the policies we have

established.