Mr. President, this morning's newspapers across America

have lead stories that I think are a grim reminder to us of the reality

of life in Washington and the challenges we face. The lead stories in

most newspapers across America relate to a vote on the Senate floor

yesterday. I believe it was a historic vote. By a vote of 79 to 19,

Republican and Democratic Senators said it is time for change in this

administration's policy in Iraq.

Certainly, when you look at the statistics, it is understandable:

Over 2,060 of our best and bravest soldiers have lost their lives in

Iraq. Over 15,000 have been gravely wounded, some of them with injuries

that will change their lives. And, of course, 25,000 or 30,000 innocent

Iraqis--innocent Iraqis--have died during the course of this war.

This war has gone on for over 3 years, after the administration

promised us, in the words of Secretary Rumsfeld, that he could not

imagine we would be there for more than 6 months. It is now beyond 3

years; no end in sight.

The American people are frustrated, as they should be; frustrated by

the fact that this administration made a case for the war in Iraq that

was false. You can recall it, as I do, the President, the Vice

President, the Secretary of Defense, Condoleezza Rice, even Secretary

of State Powell, making statements about the existence of weapons of

mass destruction in Iraq that were a threat to the Middle East and to

the world that could easily fall into the hands of terrorists;

statements over and over again about nuclear weapons, Condoleezza Rice

talking about mushroom clouds that we could fear if we did not invade

Iraq and stop Saddam Hussein; and, of course, linking our national

tragedy of 9/11 with Saddam Hussein, saying that somehow he had

connections with al-Qaida.

Well, it turned out all of those things were false--every single one

of them--so false to the point where the President had to do something

I do not think has ever been done in the history of this Nation. He had

to apologize and recant a remark he made in his State of the Union

Address about this yellow cake coming from Niger in Africa so the

Iraqis could use it to make nuclear weapons. It turned out it was a

phony. It was not true.

So we were drawn into a war under false pretenses. We all knew how

terrible Saddam Hussein was, but we certainly came to understand that

the specific reasons given for the invasion of Iraq turned out not to

be true, one after the other. Weapons of mass destruction, nuclear

weapons, connections with al-Qaida, yellow cake from Niger, so-called

mobile biological weapons laboratories--all of these things turned out

to be totally false.

It is understandable the American people are concerned about it

because if you measure an abuse of power by a government, could there

be an abuse of power any worse than misleading the people of a country

into believing that a war is necessary?

That is, of course, why the Senate Democrats took to the floor just 2

weeks ago and demanded that the promised investigation of this

administration for the potential misuse of intelligence be completed by

the Senate Intelligence Committee. It has been over 20 months--20

months--since we were promised that this honest investigation would

take place, and nothing has happened.

There have been small parts of it that have been addressed, but I

think we all know what the story is. The Senate Intelligence Committee,

under the control of the President's party, does not want to open that

door and look inside. Well, why should we? Why should we reflect and

dwell on the past? Some say: Let's look forward. But if we do not get

to the heart of this issue, the truth of the matter, if we are not

honest with the American people and straightforward as to what happened

leading up to that invasion of Iraq, then I think we are derelict in

our constitutional responsibilities.

This Congress is designed as one branch of Government to serve as

oversight of the executive branch of Government. The failure of the

Senate Intelligence Committee, for more than 20 months, to produce this

intelligence analysis, which they promised, is proof positive they are

dragging their feet, unwilling to accept the responsibility which they

have publicly proclaimed.

So yesterday we passed on the floor, by a vote of 79 to 19, a clear

statement to this administration that the policy in Iraq must change.

No. 1, we said the year 2006 will not just be another year in Iraq,

another year of casualties, another year of death, another year of our

despondency over whether this is going to end well. It will be a year

of significant transition. That is what the Democratic amendment said.

That is what was adopted.

Secondly, we served notice on Iraqis that it is their responsibility,

not the American responsibility, to secure their own country and to

build a political coalition that can defeat the insurgency. I had hoped

we would have even stronger language to say to the Iraqis: We are not

here indefinitely. We want to bring our troops home. The Republican

side watered down that language, but the message was still clear.

The third element is important as well. Accountability is essential.

This administration must be held accountable for whether we were

prepared not only for the invasion of Iraq but for what occurred

afterwards. You know what happened afterwards. Secretary Rumsfeld

visited with our troops, and a soldier came forward, held up his hand

to ask a question, and said: Mr. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, why is

it that we soldiers have to scavenge through junk piles to find pieces

of armor to stick on these humvees to protect ourselves? A moment of

great embarrassment for the Secretary, but I am glad that soldier had

the courage to stand up and say what we already knew.

We were not prepared. We sent our troops into combat without the

necessary humvee armor, without the necessary body armor, without the

necessary protection for our helicopters. It was done, and in some

respects too late

and too little. We lost American soldiers' lives and many were injured

because we did not have the right equipment in place.

So now what we are saying is that this administration must be held

accountable, to report to Congress every 90 days to tell us in Congress

the progress that is being made in protecting our troops, in preparing

the Iraqis to defend their own country, in moving that country toward

stability, and in moving us to the point where American soldiers can

start coming home. That was passed yesterday, 79 to 19.

As the President stood on Veterans Day and in an unprecedented

political speech attacked his Democratic critics for saying they did

not agree with his war policy, this Senate, on a bipartisan basis

yesterday, 79 to 19, said to the President: Your policy in Iraq must

change. We need to start looking to bring American soldiers home. And

2006 is the year to begin that process in earnest.

That is why it was a historic vote. Of course, as we look at the

statements made in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, there is a

recurring theme. It turns out that the major sources of intelligence

that were passing through the administration and to the American people

were passing across the desk of Vice President Cheney.

Lieutenant Colonel Wilkerson, chief of staff to Secretary of State

Colin Powell, referred to a cabal, a cabal led by Vice President Cheney

and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, a cabal which set the stage for the

invasion of Iraq. The man speaking was not a partisan Democrat. He was

the chief of staff to the Secretary of State in the Bush

administration, Colin Powell. I think it makes clear that throughout

the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, our Vice President, Richard

Cheney, was making statements that did not reflect the truth of what

was occurring in Iraq.

Repeatedly, he said Iraq had links to al-Qaida, and that was proven

false. Repeatedly, he said Iraq was an imminent threat to the United

States, and that was proven false. Repeatedly, Vice President Cheney

said Iraq was trying to acquire nuclear weapons, and that was proven

false.

On ``Meet the Press,'' on March 16, 2003, the Vice President said:

False.

In addition, there were statements made about whether Iraq was trying

to acquire uranium from Africa, statements made by the Vice President

which turned out to be false, and statements, of course, relative to

aluminum tubes. I knew something about that debate because as a member

of the Senate Intelligence Committee, I listened as the Department of

Defense and the Department of Energy debated whether these aluminum

tubes were really all about nuclear weapons. There was a real division

within the administration, and I would walk outside the Senate

Intelligence Committee room and hear statements made by the Vice

President saying: There is no debate. It is all about nuclear weapons.

Now, I could not repeat what I had heard in the Senate Intelligence

Committee. I was prohibited from saying it publicly. I knew what he

said was false. It is one of the reasons I voted against that

resolution to go to war in Iraq.

But again and again the Vice President was taking information,

intelligence information, giving it to the American people selectively,

making certain that it was always the strongest spin toward the

immediate need for a war, and that is how we ended up in the position

we are in today.

It is a lot easier to get into a war than it is to get out of one.

And we have learned that with the cost in human lives and the cost to

America's Treasury.