Mr. President, last night we had our first and only

conference committee meeting where all the members from both

Appropriations Committees who are on the conference committee,

including members on the House side, had an opportunity to come

together for their first gathering. I predict it will be the only

gathering. Everything else in that supplemental has been worked out

behind doors, and a lot of us were not privy to it until legislation

was proposed in the conference committee yesterday.

I am very disappointed in that piece of legislation. There is a huge

increase in the amount of dollars being spent to try to placate some of

those who may otherwise oppose the legislation.

But my main concern with that legislation is it has timelines and

benchmarks in it that are going to tend to micromanage the conflict in

Iraq. I think that is a bad idea. In fact, I have indicated I am not

willing to sign the conference report that is going to come out of that

particular committee because of the language in there that does lay

down timelines and benchmarks. That creates a problem for our

commanders in the field in Iraq.

Mr. President, it was not very many months ago the Senate unanimously

approved General Petraeus to head our efforts in Iraq. Many Members

have extolled the virtues of the general--his education, his

leadership, and his commitment to his soldiers.

Unfortunately, we are still confronted with the reality that some

want to tie General Petraeus's hands. Confusingly enough, they want to

reject the strategy General Petraeus has proposed in Iraq even before

he has been given the full opportunity to perform his mission.

I ask again: Why would we support him and recognize his stellar

career with a unanimous nomination vote but not give him the means to

get the job done? For what reason did my colleagues agree to send him

to Iraq as the commander of our forces? His strategy in Iraq was made

very clear, both publicly and privately, and yet we are not willing to

support it. It is vexing.

We need to avoid micromanaging the war from the floor of the Senate.

Let our Commander in Chief perform his duties, and let our military

leaders do their jobs. If we do not support them fully in the

supplemental bill, then I must continue to vote against any legislation

that sets arbitrary deadlines and thresholds in Iraq--and plead with my

colleagues to do the same.

We cannot afford to set a deadline and walk away from Iraq. The cost

of failure is too great to our future long-term national security. It

is in America's security interests to have an Iraq that can sustain,

govern, and defend itself. Too much is at stake to simply abandon Iraq

at this point. The price of failure is simply too great.

Let me remind my colleagues that we have seen terrible results from

political motives being placed above military necessities--the attempt

at rescuing the American Embassy hostages from Tehran, or Beirut in the

1980s, and Somalia in the 1990s. Leaving Iraq in the current situation

would be like the ending of our efforts in those areas as well. Our

withdrawal from these countries embolden the terrorists. Bin Laden

himself is on record after these withdrawals criticizing our lack of

will and questioning our commitment to fighting these zealots. We have

to learn from our mistakes in the past.

How have we gotten to this point? Well, many of my colleagues in the

Senate continue to beat the drum of the Iraq Study Group Report. They

continue to state that their withdrawal proposal follows the report's

recommendations.

I would simply like to point out something to my colleagues. Unlike

the supplemental bill that will soon be voted on--or what I would like

to call our surrender document--the Iraq Study Group Report does not

call for us to walk away from our mission. They do not call for us to

walk away from our mission. In fact, the Iraq Study Group Cochair,

So here we are, a must-pass bill that flies in the face of what the

Iraq Study Group has recommended. But the Democratic majority is well

aware of what effect slowing down passage of the supplemental means to

the Department of Defense as a whole. Particularly, the House of

Representatives has dragged its feet in appointing conferees to the

bill, knowing full well the President intends to veto this legislation.

In fact, just yesterday, President Bush stated he would strongly object

to any deadlines

I agree with the

President wholeheartedly.

By placing the President in the precarious position of vetoing this

bill, even in the dire financial straits it places the Department of

Defense, the other side of the aisle has chosen to play politics rather

than fund a clean bill that gives our soldiers in the field the

resources they need.

The question remains, if the other side truly believes the war is

lost, then why not cut off funding for the war entirely? The power of

the purse is in our constitutional authority as a Congress. If the

majority party wants to dictate Iraq policy to the President, rather

than put limitations on our military in Iraq, which would be a

disaster, they should attempt to no longer fund our efforts.

But I doubt that will happen because they know they do not have the

votes or the support for such a precipitous withdrawal. Instead, the

``slow bleed strategy'' will continue from our colleagues in the Senate

and the House that will, in my opinion, leave our troops dejected and

less safe than before. This ill-advised strategy will clearly hand Al

Jazeera its propaganda message.

There is no doubt we face extremely difficult challenges in Iraq. We

have not made enough progress. Citizens of Iraq must be willing to

fight for their own freedom. The President recognizes this, and his new

plan is the result of increased commitments from the Iraqi Prime

Minister. The President has developed a new plan with new leadership.

We should not jerk the rug out from under those we have put in charge

in Iraq.

I ask my colleagues to reject this bill and let us craft a clean

funding bill that will meet the priorities and needs of our men and

women in Iraq.