Four years ago, as we all know too well, we sent our young

men and women to Iraq for a war that many of us now believe was a grave

and tragic mistake. Day after day, month after month, the

administration has repeatedly exacerbated that mistake by leaving our

soldiers in the field without the equipment and without the protection

they need and deserve, knowing full well what the lethal consequences

would be.

There will be and there is disagreement in this body over the next

difficult steps to take in Iraq. We can disagree on troop numbers. We

can disagree on a timetable. We can disagree on the shape of a future

political settlement in Iraq. Surely, we can all recognize those are

honest differences of opinion. But there is no difference of opinion

and there is no disagreement here that we ought to be giving our troops

absolutely everything they need in order to accomplish this mission.

There is no disagreement that those troops deserve everything they need

to be as safe as possible, and there should be no disagreement that

when we ask young men and women to leave their families to fight deadly

foreign enemies halfway across the globe, when we ask them to put their

lives on the line, the least we owe them is the equipment they need to

protect themselves and get the job done. One soldier dying from a

roadside bomb because he or she does not have the body armor is one too

many.

The fact is, when it comes to body armor, when it comes to armored

vehicles in Iraq, our troops do not have

what they need. According to the Washington Post this week, our

soldiers are short more than 4,000 of the latest humvee armor kit, the

FRAG Kit 5. Fewer than half of the Army's 14,500 up-armored HMMWVs in

Iraq and Afghanistan have the latest equipment.

It is not just armored vehicles that would keep our troops safer.

They need better body armor, too. People are actually holding bake

sales in our States in order to raise the money to privately purchase

and send to their loved ones the armor or the helmets they want.

Over a year ago, the Pentagon issued a report that many of the deaths

in Iraq caused by upper-body injuries could be prevented if all the

body armor issued to our troops included side armor plates. Some of my

colleagues raised this issue with Secretary Rumsfeld, and he assured

them that the Pentagon was going to begin the procurement and delivery

of an additional 230,000 sets of side armor plates.

Last month, another Pentagon report found continued shortages in

force protection equipment for our soldiers, a shortage of body armor,

a shortage of up-armored vehicles, a shortage of communications

equipment, and a shortage of electronic countermeasure devices.

We have also heard firsthand from troops that many are still being

issued body armor without the side armor plates. How can someone be

content to send our soldiers on the most dangerous patrols in the

roughest neighborhoods of Baghdad without the best possible protection

being afforded them?

In the last 4 years, over 1,100 Americans have died from roadside

bombs, and thousands of our best troops have suffered debilitating

injuries or had their lives permanently altered by these terrible

weapons.

Knowing full well you don't have enough armor for the troops already

in the field, how do you responsibly turn around and say: That is OK.

We will just go ahead and put another 21,500 or more right there

alongside them, particularly when it is a job that Iraqis themselves

ought to be doing? By themselves, these shortages are trouble. But the

President's plan to send over this additional force makes them even

more questionable.

Now we hear that the troops pouring into Iraq will not even have

enough up-armored HMMWVs or other armored vehicles until July. So what

is the rationale for putting in the over 20,000 now, when the armor

their lives depend on is not going to arrive until July? How do you

turn around and say to a parent or to one of those young people

themselves that they are the next people to be over in Bethesda or in

Walter Reed minus their limbs? Oh, sorry, we just didn't get them over

there in time, even though we had a couple of years to make the plans

and respond, the most powerful, richest Nation on the face of the

planet, one that prides itself on its technology and on its support for

the troops. How do you explain that to one of those soldiers?

Well, in addition to being a pretty smug and even cavalier thing to

say at that point in time, you ought to measure it by where we are

today. That was about a year and a half ago. You may go into war with

the Army you have, but smart people adapt to their enemy's tactics. You

exploit their weaknesses, and you certainly work to minimize your own.

We ended World War II in less time than it has taken to prosecute the

current war in Iraq. We ended it with a weapon that didn't even exist

when World War II began, when Pearl Harbor took place.

We have known for years now that the technologies our enemies are

using to kill our troops are outpacing the equipment we use to protect

them. And the gap between their offensive weapons and our defensive

armor is only growing, thanks in part to a major increase in an

especially lethal kind of roadside bomb, the so-called EFP or

explosively formed penetrator. This is a diabolical contraption which

has been described as a ``spear that rips right through the vehicle.''

It can shoot a metal projectile through the side of even an up-armored

HMMWV and turn pieces of the vehicle itself into shrapnel that kills or

maims the soldiers inside.

Ninety percent of American fatalities from these terrible weapons

have come in Baghdad. Against the warnings of former Secretary of State

Colin Powell, against the warnings of GEN John Abizaid, against the

warnings of the entire Joint Chiefs of Staff last year, who said we

don't need more troops and don't want them, the President is now

sending five brigades to referee a Sunni/Shia civil war. We are sending

them without the protection they need to survive EFP attacks.

Unfortunately, even with the latest armor, soldiers will still die

from roadside bombs. But the new armor reinforces the doors, slows down

the projectile, will keep soldiers safer, and it will save many lives.

The technology exists right now to keep our troops safer. So why, 4

years later, do our troops not have it? Partly, it is due to the gross

incompetence at the highest levels of this Administration in their

commitment to the procurement process itself. Mostly, it is the fact

that we have never been mobilized to actually do what you do in war. We

talk about war; the rhetoric is all about war; but there is no request

of Americans to behave as if we are at war. Certainly, for the people

waiting for that equipment, there is no showing that we are serious

about it.

From the time we invaded, the need for a fleet of vehicles that could

keep our troops safe has been unmistakable. From the time we first got

there, people knew you would drive down the streets and be exposed to

these kinds of risks. Yet we kept relying on one single provider of

uparmored HMMWVs, and given the chronic shortfalls we have seen, that

is a pretty amazing reliance. Still, the Administration doesn't seem to

respond.

The President's defense budget for next year does not include enough

funds for armored vehicles, so the Marine Corps had to ask Congress for

an additional $2.8 billion to buy more mine-resistant, ambush-protected

vehicles. Going back to 2002, the Administration terminated funding for

one alternative vehicle that was more suited to the battlefield in

Iraq--because of what they called ``budget priorities.'' I want to know

what the budget priority was that came ahead of providing a vehicle to

our troops that would have been more suited to the battlefield. Was it

the tax cuts? What was the priority?

While this is an urgent short-term concern, we also need to think

about what our soldiers will need in the long term for 21st century

warfare. Enemies are taking book on the weaknesses that we are showing

them on a daily basis. Unfortunately, this will not be the last war in

which our troops are targeted in the vehicles they ride.

Since Somalia, in 1993, we have known that humvees, with their thin

skin and square-bottom chassis, are ill-suited for counterinsurgency

and the modern battlefield. We need to bridge this short-term gap and

we need to invest in the armored vehicles to keep our soldiers safe in

the future. This is serious business, and we cannot afford to be

vulnerable or reluctant to engage with the urgency it requires.

No Commander in Chief and no Congress should knowingly put the lives

of our soldiers at risk unnecessarily. But that is exactly what is

happening as we escalate this war. It is long past time that we had an

honest conversation about what protecting our troops means. Some of our

colleagues have come to the floor, even after blocking a vote on what

we might or might not do with respect to Iraq and the President's

escalation plan, and they say they want an amendment saying that if

Congress were to use the power of the purse to force this

Administration to change its failed policy, that that somehow would be

putting our troops at risk.

Let me tell you what puts our troops at risk. It is sending them on a

mission without the equipment, without the

armor, without the vehicles that we know how to produce and are not

being produced, and which they don't have. That is what puts our troops

at risk. It seems to me it is unfair, if not negligent, to put our

troops at risk in the crossfire of a civil war without the equipment

they need.

So we ought to make certain we give our soldiers the extra body armor

and the latest uparmored HMMWVs in order to do their job. That is why I

will again introduce a resolution in the Senate that offers us the best

chance to salvage some measure of success in Iraq. I am convinced the

real way you protect the troops is to give them a mission that indeed

invites success. And absent the kind of summit and diplomacy necessary

to resolve the fundamental political differences between Shia and

Sunni, between the fundamental stakeholders in Iraq, our soldiers, no

matter how brave or courageous--and they are both--cannot do the job.

The job has to be done at a table negotiating out those differences.

It is long since time we had a policy that sought to get Iraqis to

take responsibility for Iraq. The Iraqis have shown again and again

that they only respond to a deadline. About 6 months ago, General Casey

and Ambassador Khalilzaid said publicly that the Iraqis had about 5

months to make a series of decisions in order to resolve their

differences, or it may become almost impossible to make it happen.

Those 5 months came and went. Nothing happened. Nothing was required of

the Iraqis that was firm. Nothing happened to change the equation on

the ground in Iraq. I believe it is only with a deadline that urges

them to take those steps that we will ultimately be successful. That is

what I believe we owe our soldiers.