Mr. President, the

Senate has been dealing with some important

matters these days, with a judicial

nomination to the second highest

court in the country, and shortly to

bring up an appropriations bill that

will determine spending across this

country with hundreds of billions of

dollars for the rest of this fiscal year.

But there is something else going on

in this country which is of overwhelming

importance which really

should supersede all of this, and that is

the imminent prospect of a war against

Iraq.

At the same time we are talking

about these other matters, this country

is under a condition code orange,

the second highest level of security we

have. Our citizens have been told in the

last few days to go out and get duct

tape and sheets of plastic and water.

Today at the Senate Armed Services

Committee hearing, of which I am a

member, the Secretary of Defense

called the time that we are in now ‘‘the

most dangerous security environment

that the world has ever known.’’ It is

for those reasons I wrote the majority

leader and urged we not take a recess

as planned next week, that we stay in

Washington, stay in session, because I

think this is a matter of such urgency

and such paramount importance to our

country and to the world that we

should be continuing to focus on that

matter.

The ominous forewarnings of this

last couple of days affirm to me what

Robert Kennedy said after the Cuban

missile crisis. He said:

For the last 55 years the leaders of

this country have understood that

principle. They, too, faced dangerous

dictators who possessed weapons of

mass destruction, who headed countries

that were hostile to the United

States, the former Soviet Union,

China, North Korea. But they didn’t attack

another country to eliminate

those threats, even though they persisted,

even though we disagreed with

those countries, what their leaders did

to their own people, the threats they

were around the world. The principal

reason was we understood the doctrine

of mutual assured destruction. We understood

their destruction against the

United States would be an intolerable

cost for our destruction of them and

for the objectives we might accomplish

militarily.

I believe these forewarnings we have

received the last few days should cause

us to ask this administration why

would they expect Iraq to be any different.

If the United States intervenes

and begins to destroy that country and

its cities, cause civilian casualties,

why would we not expect Iraq to retaliate

with every destructive force it has

available to it within our own borders,

against our own cities and our own

citizens?

Why wouldn’t we expect Osama bin

Laden to do his worst to exploit this

situation, to twist facts to be seen by

the rest of the world other than as they

are, but in ways that would be destructive

to United States standing around

the world and to our own national security

now and in the days and months

ahead?

Why does this administration believe

it should disregard the lessons that

other Presidents, Republican and Democrat,

have recognized and observed

and proven to be as valid then as they

are today? What is different about this

situation?

At the Senate Armed Services Committee

hearing this morning I asked

the Secretary of Defense his assessment

of our ability to protect our citizens

from retaliatory attacks against

them if we were to invade Iraq. I asked

that question twice. How do you assess,

Mr. Secretary, our ability to protect

our citizens in their homes and their

schools and our cities from an enemy

attack? Neither time did I receive a direct

answer to that question. Neither

time. I have the highest regard for the

Secretary of Defense. He has an enormous

responsibility. He brings tremendous

experience and ability and a heroic

dedication to our country to this

task. But if all this administration can

offer the American people, when our

national security alert is raised to the

second highest level, is duct tape,

sheets of plastic and water, there is

something very seriously wrong, if this

administration intends to start a war,

not against the most urgent threat to

this country, not the threat that endangered

us before, attacked us before

and endangers us now, according to

many of their own officials, al-Qaida,

Osama bin Laden, the tape that was released

this week that issues that

threat against us and our citizens once

again, not an attack against al-Qaida

but against Iraq, against a country

that, no question, is ruled by an evil

man, a dangerous dictator, a man who

almost certainly, as the Secretary of

State has demonstrated, the President

in the State of the Union, possesses biological

and chemical weapons and has

for the last 12 years, ever since the

first President Bush made a strategic

decision at the conclusion of the gulf

war to leave him in power, which may

have been the right decision given the

other options that were available.

Yes, an evil dictator, but one who has

been constrained in key respects by active,

ongoing efforts of diplomacy with

our allies and containment by international

forces by both former President

Bush and by President Clinton.

Contained, constrained, not perfectly,

not easily, certainly not voluntarily on

his part, but effectively, more effectively

than has been acknowledged in

recent months. He is weaker, according

to reports I have seen, militarily in

most respects than he was before the

gulf war. He does, by all accounts that

we can obtain, not possess nuclear warhead

capabilities at this time, which I

agree with the President would be intolerable

for this country to permit. He

has not attacked his neighbors—not because

he wouldn’t like to, probably,

but because he has not had the capability

to do so under these containment

policies for the last 12 years. And as far

as I have been informed in various

briefings, he was not actively threatening

our country or his neighbors or

anyone else when he was dusted off the

shelf by this administration right after

Labor Day.

The President has properly refocused

the world spotlight on this man and his

intent. The President has drawn a line

very clearly, which I support, that it

would be intolerable for this Nation to

permit that dictator to possess nuclear

weapons or the missile capabilities to

deliver those warheads or any warheads

against this country or against

neighbors in the region surrounding

him.

Certainly after September 11 and Operation

Enduring Freedom, no one in

this world could question the steely resolve

of our President and his willingness,

if necessary, to use military

force. After Operation Enduring Freedom,

no one could raise a doubt about

the might of the United States Armed

Forces and the strength we can bring

to bear anywhere in the world as a last

resort, as truly a last resort.

But there is another lesson from September

11, which is that no matter how

great our military might, we are not

invulnerable. We are too big a country.

We have too wide an expanse. We have

too many possible targets for terrorists.

And we saw on September 11 tragically,

horribly, the damage and the destruction

and the cost of human life

and the untold human suffering and

misery of families that a very small

number of fanatical men could cause.

I don’t think we should back down or

be deterred by any threat. I think we

should do what we must to defend this

country, and the principles we have established

in the last half century of

dealing with these threats have been

ones that have prevented war, preserved

our peace, and strengthened this

country economically and socially in

its position of leadership in the world.

It would be a very dangerous precedent

if we were to do, except as a very

last resort, what no President in this

country has done before, which is to

start a war, which is to launch a preemptive

attack against another country

based on what it might in the future

do to us. And I think we should

consider what that precedent would

mean if other nations were to follow

that example. If we set a precedent in

this ‘‘new world order,’’ as it has been

called, that a preemptive attack

against a possible future threat is the

way to resolve crises or standoffs, what

will happen when other countries adopt

that path?

We have seen now—and we have been

forewarned—that the nuclear proliferation

that we are seeing other countries

undertake is the worst nightmare that

many predicted years ago, decades ago

if we didn’t—the superpowers—bring to

a halt the nuclear arms race and remove

them from the shelves of the nations

of the world. Now we are told

that half a dozen countries—and more

to come soon—will have them. That

should be and must be a warning to us.

What happens if we lead down a path

on which we don’t want other nations

to follow?

If we set a precedent of preemptive

attack, that path is one that the world

will follow at its peril. I urge the President

to take that into the most careful

consideration as he makes this fateful

decision.

I yield the floor.