Mr. President, this week, just days before the end of the

fiscal year, we are going to consider the Defense appropriations bill.

This is an important bill for America's national security. The

chairman, ranking member, and their staffs worked long and hard on it.

I appreciate their commitment and willingness to work with both sides.

Before we even take up this bill, however, we could and should have

voted on the Defense authorization bill, which includes critical policy

matters crucial to national security importance. As hard as it may be

to understand in the midst of a war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the

Republican leadership in the Senate pulled the Defense authorization

bill from the calendar in July and replaced it with a bill that was

requested by the National Rifle Association.

The gun lobby wanted a bill to excuse them from liability in lawsuits

and the Republican leadership in the Senate felt that was more

important than the Defense authorization bill, which considered massive

policy questions involving hundreds of thousands of men and women in

uniform and veterans.

I do not understand that thinking. The appropriations bill we will

hopefully take up this week includes $50 billion for military

operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. I said, at the start of the war in

Iraq, that while I felt the invasion was a mistake, I would not deny

one penny to our troops in the field for body armor, medical supplies,

air support, ammunition, equipment, or any other costs associated with

our forces and their security.

I have always thought that if it were my son or daughter in uniform,

I would not shortchange them one penny, so that they could come home

safely with their mission accomplished, and that is still my pledge.

The American people should be aware of what this war is costing us.

First and foremost, it continues to cost American lives. This month,

while most Americans were glued to their televisions focusing on

Katrina and Rita, the hurricanes that struck us in the Gulf of Mexico,

37 more American soldiers died in Iraq.

Last month, while Congress was in recess, 85 Americans were killed in

Iraq. All told, 1,921 Americans have been killed as of today and 14,755

have been wounded. Many have suffered devastating permanent injuries.

Senator Harry Reid and his wife Landra went to Bethesda Medical

Center yesterday. Senator Reid came to tell us this morning the sad

experience he had there, where he saw a young soldier in a wheelchair

who had clearly been maimed by this war in ways that

are hard to believe. Having lost both legs and suffered a head injury,

it is clear that his life will never, ever be the same. Senator Reid

said to us again at lunch, he cannot get this image from his mind.

When we hear of injured soldiers, we should not believe that these

are superficial injuries which can be easily overlooked. Many of those

are life changing, life transforming.

This war has cost us in so many other ways as well. Sadly, it has

undermined our war on terrorism, while it has created a new front in

this conflict and an advanced training ground for terrorists. It has

stretched our Armed Forces, especially our Army, National Guard, and

Reserves, placing enormous strains on service members and their

families. It has diminished our national credibility. That loss of

credibility makes it harder now for the administration to go to the

United Nations and present information that is needed about security in

the world. Some of the presentations made in the lead up to the war in

Iraq have cost us dearly in terms of our credibility.

A nuclear Iran is a terrible threat, but I know much of the world is

probably wondering if they believe any photographs that we produce

relative to that threat in Iran after the discredited photos before our

invasion of Iraq. Some Americans probably are asking the same question,

and their doubts are another unfortunate product of this conflict.

There are enormous costs to this war. We have already spent over $196

billion in Iraq. This week or next we are likely to approve another $50

billion, which will not cover the cost of the war next year. It is a

downpayment for the beginning of those costs. We are currently spending

close to $5 billion a month in Iraq, and we are acting on this bill

this week in part because of the report that the Pentagon is growing

short of money. The new fiscal year starts in several days, and that

makes it virtually inevitable that at some point next year, maybe as

early as next spring, we will be voting another supplemental

appropriation to fund the war in Iraq.

I think simply staying the course under these circumstances is no

longer an option. The costs in blood and treasure are too high and the

progress in Iraq is not there.

The costs of this war have been brought home to my State. We have

lost 77 of our sons and daughters in this war, and by one calculation

it has cost the taxpayers in the city of Chicago alone $2.2 billion.

Last week, the Chicago city council passed a resolution addressing the

war in Iraq. They did so not because they believe that they are in

charge of foreign policy but because they wanted to speak their minds.

The city council's resolution honors the men and women who serve and

those who have been killed or wounded. It states that through their

service and sacrifice, our troops have substantially accomplished the

stated purpose of the United States of giving the people of Iraq a

reasonable opportunity to decide their own future.

The resolution concludes that we should, therefore, make an orderly

and rapid withdrawal from Iraq. That is the conclusion of the Chicago

city council; it is not mine. But I sure understand the motivations and

I sure hear many people back in Illinois saying exactly those words. I

think millions of Americans understand and share the sentiments.

Polls show that 63 percent of the people in this country believe we

should withdraw all or some of our troops from Iraq. This past weekend,

at least 100,000 people, maybe many more, marched on Washington to call

for a way out of Iraq. They came from all over the country and from

many walks of life. I do not think a rapid withdrawal is in the best

interests of Iraq or the United States, but I understand why they came,

and I understand why they are trying to raise this issue. It troubles

me that we can go for days on end in the Senate without ever talking

about the war in Iraq that is so much in the forefront of the minds of

the American people.

I bring these charts to the floor as a reminder that as our daily

business goes apace, Americans are losing their lives and suffering

terrible injuries.

America cannot simply stay the course in Iraq. The administration

claims its strategy is working, but there is very little evidence of

that. The insurgents are getting more violent, more lethal. Their

attacks are killing more people. That is the nature of insurgency. It

is an insurgency against foreign occupiers. History says that this can

go on for a long time. Do we possess more fire power than these

insurgents or terrorists? We sure do, but we alone cannot use that

military fire power to be successful.

Our military leaders tell us one cannot score a military victory over

an insurgency. It is going to take a political victory. The only people

who can defeat or win over Iraqi insurgents are the Iraqis themselves,

not our brave soldiers. The only people who can build a sustainable

government in Iraq are the Iraqis, and those military and political

developments must be linked or neither will succeed.

That linkage is something we were never able to accomplish in Vietnam

so many decades ago. What we saw instead in South Vietnam was a long

line of corrupt governments with little legitimacy and even less

popular support.

We still wait to see whether the Government of Iraq will be up to

this challenge. In a few weeks, the people of Iraq will vote on a draft

constitution. I hope that the October referendum on this constitution

encourages a vigorous and peaceful political process and healthy voter

turnout from all sectors of Iraqi society--Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, and

others. One vote does not make a democracy. Regardless of the outcome

of the referendum, it is critical that the same people who turn out to

vote engage in the state-building that must follow.

This week, according to the schedule, we are taking up the Defense

appropriations bill. For the first time, more than 3 years into this

bill, we are finally trying to budget for at least some of the costs of

this war. Any other time we passed it by emergency supplemental

appropriations.

May I say a word about that for a moment. Is it not curious that when

it comes to rebuilding the devastation from Hurricane Katrina and

Hurricane Rita, that there are many who are arguing that we need to cut

spending in other programs, such as health care for the poor or

prescription drugs for senior citizens, to pay for that reconstruction

in America? There was not a single member of the other political party,

that I know of, who came forward and argued for setoffs when it came to

the reconstruction of Iraq. Is it not odd that we do not need to set

off by cutting spending to rebuild Iraq but now many of these same

Congressmen and Senators are saying that before we can help rebuild

America we have to cut critical programs for the needy people of this

country? I do not understand their logic. It is certainly inconsistent.

We cannot budget for the human costs of war, and we cannot put a

number on the possible strategic costs, but we should at least try to

account for the fiscal price tag of this conflict. We have to measure

those hundreds of billions of dollars which have been spent and will be

spent against what we need in America to make our Nation strong.

Last month, when Katrina struck, a third of the Louisiana National

Guard was deployed to Iraq. So was much of their equipment. These

deployments have had real homeland security consequences. We have

learned that we were not only unprepared for Katrina, but we have to

learn the lessons of Katrina to be prepared, God forbid another

disaster, either natural or terrorist-inspired, should occur. We owe it

to our taxpayers to measure those costs. We must also measure the costs

of war against the progress Iraqis are making, and I do not see a lot

of progress, though I hope that changes.

One thousand nine hundred and twenty-one American soldiers have died

in Iraq. Before this number hits 2,000, we have a duty to give our

troops and the American people an honest appraisal of the situation and

a clear plan to bring the troops home.

When the President of Iraq, Mr. Talabani, announces that by the end

of this year, in a few months, 50,000 American troops can come home,

the Iraqis are ready to take over that responsibility, let us hold him

to that promise. Let us hold him to that responsibility. Unless and

until the Iraqis feel that they have to step up to defend their own

country, American lives will continue to be lost every single day. We

owe our fighting men and women leadership, vision and direction.