brother J.T., who is also currently serving in Iraq; and the rest of the Smallwood family during this trying time.

SERGEANT ROBB ROLFING

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I mourn the loss and celebrate the life of Rob Rolfing. Robb died on June 30 while engaging enemy insurgents in Baghdad. He was the 23rd South Dakotan to make the ultimate sacrifice in the war on terror. My deepest sympathies go out to Robb's family, in particular, his mother Margie, his father Rex, his brother TJ, and his sister Tiffany. With Robb's tragic death, South Dakota has lost one of its finest sons and the Army has lost a dedicated professional.

Robb was from Sioux Falls and graduated from O'Gorman High School in 1996. His love of science and ingenuity was inspired by television's MacGyver. Those who remember Robb from high school like to recount how Robb was never without duct tape or a Swiss Army knife. Another of their favorite stories is how Robb rigged up a makeshift parachute for his graduation cap so that when he threw it in the air it glided back down to the ground.

As Robb grew it was clear that he was a gifted scholar, athlete, leader, and coach. He dedicated himself to the pursuit of excellence in every aspect of his life. He was a passionate soccer player who excelled on and off the field at Vassar College. He finished his collegiate career with a degree in Astrophysics and was twice named the captain of the Vassar soccer team, scored the winning goal to advance his team to Vassar's first ever national tournament, and was the team's second all-time leader in goals, assists, and points. Following graduation from college, Robb coached soccer at Rollins College in Florida and Curry College in Massachusetts.

When the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, Robb pursued another of his dreams. He joined the U.S. Army and became a member of the Green Berets, the Army's elite experts in unconventional warfare. Based on Robb's dedication to excellence and his mechanical ingenuity it came as no surprise that Robb served as the special forces engineer for his unit, Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, airborne. Special forces engineers are skilled at construction projects, building field fortifications, and using explosive demolitions. Looking back over Robb's life, it seems that his whole experience was designed to culminate in gaining the coveted Army Green Beret that is recognized the world over.

Green Berets are commonly called quiet professionals and referred to as a special breed of man. Robb was both these things and truly lived the Green Beret motto, De Oppresso Liber, To Liberate the Oppressed.

Mr. President, I truly mourn the loss of SGT Robb Rolfing and I extend my thoughts, prayers, and best wishes to his family, friends, and loved ones.

MRAP

Mr. BIDEN. Madam President, I want to explain an amendment I hope to get adopted when we return to the Defense authorization bill and that I have filed today.

Let me be very frank. This is a very expensive amendment. It is also, literally, priceless. It makes good on this commitment: So long as a single American soldier or marine remains in Iraq, we will provide him or her with the best protection this country can provide.

Let me start with the basics. There are two critical issues facing our soldiers and marines today: improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, and explosively formed penetrators, or EFPs. IEDs are planted in roads and on the side of roads to hit the bottom of vehicles with powerful explosives. EFPs are shaped charges that come into the side armor of vehicles at high speeds.

We know that IEDs now cause about 70 percent of all American fatalities. Since 2003, in any given month, IEDs have caused between 30 and 76 percent of American fatalities. For every death, there are usually 2 to 10 Americans wounded. Over the past year, we have also seen a growing threat from EFPs. They are not yet everywhere in Iraq, but they are spreading and they are very lethal.

The military has a strategy for dealing with both. First, they seek to disrupt the organizations that produce IEDs and EFPs. They go after the people and the supplies. Second, they attempt to use tactics and technology to prevent IEDs and EFPs from being activated when American personnel are close enough to be harmed. Third, they attempt to survive a direct hit. It is the third area where we could and should have done much more to make a difference years ago but where still today we can and must make a difference.

The military has tested, both at testing centers and in the field, the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle, also called an MRAP. The MRAP provides dramatically improved protection against IEDs. The military has said that it is four to five times as good as an up-armored HMMWV. More important, military commanders tell us that it will reduce deaths and casualties from IEDs by 67 to 80 percent. The Brookings Institution found that 1,400 Americans died in Iraq due to IEDs from March of 2003 through June of 2007. If we had had MRAPs in the field from the start—and we could and should have—938 to 1,120 Americans would be alive today.

And let me just clarify for my colleagues that this is not new technology. It has been used successfully in Africa, by nations much poorer than ours, since the 1970s. I don't want to get bogged down in history, but this is not rocket science. Every day we delay, another soldier or marine is killed or injured by an IED. If we just look at this year, IEDs killed 309 Americans; 207 to 247 would still be alive today if they had been in MRAPs. We need to make sure that for the second half of 2007, those MRAPs are there and those lives are saved.

What about the threat from these shaped charges that come in from the side, the EFP? The Army's Rapid Equipping Force and the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization started working on that last year. In conjunction with industry, they produced a vehicle nicknamed ''the Bull'' and officially called the Highly Survivable Urban Vehicle Ballistic Protection Experiment Program. This vehicle was tested and shown to defeat EFPs and also tested against the first level of MRAP requirements. That testing was completed in March of this year. For some reason, the military has not asked for another vehicle to do the MRAP level two tests. So we do not actually know how capable this vehicle might be for all threats, but we know it works against EFPs. Instead of trying to get ahead of the enemy and get this technology into the field, the military seems to be sitting on its hands while the EFP threat has increased. Why wouldn't you field something you know works?

The perfect vehicle would be a complete MRAP with EFP protection, but that appears to be many months away, although some MRAP producers tell me that their vehicles have survived EFP hits in the field. So again, we do not have the complete picture. We have also been told that Frag-Kit-6 armor can defeat EFPs, but it is too heavy for MRAPs. So vehicles must be redesigned and retested. This will take time. I understand that and support that effort, but Americans are dying today. Again, as with the MRAP, we have a technology that could keep them alive, and we should be using it while we work to perfect it.

I do not know if all of my colleagues saw the USA Today article that appeared on Monday detailing some of the history surrounding the MRAP. I will summarize a few points but will ask to have the entire article printed in the RECORD.

This article details efforts to get MRAPs going back to 2003. It also details the reasons for delay, and that is what I want to point out to my colleagues.

First, apparently, the leadership at the Pentagon did not expect this war to last this long. Well, that is no surprise. We all remember the ''Mission Accomplished'' speech and the promise of roses in the streets. We remember Vice President CHENEY telling us that the insurgency was in its death throes. We remember Secretary Rumsfeld telling us that crime in Baghdad was not any worse than that in Washington, DC. I remember all of that. Sadly, none of those leaders remember the hearings that Senator LUGAR and I held before the war began that predicted the need for a long-term American presence and engagement. They don't remember

some of us, starting before the war, repeatedly urged the President to level with the American people about the likely duration, cost, and danger of this war. Perhaps even more tragically, this uncertainty about future force levels continues to limit the military commitment to fielding more MRAPs and EFP protected vehicles.

Second, these vehicles were seen as contrary to Secretary Rumsfeld's vision for the transformed military, a lighter, more agile force. While it depends on what armored humvee you are talking about, many believed that MRAPs were heavier and slower than humvees. The stifling effect Secretary Rumsfeld's views and management style had on military leaders is well known to everyone who follows military issues. In this instance, it meant that officers were predisposed against the heavier vehicle and didn't push the issue when our forces in the field asked for MRAP technology. Instead, they focused on the first two parts of the anti-IED strategy I talked about earlier.

Finally, and most disturbing to me, many believed that Congress would not support funding the MRAP while also fielding better armored humvees. I do not know of a single wartime funding request that Congress has denied. There have been some items added to the supplemental bills that were clearly not urgent or war related, but nothing directly linked to current operations was refused. Nonetheless, it appears that the military did not believe that our support for needed equipment was for real. Even today, I hear that leaders are concerned that they must cut multiple existing programs to pay for this growing MRAP requirement. There may be programs that we could all agree are not as vital for a wartime Army, but I do not want that debate and concern to slow lifesaving equipment.

I understand that this program will be the third largest procurement program in the Pentagon. As I said, it is very costly. We can work together in the future to find the lower priority programs that simply should not be funded if they are competing with lifesaving programs. We do not have any more time to delay spending the money needed to buy these vehicles, however, if we are going to save lives.

Leadership is about making hard choices, and I look forward to working with my colleagues and the administration to do whatever it takes. I am even willing to cut programs I support because saving lives and limbs under fire today must truly be our first priority. So, today, with this amendment I hope we can make it clear that we will provide whatever funding is needed, so that military leaders do not fear being honest about their needs.

In addition to the issues brought out in the article, I have also heard a regular concern that some in the military do not believe MRAPs will be needed in the future—that when we leave Iraq, we will leave most of these vehicles behind. I was happy to see the Secretary of the Army, Peter Geren, state clearly in his confirmation hearing that he believes MRAPs will be needed in future conflicts. It is clear to me that until we show America's enemies that we can handle IEDs, they will continue to use them throughout the world. We are already seeing an increased use of IEDs in Afghanistan.

It is also clear to me that those who worry about what the military will be driving in 5 years are missing the boat here. I understand that there are great advancements being developed for our future force. But we have a sacred trust to those on the front lines today, right now. Right now, we are saying to them: If you survive this war, we will get you really good protection for the next one. Give me a break. To paraphrase a former Secretary of Defense, you fight the war you are in, not the war you might be in down the road. Ideally, you do both, but your priority has to be protecting the men and women under fire now. End of story. Can anyone imagine Roosevelt saying, ''Listen, we may not need some of those boats after Normandy, so maybe we should not build so many?'' Of course not. War is inherently wasteful and this war is no exception. I am willing to waste money and equipment if it means we don't waste lives and limbs. The fact that we may not need all of the vehicles we buy today in 5 years, is no reason to shortchange the soldiers and marines who truly need the vehicles today.

I have given my colleagues some of this history so they will understand why we must stand up for our marines and soldiers on this issue. We must cut through the ''business as usual'' bureaucracy. I applaud Secretary Gates for making MRAPs the top priority of the military, but I am concerned that even now, some of the same problems continue. After all, Army commanders in Iraq concluded that they need 17,700 MRAPs. That is 15,200 more than currently being bought. We must act now to put money in the pipeline to order the additional vehicles and expand production capacity.

Instead, we find out that 2 months later, the Joint Requirements Oversight Council has yet to approve the Army request as a ''validated joint requirement.'' I don't get it.

The President tells us that the most important thing in this war is the judgment of our commanders in the field. Now, I may disagree with the policy being executed, but I would agree that when it comes to tactical decisions about the best way to implement our policies, this is the right approach. Apparently, others feel that the commanders should only be listened to selectively, when it does not cost too much money.

The commanders in the field have said that they need an additional 15,200 mine resistant vehicles for the Army. They have also said that they need thousands of vehicles with EFP protection. So, why the delay?

No one from the Pentagon has been able to explain it to me.

Last, some argue that the real problem is production capacity. I simply don't buy it. We are being told that American industry cannot handle this or does not care enough about our soldiers and marines to do it. I don't buy it. These are purely military vehicles. If the military does not place the orders, industry will not build them, and they certainly won't create new production capacity. They cannot sell the extras to your neighbor or mine. So we must put the money up front and challenge our companies to deliver quickly. We did that on the supplemental where Congress accepted my amendment adding $1.2 billion. Because that led to increased production capacity, Secretary Gates has reprogrammed another $1.2 billion for fiscal year 2007 to take advantage of that new capacity.

We made it to the Moon by putting money up front and challenging Americans to do their best to get there. MRAPs and EFP protected vehicles are basically modified trucks. America knows how to make trucks and how to make a lot of them. As I said before, this is not rocket science. If we buy it, they will build it.

What if they cannot? What if industry can only get 15,000 or 20,000 of the 23,000 we need built by the end of fiscal year 2008? Well, I tell my colleagues, than we will know that we gave them every chance to succeed. More important, we gave our soldiers and marines their best chance to survive this war.

And the downside is simply that all of the funds we provide cannot be spent in 1 year and all of the vehicles cannot be purchased. In that situation, all we have to do is authorize reprogramming the unspent funds for the next fiscal year. Compared to taking a chance on saving our kids, that is an easy downside to accept.

I opened by saying that this was a very expensive amendment, and it is. Let me be clear. It provides $23.6 billion for Army MRAPs, enough money to buy the 15,200 the commanders in the field are asking for. The amount is based on the last cost estimate I was given by the Pentagon on July 9. The amendment also provides an additional $1 billion that I have been told is needed for the purchase of 7,774 MRAPs currently planned for and funded in this bill. The increased funds are needed for airlift, training, and maintenance costs not originally included in the program budget.

In addition, the amendment provides $400 million for EFP protection. Half is to field 200 of the vehicles already tested and half is for the joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization to continue to work on and field better vehicles. The Bull may not be the perfect answer, but it gives us a chance to save American lives today. While we work on the perfect solution, an MRAP with EFP protection, we should still be giving our soldiers and marines the best we have today. The military needs

to see if the Bull can provide full MRAP protection. They also need to look at other ideas for improving MRAPs, but while they do, we should take advantage of the proven technology we have at hand.

Last, this amendment asks Secretary Gates to report back to us within 30 days on any legal authorities he needs to produce and field these protective vehicles faster.

Let me also clarify what we are adding these funds to. The Armed Services Committee added $4.1 billion to the President's initial request for a mere $441 million for MRAPs in this bill. At the time, that was all that was thought to be needed to meet the 7,774 requirement and I applaud the committee for meeting that need. The situation has changed since the bill came out of committee. We now know that the Army commanders on the ground want far more. We cannot get such a large order produced if we continue to delay.

For me, this is very simple. I believe that when our sons and daughters are getting blown up and we have vehicles proven to dramatically improve their odds of survival, we must get the vehicles to them. This amendment allows us to do that. When the Senate returns to debate on the Defense Authorization Act, I hope all of my colleagues will support it.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to have the article to which I referred printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From USA Today, July 16, 2007]

PENTAGON BALKED AT PLEAS FROM OFFICERS IN FIELD FOR SAFER VEHICLES

(By Peter Eisler, Blake Morrison and Tom Vanden Brook)

Pfc. Aaron Kincaid, 25, had been joking with buddies just before their Humvee rolled over the bomb. His wife, Rachel, later learned that the blast blew Kincaid, a father of two from outside Atlanta, through the Humvee's metal roof.

Army investigators who reviewed the Sept. 23 attack near Riyadh, Iraq, wrote in their report that only providence could have saved Kincaid from dying that day: ''There was no way short of not going on that route at that time (that) this tragedy could have been diverted.''

A USA TODAY investigation of the Pentagon's efforts to protect troops in Iraq suggests otherwise.

Years before the war began, Pentagon officials knew of the effectiveness of another type of vehicle that better shielded troops from bombs like those that have killed Kincaid and 1,500 other soldiers and Marines. But military officials repeatedly balked at appeals—from commanders on the battlefield and from the Pentagon's own staff—to provide the lifesaving Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle, or MRAP, for patrols and combat missions, USA TODAY found.

In a letter to Defense Secretary Robert Gates late last month, two U.S. senators said the delays cost the lives of an estimated ''621 to 742 Americans'' who would have survived explosions had they been in MRAPs rather than Humvees.

The letter, from Sens. Joseph Biden, D–Del., and Kit Bond, R–Mo., assumed the initial calls for MRAPs came in February 2005, when Marines in Iraq asked the Pentagon for almost 1,200 of the vehicles. USA TODAY found that the first appeals for the MRAP came much earlier.

As early as December 2003, when the Marines requested their first 27 MRAPs for explosives-disposal teams, Pentagon analysts sent detailed information about the superiority of the vehicles to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, e-mails obtained by USA TODAY show. Later pleas came from Iraq, where commanders saw that the approach the Joint Chiefs embraced—adding armor to the sides of Humvees, the standard vehicles in the war zone—did little to protect against blasts beneath the vehicles.

Despite the efforts, the general who chaired the Joint Chiefs until Oct. 1, 2005, says buying MRAPs ''was not on the radar screen when I was chairman.'' Air Force general Richard Myers, now retired, says top military officials dealt with a number of vehicle issues, including armoring Humvees. The MRAP, however, was ''not one of them.'' Something related to MRAPs ''might have crossed my desk,'' Myers says, ''but I don't recall it.''

Why the issue never received more of a hearing from top officials early in the war remains a mystery, given the chorus of concern. One Pentagon analyst complained in an April 29, 2004, e-mail to colleagues, for instance, that it was ''frustrating to see the pictures of burning Humvees while knowing that there are other vehicles out there that would provide more protection.''

The analyst was referring to the MRAP, whose V-shaped hull puts the crew more than 3 feet off the ground and deflects explosions. It was designed to withstand the underbelly bombs that cripple the lower-riding Humvees. Pentagon officials, civilians and military alike, had been searching for technologies to guard against improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. The makeshift bombs are the No. 1 killer of U.S. forces.

The MRAP was not new to the Pentagon. The technology had been developed in South Africa and Rhodesia in the 1970s, making it older than Kincaid and most of the other troops killed by homemade bombs. The Pentagon had tested MRAPs in 2000, purchased fewer than two dozen and sent some to Iraq. They were used primarily to protect explosive ordnance disposal teams, not to transport troops or to chase Iraqi insurgents.

THE GOAL: IRAQIS ''STAND UP'' SO U.S. CAN ''STAND DOWN''

Even as the Pentagon balked at buying MRAPs for U.S. troops, USA TODAY found that the military pushed to buy them for a different fighting force: the Iraqi army.

On Dec. 22, 2004—two weeks after President Bush told families of servicemembers that ''we're doing everything we possibly can to protect your loved ones''—a U.S. Army general solicited ideas for an armored vehicle for the Iraqis. The Army had an ''extreme interest'' in getting troops better armor, then-brigadier general Roger Nadeau told a subordinate looking at foreign technology, in an e-mail obtained by USA TODAY.

In a follow-up message, Nadeau clarified his request: ''What I failed to point out in my first message to you folks is that the U.S. Govt. is interested not for U.S. use, but for possible use in fielding assets to the Iraqi military forces.''

In response, Lt. Col. Clay Brown, based in Australia, sent information on two types of MRAPs manufactured overseas. ''By all accounts, these are some of the best in the world,'' he wrote. ''If I were fitting out the Iraqi Army, this is where I'd look (wish we had some!)''

The first contract for what would become the Iraqi Light Armored Vehicle—virtually identical to the MRAPs sought by U.S. forces then and now, and made in the United States by BAE Systems—was issued in May 2006. The vehicles, called Badgers, began arriving in Iraq 90 days later, according to BAE. In September 2006, the Pentagon said it would provide up to 600 more to Iraqi forces. As of this spring, 400 had been delivered.

The rush to equip the Iraqis stood in stark contrast to the Pentagon's efforts to protect U.S. troops.

In February 2005, two months after Nadeau solicited ideas for better armor for the Iraqis and was told MRAPs were an answer, an urgent-need request for the same type of vehicle came from embattled Marines in Anbar province. The request, signed by then-brigadier general Dennis Hejlik, said the Marines ''cannot continue to lose . . . serious and grave casualties to IEDs . . . at current rates when a commercial off-the-shelf capability exists to mitigate'' them.

Officials at Marine headquarters in Quantico, Va., shelved the request for 1,169 vehicles. Fifteen months passed before a second request reached the Joint Chiefs and was approved. Those vehicles finally began trickling into Anbar in February, two years after the original request. Because of the delay, the Marines are investigating how its urgent-need requests are handled.

The long delay infuriates some members of Congress. ''Every day, our troops are being maimed or killed needlessly because we haven't fielded this soon enough,'' says Rep. Gene Taylor, D–Miss. ''The costs are in human lives, in kids who will never have their legs again, people blind, crippled. That's the real tragedy.''

Not until two months ago did the Pentagon champion the MRAP for all U.S. forces. Gates made MRAPs the military's top priority. The plan is to build the vehicles as fast as possible until conditions warrant a change, according to a military official who has direct knowledge of the program but is not authorized to speak on the record. Thousands are in the pipeline at a cost so far of about $2.4 billion.

Gates said he was influenced by a news report—originally in USA TODAY—that disclosed Marine units using MRAPs in Anbar reported no deaths in about 300 roadside bombings in the past year. His tone was grave. ''For every month we delay,'' he said, ''scores of young Americans are going to die.''

One reason officials put off buying MRAPs in significant quantities: They never expected the war to last this long. Bush set the tone on May 1, 2003, six weeks after the U.S. invasion, when he declared on board the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln that ''major combat operations in Iraq have ended.''

Gen. George Casey, the top commander in Iraq from June 2004 until February this year, repeatedly said that troop levels in Iraq would be cut just as soon as Iraqi troops took more responsibility for security. In March 2005, he predicted ''very substantial reductions'' in U.S. troops by early 2006. He said virtually the same thing a year later.

Casey wasn't the only optimist. In May 2005, Vice President Cheney declared that the insurgency was ''in its last throes.''

Given the view that the war would end soon, the Pentagon had little use for expensive new vehicles such as the MRAP, at least not in large quantities. The MRAPs ordered for the Iraqis were intended to speed the day when, to use Bush's words, Iraqi forces could ''stand up'' and the United States could ''stand down.''

Nadeau, who wrote the e-mail that led to MRAPs for the Iraqis, explains why he did so: ''The U.S. government knows that eventually we're going to get out'' of Iraq. The United States wants ''to help get (the Iraqis) in a position to take care of themselves.''

For U.S. forces, however, the answer was something else: adding armor to Humvees. Nadeau and others say the choice made sense because Humvees were already in Iraq and the improvements—adding steel to the sides, upgrading the windows and replacing the canvas doors—could be made quickly, and far more cheaply. Adding armor to a Humvee cost only $14,000; a Humvee armored at the factory cost $191,000; today, an MRAP costs between $600,000 and $1 million, though some foreign models cost only about $200,000 in 2004.

The solution to the IED problem in 2003 had to be ''immediate,'' says retired vice admiral Gordon Holder, director for logistics for the Joint Chiefs until mid-2004. ''We had to stop the bleeding.'' Holder says MRAPs seemed impractical for the immediate need: ''We shouldn't take four years to field something the kids needed yesterday.''

Would it actually have taken four years? That depends upon how much urgency the Pentagon and Congress attached to speeding production. Force Protection Inc., the small South Carolina company that landed the first significant MRAP contracts, was criticized this month by the Pentagon's inspector general for failing to deliver its vehicles on time. But bigger defense contractors were available then—and have secured MRAP contracts in recent weeks that call for deliveries in as little as four months.

A bigger obstacle might have been philosophical: The MRAP didn't fit the Pentagon's long-term vision of how the military should be equipped.

Then-Defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld regarded the Iraq war ''as a means to change'' the military, ''make it lighter, make it more responsive, make it more agile,'' Holder says. The MRAP, heavier and slower than the Humvee, wouldn't have measured up, he says.

THE COMMANDER: ''IEDS ARE MY NO. 1 THREAT''

By June 2004, the military had lost almost 200 U.S. troops to the homemade bombs. Gen. John Abizaid, then head of U.S. Central Command, told the Joint Chiefs that ''IEDs are my No. 1 threat.'' He called for a ''mini-Manhattan Project'' against IEDs, akin to the task force that developed the atomic bomb during World War II.

The Pentagon organized a small task force that, two years later, morphed into a full-fledged agency: the Joint IED Defeat Organization, or JIEDDO. Its leader, Montgomery Meigs, is a retired four-star general. Its annual budget totals $4.3 billion. Its mission: to stop IEDs from killing U.S. troops.

In one of its PowerPoint presentations, JIEDDO made its priorities clear. First, prevent IEDs from being planted by attacking the insurgency. Then, if a device is planted, prevent it from exploding. ''When all Else Fails,'' reads another slide, ''Survive the blast.'' That put solutions such as the MRAP into the category of last resorts.

JIEDDO did spend its own money for 122 MRAPs, but it primarily focused on electronic jammers to prevent bombs from being remotely detonated, unmanned surveillance aircraft to catch insurgents putting bombs along roads and better intelligence on who was building and planting bombs.

The agency has claimed some successes. Insurgents in 2007 had to plant six times as many bombs as they did in 2004 to inflict the same number of U.S. casualties, Meigs said in an interview.

But the insurgents—Sunnis loyal to the deposed leader Saddam Hussein, Shiites who hated the U.S. occupiers and foreigners aligned with al-Qaeda—often managed to stay one step ahead of JIEDDO. They changed the kind of explosives they planted and varied the locations of the devices and the way they detonated them.

When the Pentagon added armor to the sides of Humvees to guard against bombs planted along roadsides, the insurgents responded by burying bombs in the roads. The bombs could blast through the vulnerable underbelly of the Humvees. The insurgents also moved to larger, more sophisticated bombs, some packed with as much as 100 pounds of explosives.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England, the No. 2 official at the Pentagon, testified on Capitol Hill in June that ''as the threat has evolved, we have evolved. We work very, very hard to be responsible to our troops.''

Taylor, the Democratic congressman from Mississippi, pressed England about why the Pentagon waited until May to request substantial numbers of MRAPs. ''Are you telling me no one could see that (need) coming, no one could recognize that the bottom of the Humvee'' didn't protect troops, and ''that's why the kids inside are losing their legs and their lives?'' Taylor asked.

''That is too simplistic a description,'' England replied. ''People have not died needlessly, and we have not left our people without equipment.''

To Pentagon decision-makers, the Humvee seemed able to handle the threat early in the war—roadside bombs, rather than those buried in the roads. ''If anybody could have guessed in 2003 that we would be looking at these kind of (high-powered, buried) IEDs that we're seeing now in 2007, then we would have been looking at something much longer'' term as a solution, Holder says. ''But who had the crystal ball back then?''

Nadeau, now a major general in charge of the Army's Test and Evaluation Command in Alexandria, Va., also defends the Pentagon's choices. He says buried IEDs did not become a serious threat to the armored Humvees until 2006. Critics might say, ''Why didn't you guys buy 16,000 MRAPs a decade ago?'' Nadeau says today. ''You know, I didn't need them.''

Six officers interviewed by USA TODAY say the threat to the Humvees surfaced sooner. Lt. Col. Dallas Eubanks, chief of operations for the Army's 4th Infantry Division in 2003–04, says IEDs became more menacing before he left Iraq. ''We were certainly seeing underground IEDs by early 2004,'' he says.

In mid-2005, two top Marines—Gen. William Nyland, assistant Marine commandant, and Maj. Gen. William Catto, head of Marine Corps Systems Command—testified before Congress that they were seeing an ''evolving'' threat from underbelly blasts. They said at the time that armored Humvees remained their best defense.

THE CONGRESSMAN: MRAP'S ''SIMPLE'' ADVANTAGE

Just after lunch on June 27, 2004, a group of enlisted men parked a handful of armored vehicles near a cinderblock building at Marine headquarters in Fallujah, Iraq.

The day had turned sweltering, like every summer afternoon in central Iraq. But this day was special. A congressional delegation had arrived, and among the dignitaries was Rep. Duncan Hunter, then the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. Hunter wasn't just a powerful congressman. He was a Vietnam War veteran, and his son, then a 27-year-old Marine lieutenant also named Duncan, was stationed at the base.

More important to most of the Marines, the California Republican had been instrumental in pushing the Pentagon to get better armor for them. Humvees with cloth doors—canvas, like the crusher hat that Hunter wore that day—had been standard issue when the war began. The fabric worked well to shield the sun; it offered no protection against explosives.

Then, as now, Hunter was impatient with the pace of procurement in Iraq. That winter, he had dispatched his staff to steel mills, where they persuaded managers and union leaders to set aside commercial orders to expedite steel needed to armor the Humvees. He also worked with the Army and its contractors to expand production.

In Fallujah, Hunter recognized the Humvees. He couldn't identify the two vehicles next to them. One was called a Cougar, the other a Buffalo. Both were MRAPs, made by Force Protection Inc., and both, he was told, were coveted. They were used by explosives disposal teams, but combat units ''looked at them and said, 'We want those,' '' Hunter recalls.

Throughout most of Iraq, they still haven't arrived.

Despite requests from the field, Pentagon officials decided to ration the vehicle. In 2003 and 2004, they bought about 55, and only for explosives-disposal units. But they chose a different approach for protecting the rest of the troops: adding armor to Humvees. The choice was problematic. The Humvee's flat bottom channels an explosion through the center of the vehicle, toward the occupants.

Memos and e-mails obtained by USA TODAY show a stream of concerns about the decision to armor the Humvee. Most went up the chain of command and withered:

December 2003: At the direction of then-deputy Defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz, who was troubled by the mounting death toll from IEDs, the Joint Chiefs began to explore options for giving troops better armor. Detailed information on the Wer'Wolf, an MRAP made in the African country of Namibia, was passed from analysts in the Pentagon to Lt. Col. Steven Ware, an aide collecting information for the Joint Chiefs.

March 30, 2004: Gen. Larry Ellis, in charge of U.S. Forces Command in Atlanta, sent a memo to the Army's chief of staff, Gen. Peter Schoomaker. He complained that ''some Army members and agencies are still in a peacetime posture.'' U.S. commanders in Iraq told him that the armored Humvee ''is not providing the solution the Army hoped to achieve.'' He didn't recommend MRAPs but rather suggested accelerating production of a combat vehicle called the Stryker. In response, the military said new Humvee armor kits would suffice.

April 28–29, 2004: Duncan Lang, a Pentagon analyst who worked in acquisition and technology, suggested purchasing the Wer'Wolf, the MRAP put before the Joint Chiefs in December 2003. In an e-mail to colleagues and supervisors, Lang said ''a number could be sent to Iraq ''as quickly as, or even more quickly than, additional armored Humvees.'' He called it ''frustrating to see the pictures of burning Humvees while knowing that there are other vehicles out there that would provide more protection.''

April 30, 2004: Another Pentagon analyst, Air Force Lt. Col. Bob Harris, forwarded details about MRAP options to a member of the IED task force. The list included a variety of MRAPs, among them the Wer'Wolf and Force Protection's Cougar. ''There was no great clarity as to why they didn't pursue these options,'' Harris says. ''I saw it as my job to educate.'' Harris is now an acquisition officer at Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts.

Hunter says the advantages the MRAP had on the Humvee were clear. ''It's a simple formula,'' Hunter says. ''A vehicle that's 1 foot off the ground gets 16 times that (blast) impact that you get in a vehicle that's 4 feet off the ground,'' like the MRAP.

Although Hunter favored adding armor to Humvees, he now calls the military's devotion to that approach a costly mistake. ''It's true that they saved more lives by moving

first on up-armoring the Humvees,'' he says. ''The flaw is that they did nothing on MRAPs. The up-armoring of Humvees didn't have to be an exclusive operation.''

Holder dismisses the idea that the Pentagon could have moved on a dual track: armoring Humvees while ordering up MRAPs. He doubts Congress would have funded both at the time. But that's exactly what Congress is doing now—buying both vehicles.

''We probably should've had the foresight'' to start buying MRAPs earlier, says Ware, the Joint Chiefs aide (now retired) who passed the information to superiors and counterparts in the Army and Marines. But ''we just couldn't get them there fast enough.'' Adding armor to the Humvee, Ware says, ''was better than nothing.''

THE LIEUTENANT COLONEL: ''HOPE NO ONE GETS WASTED''

A PowerPoint presentation, dated Aug. 25, 2004, shows wounded troops lying in hospital beds. Most are bandaged. One is bloody. His left eye is barely open, his injured right is covered by a patch. Each was maimed by an IED. Each, save one, was in a Humvee.

On another slide: ''Numerous vehicles on the market provide far superior ballistic protection'' than the Humvee, wrote then-lieutenant colonel Jim Hampton, the man who prepared the presentation for the operations staff of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Baghdad.

Safety is a passion for Hampton. He's so concerned with security that he asks his wife, Kate, to take her pistol when she goes for walks on their 80 acres in rural Mississippi. When he got to Iraq in early 2004, he was tasked with looking at armor options to protect the Corps of Engineers, the agency sent to help with rebuilding efforts. For weeks, he studied armor options. His conclusion: The corps should get MRAPs to protect its people, specifically Wer'Wolves. Hampton says he asked for 53 Wer'Wolves. The corps got four.

Hampton couldn't have been more opposed to up-armoring the Humvees and warned his superiors. He even e-mailed his wife from Iraq. ''Hey Babe,'' his e-mail read. ''Just a little aggravated with the bureaucracy. It is simply beyond my comprehension why we're having to go through such (an ordeal) to order confounded hard vehicles. I sure hope no one gets wasted before the powers-that-be get off their collective fat asses.''

Finally, he wrote his congressman, Rep. Chip Pickering, R-Miss., urging him to investigate deaths involving the Humvee. ''We would never consider sending troops'' in Humvees ''up against armor or artillery,'' Hampton wrote, ''but this is tantamount to what we're doing because these vehicles are being engaged with the very ordnance delivered by artillery in the form of improvised explosive devices.''

By November 2004, Pentagon analyst Lang had grown discouraged, an e-mail shows. ''I have found that you can never put the word out too many times,'' he wrote on Nov. 17. ''I send it on to (the Secretary of Defense's office), Army and (Marine Corps) contacts I have. Some of it is getting to the rapid fielding folks and force protection folks that are looking at Iraq issues. I do not see much action.''

Lang closed the message with a variation on his earlier plea: ''For the life of me, I cannot figure out why we have not taken better advantage of the sources of such vehicles,'' he wrote. ''We should be buying 200, not 2, at a time. These things work, they save lives and they don't cost much, if any, more than what we are using now.'' At the time, a basic Wer'Wolf cost about the same as a factory-made armored Humvee: around $200,000.

In December 2004, at a town hall meeting with troops in Kuwait, a soldier asked Rumsfeld about the lack of armor on military vehicles. Rumsfeld explained the situation this way: ''You go to war with the Army you have. They're not the Army you might want or wish to have at a later time.''

The concerns troops voiced at the meeting might have had an impact. Within a week, the Marine Corps Systems Command in Quantico posted its first notice seeking information on MRAPs from potential contractors.

Back in Fallujah, the desire for the Cougar had grown. By February 2005, the Marines were formally asking for more. Field commanders sent their first large-scale request for MRAPs, seeking 1,169 vehicles with specifications that closely mirrored those of the Cougar. They no longer envisioned the vehicle as limited to explosives-disposal teams; they wanted MRAPs for combat troops, too.

Roy McGriff III, then a major, drafted the request signed by Brig. Gen. Hejlik. ''MRAP vehicles will protect Marines, reduce casualties, increase mobility and enhance mission success,'' the request read. ''Without MRAP, personnel loss rates are likely to continue at their current rate.'' In spring 2005, he would have a chance to argue his case before top generals.

THE MARINE MAJOR: ''UNNECESSARY'' CASUALTIES

They convened March 29–30, 2005, at the Marine Corps Air Station in Miramar, Calif. The occasion: a safety board meeting, a regular gathering to address safety issues across the Corps. In attendance: five three-star generals, four two-stars, seven one-stars and McGriff.

McGriff knew the MRAP's history and the Pentagon's reluctance to invest in the vehicle. He had learned about the vehicle from a fellow Marine, Wayne Sinclair. Sinclair, then a captain, wrote in the July 1996 issue of the Marine Corps Gazette that ''an affordable answer to the land mine was developed over 20 years ago. It's time that Marines at the sharp end shared in . . . this discovery.''

Addressing the generals, McGriff recommended analyzing every incident involving Marine vehicles the same way investigators probe aircraft crashes. Look at the vehicle for flaws, McGriff recalls telling the officers, and examine the tactics used to defeat it.

Lt. Gen. Wallace Gregson, commander of Marine Corps Forces in the Pacific, and Lt. Gen. James Mattis, leader of the Marine Combat Development Command, listened and then conferred for a moment.

The room grew quiet. ''Then they said, 'OK, what do you want to do?' '' McGriff remembers.

He recited the very plan that the Pentagon, under a new Defense secretary, would embrace in 2007: ''A phased transition. Continue to armor Humvees. At the same time, as quickly and as expeditiously as possible, purchase as many MRAPs as possible. Phase out Humvees.''

According to McGriff, the room again grew silent. Then, Mattis finally spoke: ''That's exactly what we're going to do.'' Mattis' words failed to translate into action. The urgent-need request McGriff drafted went unfulfilled at Marine headquarters in Quantico. A June 10, 2005, status report on the request indicated the Marine Corps was holding out for a ''future vehicle,'' presumably the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle—more mobile than the MRAP, more protective than the Humvee, and due in 2012. In practical terms, that meant no MRAPs immediately.

McGriff foresaw some of the turmoil over vehicles in a prophetic 2003 paper for the School for Advanced Warfighting in Quantico.

''Currently, our underprotected vehicles result in casualties that are politically untenable and militarily unnecessary,'' his paper read. ''Failure to build a MRAP vehicle fleet produces a deteriorating cascade of effects that will substantially increase'' risks for the military while ''rendering it tactically immobile.'' Mines and IEDs will force U.S. troops off the roads, he wrote, and keep them from aggressively attacking insurgents.

The words were strong and the conclusions were damning. Rhodesia, a nation with nothing near the resources of the U.S. military, had built MRAPs more than a quarter-century earlier that remained ''more survivable than any comparable vehicle produced by the U.S. today,'' McGriff wrote.

Despite his views then, McGriff, now a lieutenant colonel, says he understands the delays. MRAPs needed to be tested to ensure they could perform in combat. ''Nothing happens fast enough when people are fighting and dying,'' he says today. ''But amidst the chaos, you still have to make the right choices. In the end, I think the Marines got the MRAP capability as quickly and safely as possible.''

Others disagree.

Marine major Franz Gayl, now retired, was science adviser to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq. He saw how Marines were still being killed or maimed in Anbar in the fall of 2006. If the Marine Corps had decided MRAPs were a top priority, he says, it could and should have pursued them with the same urgency the Pentagon is now showing.

''The ramp-up of industry capacity was delayed by over 1½ years,'' Gayl says, ''until it became the dire emergency that it is today.''

Bureaucrats didn't want the MRAP sooner ''because it would compete against'' armored Humvees and ''many other favored programs'' for funding, Gayl says. Gayl, who works as a civilian for the Marines at the Pentagon, has filed for federal whistleblower protection because he fears retaliation for speaking out about the failure to get MRAPs sooner.

DEFENSE SECRETARY GATES: ''LIVES ARE AT STAKE''

After McGriff addressed the generals in March 2005, another 15 months passed. Then the Marines in Iraq reiterated the request for MRAPs. This time they sent the request directly to the Joint Chiefs. This time they were successful.

In December 2006, after insurgent bombs had killed almost 1,200 U.S. troops in Iraq, the Joint Chiefs validated requests from Iraq for 4,060 MRAPs, and the formal MRAP program was launched.

By March 2007, Marine Corps Commandant James Conway called the vehicle his ''No. 1 unfilled warfighting requirement.''

In part, that's because he saw it save lives in Anbar province. Brig. Gen. John Allen, deputy commander of coalition forces there, says the Marines tracked attacks on MRAPs since January 2006. The finding: Marines in armored Humvees are twice as likely to be badly wounded in an IED attack as those in MRAPs.

Perhaps more convincing: No Marines have been killed in more than 300 attacks on MRAPs there.

The news, revealed in USA TODAY on April 19, drew the attention of Defense Secretary Gates, four months into his job at the Pentagon. He was traveling in Iraq and read about the MRAP's success in the Pentagon's daily news roundup. Weeks later, at a news conference, Gates said the Pentagon would rush MRAPs to Iraq ''as best we can.''

Late last month, top Pentagon officials approved an Army strategy for buying as many as 17,700 MRAPs, allowing a one-for-one swap

for its armored Humvees. About 5,200 MRAPs had been approved for the other services. Now, Pentagon officials decline to say exactly how many MRAPs they need.

One official says they'll build MRAPs as fast as possible, then recalibrate the military's needs as they assess operations in Iraq, a tacit acknowledgment that they may need fewer MRAPs as U.S. troops are withdrawn.

During another news conference late last month, Gates worried that the companies building the MRAP—not only Force Protection but BAE Systems, General Dynamics, Oshkosh Truck, Armor Holdings, International Military and Government and Protected Vehicles—won't be able to get the vehicles to Iraq fast enough.

''I didn't think that was acceptable,'' Gates said. ''Lives are at stake.''

THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT: ''SAFEST VEHICLE EVER''

As the sun egan to bake the Iraqi countryside last month, Marine 2nd Lt. George Saenz headed back to his base on the outskirts in Fallujah. He felt oddly joyful.

Saenz had just spent hours leading his platoon through one of the most excruciating battlefield jobs—inching a convoy along the crumbling streets of Fallujah, searching for homemade bombs planted in the asphalt or dirt.

The night before had proved dangerous. Two bombs had blown up underneath Saenz's convoy, including one beneath his vehicle.

As Saenz turned through the gray blast walls protecting the base, he says he couldn't help but think: If I had been riding a Humvee, I wouldn't be here right now.

Saenz knew why he was alive. His platoon in the 6th Marine Regiment Combat Team had replaced its Humvees with MRAPs. The two blasts produced just one injury, a Marine whose concussion put him on light duty for a week.

''We're probably in the safest vehicle ever designed for military use,'' Saenz says, recalling his platoon's record: Three months. Eleven bomb attacks. No one dead.

MRAPs have become legendary in Anbar since Marines began using them on dangerous missions clearing roadside bombs. Tank commanders, radio operators and others drop by Saenz's platoon every day to do what Rep. Hunter had done three years earlier—inspect the small fleet of MRAPs, knock on the armor, sometimes crawl inside.

Scores of MRAPs are scheduled to arrive in Anbar this summer. That means they'll be available for the first time to the Marines for tasks other than clearing IEDs, says Marine Col. Mike Rudolph, logistics officer for U.S. forces in western Iraq. No one has decided how MRAPs will be used, but ''everybody wants one,'' Rudolph says.

To be sure, the vehicle isn't perfect. Saenz's team warns that MRAPs drive like trucks, plodding and heavy. Some models are so bulky they have blind spots for troops peering over the boxy hood and so noisy a driver has to shout at someone 2 feet away.

''They're just so heavy,'' Sgt. Randall Miller says. ''These are virtually designed off a semi-truck platform.''

After substantial testing, the military also has concluded that MRAPs are vulnerable to explosively formed projectiles, the newest and most devastating variation of the IED. More armor has been developed for the MRAPs the Pentagon ordered this spring.

Miller isn't complaining. On his first tour in Iraq in 2004–05, Miller searched for land mines in a Humvee. His detection technique was simple: ''Go real slow, cross your fingers.'' He still drives slowly but feels safer knowing the MRAP's V-shaped hull will deflect a bomb blast. ''I've seen our guys get hit and walk away,'' Miller says. ''They're awesome, awesome vehicles.''

THE WIDOW: ''THEY SHOULD'VE DONE IT'' SOONER

Whom or what is to blame for the delay in getting safer vehicles for the 158,000 U.S. troops in Iraq?

Jim Hampton, now a retired colonel, questions why the Pentagon and Congress didn't do more to keep the troops safe. ''I have colleagues who say people need to go to jail over this, and in my mind they do,'' Hampton says.

Hunter, now running for president, blames the Pentagon bureaucracy, which he says ''doesn't move fast enough to meet the needs of the war fighter. We have a system in which the warfighting requirements are requested from the field and the acquisition people say, 'We'll get it on our schedule.' ''

Other members of Congress blame Rumsfeld and his vision of transforming the military into a leaner, faster fighting force.

Rep. John Murtha, D–Pa., wonders if Rumsfeld's forceful personality silenced some of the generals. ''Rumsfeld so intimidated the military that I've lost confidence in them telling us what they really need'' in Iraq, Murtha says.

''They all knew the Rumsfeld rule: Your career is over if you say anything contrary'' to his policies, Murtha says. ''It's much better now that Rumsfeld is gone. The military is being much more honest.''

If the Pentagon ''had just listened to the guys in the field'' who wanted MRAPs, Murtha says, ''we'd have them in Iraq right now.''

USA TODAY could not determine what role, if any, Rumsfeld played in MRAP deliberations. A spokesman for Rumsfeld, now running a foundation in Washington, said last week that the former Defense secretary would not comment.

Aaron Kincaid's widow, Rachel, doesn't know who should be held accountable. She is haunted by whether getting MRAPs to Iraq earlier might have saved her husband's life. The bomb that blew apart his Humvee lay along the path he and his unit took, and no one noticed.

Today, she wonders: Was his death really about the path that he took, or about the path the Pentagon spent years avoiding, the path that, in May, finally led them to the vehicle that might have saved her husband's life?

You think there is always something that could've been done to prevent it,'' Rachel Kincaid says of her husband's death.

''If that's been around for that many years,'' she says of the MRAP, ''why hasn't it been used? They should've done it at the beginning of the war. They should've done it three years ago, four years ago.''

IRAQ

Ms. FEINGOLD. Madam President, as I said late last week, it has been 52 months since military operations began in Iraq. Approximately 3,613 Americans have died and 25,000 have been wounded. More than 4 million Iraqis have fled their homes, and tens of thousands, at a minimum, have been killed. We have now been engaged in the war in Iraq longer than we were in World War II.

With the surge well underway, violence in Iraq has reached unprecedented levels and American troop fatalities are up 70 percent. From all angles, the situation in Iraq is an absolute disaster, and the administration's inability or unwillingness to recognize this reality is diminishing our international credibility, straining our relations with many foreign governments, and causing us to neglect weak and unstable regions that could pose threats to our national security.

The administration's single-minded focus on Iraq is preventing us from adequately confronting threats of extremism and terrorism around the globe. The declassified NIE released just yesterday confirms that al-Qaida remains the most serious threat to the United States and that key elements of that threat have been regenerated or even enhanced. The administration's policies in Iraq have also resulted in the emergence of an al-Qaida affiliate that did not exist before the war—al-Qaida in Iraq, or AQI. According to the NIE, al-Qaida's association with this group helps it raise resources and recruit and indoctrinate operatives, including for attacks against the United States.

Yet, while this report is further proof that the war in Iraq is a distraction from our core goal of fighting those who attacked us on 9/11, this administration and its supporters are still calling Iraq the ''central front in the war on terror,'' even though al-Qaida is a global threat and AQI is one of a number of actors responsible for violence in Iraq's self-sustaining sectarian conflict.

While our attention has been diverted and our resources squandered in Iraq, al-Quaida has protected its safe haven in Pakistan and has increased cooperation with regional terrorist groups. The sooner we redeploy from Iraq, the sooner we can refocus our efforts and develop a wide-ranging, inclusive strategy that would deny al-Qaida these advantages.

I remind my colleagues that last November, our constituents spoke out against this war in every way they possibly could. And as the situation continues to deteriorate, they have repeated their call—they were outside this building last night holding a candlelight vigil, and in States around the Nation, to show their support for ending this war and to tell President Bush and Senate Republicans to ''stop obstructing an end to the war.'' I know my colleagues heard their voices last November, and I am hopeful they heard them last night. It almost goes without saying that they hear them every time they return home as well.

But, just like last week and the week before that, at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, these pervasive calls are ignored as the President continues to make it clear that nothing not the voices of his citizens, not the advice of military and foreign policy experts, not the concerns of members from his own party—will discourage him from pursuing an indefinite and misguided war.

We can't put all the blame on the White House, however. An overwhelming majority of Congress authorized this misguided war, and now a far smaller but still determined minority