Mr. President, I will spend a few minutes talking about

Iraq this afternoon. I start with my conclusion and then go into the

body of my remarks after I state what that conclusion is.

The administration's position that we will stay as long as the Iraqis

need us to is too open-ended and sends the wrong message to Iraqis that

their failure to make the necessary political compromises will not

affect how long we stay, and it makes it less likely that those

compromises will be reached.

Our military commanders have repeatedly stated there is no purely

military solution in Iraq and that a political settlement is a

necessary element for success. In view of that, I believe, unless the

Iraqis achieve a political settlement by the end of this year, we must

consider a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, and

we must make that point clearly to the Iraqis now while they are in the

process of deciding whether to come together through consensus.

The Iraqi National Assembly approved a draft Constitution on August

28, despite objections from the Sunni Arabs over provisions relating to

federalism that most Sunnis believe will disadvantage the areas of

Sunni concentration. Those provisions essentially would enable the

Kurds in the North and the Shiites in the South to establish autonomous

regions in which most of the country's oil reserves are located. Sunni

Arab voters who chose to boycott the last election, and thus were

underrepresented in the National Assembly and on the constitutional

drafting committee, registered in large numbers for the referendum on

the Constitution scheduled for October 15, with the apparent objective

of rejecting the existing draft. If two-thirds of the voters in 3 or

more of Iraq's 18 provinces vote no, the Constitution will be rejected,

and the elections scheduled for December will elect a new National

Assembly, which will start the constitutional drafting process anew.

Additionally, there are reports that firebrand Shiite cleric Muqtada

al-Sadr will exhort his followers to reject the Constitution because he

favors a unified Iraq, and he sees the existing draft leading to the

dissolution of Iraq as a single State. Muqtada al-Sadr has a huge

following in Baghdad, which lacks oil resources, and thus is

disadvantaged in a manner similar to the predominantly Sunni Arab

provinces.

Meanwhile, the administration is urging the American people to ``stay

the course.'' That is a bumper sticker slogan not a strategy.

Secretary Rice, among others, has stated we will be in Iraq as long

as we are needed, adding no incentive, therefore, to Iraqis to reach a

political settlement. An open-ended commitment to keep our troops in

Iraq, even in the absence of a political settlement by the Iraqis,

flies in the face of our military commander's assessment that there can

be no military success in the absence of an Iraqi political coming

together.

U.S. forces, particularly the U.S. Army, are stretched thin, despite

the unprecedented use of a large segment of our National Guard in Iraq.

Their lengthy and repeated deployments mean that much of a unit's time

is devoted to recovery from a previous deployment and preparation for

the next one, thus leaving little time for training to develop war-

fighting capabilities or sustaining readiness for other contingencies.

These actions, in turn, mean less time at home for soldiers with their

families and lower morale, which threatens recruiting and retention.

The level of participation of the Armed Forces of other countries has

been disappointing, leaving the United States to bear most of the

burden. The absence of forces from Muslim countries is deeply

disappointing, since the outcome in Iraq has effects throughout the

world and also impacts the future direction of Islam. While it would

likely be unwise for Iraq's neighbors to supply any forces, the failure

of the Arab states to express their condolences over the recent

stampede, in which almost 1,000 Iraqis were killed, was noted angrily

by Iraq's President and Prime Minister, as was the lack of Arab

diplomatic representation in Baghdad.

The administration should take advantage of the presence of so many

national leaders at the United Nations later this week to press nations

with substantial Muslim populations, other than those neighboring Iraq,

to send forces to Iraq. The President should also make clear to the

Iraqi leaders that we expect them to extend invitations to such

nations.

Speaking as a Senator, I delivered that message to President Talabani

this afternoon in Senator Frist's office. It is a message that I

delivered on a number of occasions and directly in the past to Iraqi's

leaders in Iraq.

U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad wrote in the Washington Post that

one of the two standards to evaluate the Iraqi Constitution is ``its

potential to be a national compact that brings Iraqis together and

undermines the insurgency.''

He went on to say:

He continues:

But Ambassador Khalilzad failed to mention that there is another

scenario; namely, that the Sunni Arabs vote overwhelmingly against the

Constitution but fall short of achieving a two-thirds negative vote in

three provinces. In such a case, the violence and insurrection is more

likely to continue and even civil war could result. Moreover, the

Ambassador's words fail to display urgency that Iraqis reach a

political settlement and unwisely suggest the U.S. forces may stay in

Iraq indefinitely until legal consensus is achieved.

Despite the National Assembly's approval of the draft Constitution,

the Iraqis continue to negotiate and make changes to the draft. For

example, the Washington Post reported on September 6 that President

Talabani said in his statement that he had agreed to changes that would

ease concerns among Sunni Arabs that the wording of the draft loosened

Iraqi ties to the Arab world. And Reuters reported on Sunday that the

United Nations is unable to start printing Iraq's draft Constitution

because the National Assembly had not yet certified the text and now

has set Sunday, September 18, as the date by which any changes to the

draft Constitution can still be met.

This week provides a critically important opportunity for the

administration to make clear to the Iraqis that U.S. forces cannot be

in Iraq indefinitely. We must make it clear to the Iraqis that they

have a limited time to achieve a political settlement and that if they

do not do so, one way or another, by the end of this year, we will

consider a timetable for withdrawal of our forces.

Speaking as one Senator, again, I delivered that viewpoint to

President Talabani in Senator Frist's office earlier this afternoon.

We cannot write a constitution for Iraq, and we should not dictate

the compromises they need to make to achieve a political settlement.

But we do control whether our troops stay in Iraq and how long they

stay.

The framework for agreement appears to be at hand. Some Shiite

leaders reportedly have come to realize the existing draft of the

constitution, which grants a high degree of control over natural

resources to autonomous regions, would apply to water resources as well

as to oil resources. That could negatively impact on the amount and

quality of water available to predominantly Shiite areas. The Shiites

are mainly located in the south, downstream of both the Kurds in the

north and the Sunni Arabs in the center, who are able to dominate the

flow of Iraq's two great rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates.

If the Shiites give up their ability to form an autonomous region or

regions,

or agree to greater control by the central government over the

country's natural resources, the Sunni Arabs might then be able to

support a revised draft constitution which would be a critical step in

achieving a political settlement.

The administration needs to move quickly. Both President Talabani and

Prime Minister Jaafari--the leading Kurd and Shiite, respectively, in

the transitional Iraqi Government--are in Washington this week and

available for straight talk from the President and his Cabinet.

The United States has done and is doing more than our part in Iraq.

It is up to the Iraqis now to step up to the political compromises

which need to be made if Iraq has a realistic chance to defeat the

insurgents and to become a nation.