Mr. President, as I come to the floor this morning to

share my concerns about this country's disastrous policies in Iraq, our

Nation is mourning the unimaginable loss of 32 people in the tragic and

senseless shootings at Virginia Tech. The thoughts and prayers of every

American are with the victims of this horrific episode, the deadliest

shooting this country has ever seen. We are only beginning to learn

exactly what happened yesterday. We may never know why it happened, but

what we know for certain is that in our shared grief we will find

shared resolve to care for the wounded, to comfort the families and

friends of those who died, to support this university and its

community, and to search for answers and hope this tragedy may never be

repeated.

I have been a member of the Senate now for just over 100 days. I am

here, and many of my freshman colleagues are here, because the people

of Rhode Island, like millions of other people across this country,

looked at the war in Iraq and saw something that needed to change. They

saw hundreds of billions of dollars spent, much of it wasted on

reconstruction contracts that were sloppily managed or ill-advised.

They saw one after another in a succession of retired generals

protesting the failed strategy in Iraq and arguing for a different

course. They saw reports that the Bush administration had misused and

politicized our national intelligence services to press a case for war

that did not exist. They read books, chronicling a heartbreaking series

of mistakes and misjudgments. They saw tens of thousands of American

soldiers return home grievously injured, and mourned more than 3,000

men and women who will never return home.

The country saw one of the greatest foreign policy disasters of

American history and demanded a new direction. The American people

voted for change. They were sincere, sober, and correct in their

judgment, and this new Congress listened, but President Bush did

not. Instead of committing to redeploy our troops from Iraq, the

President chose to escalate this conflict. Now, instead of working with

this new Congress to forge a new strategy, a strategy worthy of the

sacrifices of our men and women in uniform, the President and Vice

President are on the attack--on the political attack--not against the

Iraqi leaders who are slow-walking us through this conflict in their

country, but against the American people who have rightly questioned

their failing policy. The question is this: How much longer will this

President refuse to listen?

Since joining the Senate just over 100 days ago, I have worked to put

pressure on the Bush administration to redeploy our troops from Iraq.

In mid-March, as a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, I

traveled to Iraq to get a firsthand look at the situation on the

ground, to see the hard work of our dedicated troops, and to talk with

our military commanders and with Iraqi political officials. In Baghdad,

our delegation met with several of the officers leading America's

military engagement in Iraq, including GEN David Petraeus, LTG Raymond

Odierno, and LTG Martin Dempsey, as well as members of our U.S. Embassy

country team. We also met with Mahmud al-Mashhadani, Speaker of the

Iraqi Parliament, and National Security Minister Shirwan al-Waili. In

my capacity as a member of the Intelligence Committee, I also met with

members of our Nation's intelligence staff and their Iraqi

counterparts.

In Fallujah, we spoke with GEN Walter E. Gaskin, Marine commander in

Anbar Province, and other commanders of the Marine Expeditionary Force.

I met three brave Rhode Islanders there: Kristie St. Jean from

Woonsocket, Christopher Tilson from Providence, and Anthony Paulo from

Westerly, all serving our Nation with dedication, courage, and honor.

On our return, we traveled through Germany to visit Landstuhl

Regional Medical Center near Ramstein Air Base where our soldiers,

sailors, marines, and airmen, badly injured in Iraq and Afghanistan,

are med-evac'd to receive critical medical care before their return

home. MAJ Andrew Risio, who hails from Ashaway, RI, is helping provide

care to our wounded soldiers in that facility.

The young men and women I met with in Iraq and their families have

made tremendous sacrifices, and their expert performance and can-do

attitude reinforced my pride in the American spirit. The security

posture we maintain around our military bases is strong, and our troops

are working hard to secure the cities and countryside of Iraq. The work

of our intelligence and Special Operations personnel, which often runs

nonstop through the night, is remarkable and exhibits a level of

professionalism in which every American can be very confident.

The achievements of our forces in Iraq are serious--and here is what

impressed me the most from our trip: So is their commitment that the

Iraqis must assume responsibility for the security and governance of

their own country. In nearly every briefing, at every level of command,

the message came loud and clear that our military is highly focused on

accomplishing a handover of security responsibilities so as to bring

our troops home. As a young soldier in mess hall told me, the Iraqis

``won't stand up until we start to stand back.''

I do believe the Iraqis need more motivation to stand up. For

instance, there is key legislation the Iraqi Parliament must pass that

our military commanders believe is necessary if this surge is to

succeed. They told me we cannot succeed in this military surge unless

it is accompanied by a political surge, an economic surge, and a

diplomatic surge. Critical measures to facilitate provincial elections,

regulation and revenue-sharing for the Iraqi oil industry, reversing

de-Beatification in favor of reunification, and restricting sectarian

militias are all legislative initiatives that have stalled.

Iraq must take action and move this legislation forward and step up

its own security presence. That will require real commitment and

urgency, Mr. President. And it would be putting it mildly to say I was

not reassured by the signals I received from our meetings with Iraqi

officials. There is a serious disconnect between the urgency of our

generals about this legislation, and the absence of urgency or energy

on the part of Iraqi officials. One soldier I met put it in simple,

homespun terms. He said: ``If your parents are willing to pay for the

movies and you don't have to spend your own money, or if you can get

your big sister to do your homework for you, who wants that to stop?''

It does have to stop and this Congress is taking action to make that

clear. I was proud to vote with a majority of the Senate to pass

binding bipartisan legislation to require the safe redeployment of our

brave troops beginning in 120 days, with the goal of having the vast

majority of our troops redeployed from Iraq by the end of March. I am

also a cosponsor of the recently introduced Feingold-Reid legislation

to continue to put pressure on the Bush administration to safely

redeploy our troops.

Only the kind of pressure a decision to redeploy creates will provide

the motivation needed for Iraq to take the necessary steps to assume

responsibility for its own governance and security. An announcement

that our troops will be leaving will encourage the Iraqis to step up

and take their security seriously, will discourage the insurgents, and

will send a message to the world community that stability in Iraq will

no longer be the responsibility of America alone.

Last week, I had the opportunity to take that message directly to the

Oval Office. In a meeting with President Bush and several of our

colleagues who had recently traveled to Iraq, I urged him to announce a

redeployment and a change of course was the strongest force he had in

his hands. I also gave the President letters sent to me from Rhode

Island folks with family members serving in Iraq. Those messages said

loudly and clearly that it is time to bring our troops home.

But rather than acting to change course, the President keeps playing

politics. He has threatened to veto legislation this Congress passed to

provide critically needed funding for our troops in the field. In our

meeting last week, he said he was prepared for what he called a

``classic political showdown.''

The question of what to do in Iraq is not a political fight between

President Bush and the Democrats in Congress. It is a struggle between

the President and the will and the good sense of the American people.

It is long past time that their voices were heard.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.