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Senate

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008—Continued

Mr. REID. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll, and the following Senators entered the Chamber and answered to their names:

[Quorum No. 5 Leg.]

Akaka	Gregg	Salazar
Cardin	Isakson	Schumer
Casey	Lincoln	Stabenow
Coburn	Menendez	Sununu
Craig	Mikulski	Tester
Dorgan	Murray	Thune
Durbin	Reid	Webb

The PRESIDING OFFICER. A quorum is not present.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I move to instruct the Sergeant at Arms to request the presence of absent Senators and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There is a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion of the Senator from Nevada, Mr. REID, to direct the Sergeant at Arms to request the attendance of absent Senators. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Delaware (Mr. BIDEN), the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. BINGAMAN), the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. BYRD), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CONRAD), the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN), the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. INOUYE, the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON), the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROCKEFELLER), and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. JOHNSON) are necessarily absent.

Mr. MCCONNELL. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from Colorado (Mr. ALLARD), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. DEMINT), the Senator from North Carolina (Mrs. DOLE), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Texas (Mrs. HUTCHISON), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. KYL), the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. LOTT), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), and the Senator from Kansas (Mr. ROBERTS).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from North Carolina (Mrs. DOLE) would have voted ''nay.''

The result was announced—yeas 41, nays 37, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 250 Leg.]

YEAS—41

Akaka	Harkin	Nelson (NE)
Baucus	Kennedy	Obama
Bayh	Kerry	Pryor
Boxer	Klobuchar	Reed
Brown	Kohl	Reid
Cantwell	Landrieu	Salazar
Cardin	Lautenberg	Sanders
Carper	Leahy	Schumer
Casey	Levin	Stabenow
Clinton	Lincoln	Tester
Dodd	McCaskill	Webb
Dorgan	Menendez	Whitehouse
Durbin	Mikulski	Wyden
Feingold	Murray	

NAYS—37

Barrasso	Domenici	Sessions
Bennett	Ensign	Shelby
Bond	Enzi	Smith
Brownback	Grassley	Snowe
Bunning	Gregg	Specter
Chambliss	Hagel	Stevens
Coburn	Hatch	Sununu
Cochran	Isakson	Thune
Coleman	Lieberman	Vitter
Collins	Lugar	Voinovich
Corker	Martinez	Warner
Craig	McConnell	
Crapo	Murkowski	

NOT VOTING—22

Alexander	DeMint	Kyl
Allard	Dole	Lott
Biden	Feinstein	McCain
Bingaman	Graham	Nelson (FL)
Burr	Hutchison	Roberts
Byrd	Inhofe	Rockefeller
Conrad	Inouye	
Cornyn	Johnson	

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WEBB.) A quorum is now present.

The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the cloture vote on the Levin amendment occur at 11 a.m. today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MCCONNELL. Reserving the right to object for a moment.

Mr. REID. I will yield in 1 second.

Mr. President, I would further say that we are going to have another vote sometime later this morning. I have talked to both majority and minority, and there is no time that is appropriate. So I arbitrarily am going to state at this time that we are going to have another vote. It will not occur before 5 a.m. It could be a little before, a little after that, depending on what is happening on the floor. We will have another vote, but it won't be before 5 this morning.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as I understand the majority leader, the unanimous-consent request is that we have a cloture vote on the Levin amendment at 11, and there will be not another procedural rollcall vote prior to 5 a.m.

Mr. REID. I would further state, and I should have cleared this with the minority leader, and I did not, I would ask that the last 20 minutes prior to the 11 o'clock vote be left for Senator MCCONNELL, 20 to the hour would be the minority leader, 10 to the hour would be me. We each would get 10 minutes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Do I further understand the majority leader that there would not then be additional votes between the procedural vote at 5 a.m. or later and the 11 o'clock vote?

Mr. REID. I think that is true. We have the Senate Prayer Breakfast, we have a steering committee meeting at 9. I think people have other things scheduled. I think we have done the votes tonight, so that should work out fine.

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

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Mr. MCCONNELL. It is my understanding that there will be two more votes on this matter—a procedural vote not to occur earlier than 5 a.m., and then one additional vote at 11 o'clock on the cloture on the Levin amendment.

Mr. REID. That is true. I ask unanimous consent that the vote occur at 11, that Senator MCCONNELL and I be recognized as I have indicated, and that we will proceed with the debate on this issue during the morning hour.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators on our side be recognized in the following order: Senator ISAKSON from Georgia, Senator COBURN from Oklahoma, Senator THUNE of South Dakota, and Senator SNOWE of Maine, alternating with the designees of the other side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Under the previous order, the Senator from Georgia is recognized.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I rise to address the issue before the Senate. I have stayed all night and listened to remarks from my colleagues on both sides. I have tremendous respect for each and every one of them.

I do have some issues, however, with some rhetorical questions that have been asked and not responded to and I think are some voices that have been referred to that have not been really answered that I would like to address in my few minutes.

First of all, the Levin-Reed amendment specifically calls for a withdrawal beginning 120 days from now and completed by the spring of next year. Unconditional, notwithstanding whatever action may be taking place on the ground, what progress may or may not have been made, a precipitous and a final withdrawal.

What I would like to talk about is something that no one has mentioned; that is, the consequences if that actually takes place. I would like to do it in the context of the rhetorical question that was asked by the Senator from New Jersey, who asked the question: How many more lives?

His reference, I know, was to the soldiers in the American and the allied forces in Iraq. But the question is meritorious as a response to the consequences of a Levin-Reed amendment passing.

I joined the Foreign Relations Committee this year, as the Presiding Officer has as well. I noted that he did what I did. He sat through almost all of the hearings we had in January and February on the question of the surge and the question of withdrawal and redeployment. We all heard the same thing. Expert after expert argued over whether the surge would or would not work, or the degree to which it would work.

But no one, no one—from former Secretary Madeline Albright or former Secretary Colin Powell to JOHN MURTHA, the representative in the Congress, to Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker, all of whom testified, and 20 others, everyone said the result of a withdrawal or redeployment at that period in January would mean countless untold loss of life in Iraq. And most of them said it would cause a great loss of life in the entire Middle East.

I have had visits from representatives of other Middle Eastern countries who have said: Please do not have a precipitous withdrawal because we will not be able to contain the sectarian violence that will certainly follow.

Now, does that mean we should remain as an occupying peacekeeper? No. But it means if we have objectives and benchmarks for victory, we should give ourselves the chance for that to take place.

In May of this year, we had the debate we are having again today. In May of this year, on the Iraqi supplemental—which was to fund the war in Iraq for our soldiers—we had this debate on whether we should withdraw. We decided not to do it. And that was the right decision. We further decided to put some benchmarks, that we should judge the merits of our progress in part by July 15, and then later on September 15. The President reported 3 days early on July 15 the progress that has been made.

Some has been made, some has not been made. But we all determined that it would be September, and the report of General Petraeus, the man we unanimously put in charge of the battle, as to whether we went forward, proceeded the way we were or changed our strategy.

I do not know what the results of the September 15 report are going to be, but I know I agree with the lady by the name of Lucy Harris. Lucy is the kind of person to whom we ought to all listen. Her son, Noah, 1LT Noah Harris, died in Iraq 2 years ago. He was an e-mail buddy with me during his tour, so I knew a little bit about why he was there and what he believed.

Noah Harris was a young man who, on September 11, 2001, was at the University of Georgia and a cheerleader. The day the incident, terrible incident took place in New York City, Noah Harris went straight to Army ROTC as a junior ROTC, applied for ROTC, studied to become a commissioned officer, solely because of the inspiration he had gotten from seeing that tragedy and knowing that he wanted to represent his country and do something to pursue terrorism.

He went in the Army in 2004, was on the ground in Iraq, became known as the Beanie Baby Soldier because in the one pocket he carried bullets, in the other he carried Beanie Babies. He befriended the Iraqi children.

Noah died tragically. I went to his funeral. I paid respect to his parents. I have listened to Lucy, and I have followed her comments in the 2 years that have passed since his tragic loss.

This week, on July 15, in the Columbus newspaper in Georgia and other newspapers in a syndicated article, Ms. Harris was interviewed regarding the current debate that we are having on the floor of the Senate. I would like to quote two quotes from that article. First quote from Lucy Harris:

> ''They should just defer to Petraeus,'' Lucy Harris said of GEN David Petraeus, the commander of forces in Iraq. ''It's a political game.''

Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD this entire article.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(See exhibit 1.)

Mr. ISAKSON. Then, secondly, at the end of the article, I think a paragraph that all of us should hear: Lucy said the following:

> We're talking about boots on the ground, real people. When I think about my son who could have done anything with his life, but he fought because he believed in his country and what we are doing in Iraq. . . . I just don't want it to have been in vain.

Well, I want to say to Lucy Harris and the parents of every soldier and the loved ones of every soldier who has been deployed, and especially those whose lives have been lost, we don't want them to be in vain, nor do we want them to be deployed in an endless occupation. We have a benchmark going to September 15, a general who had the unanimous support of this body, and operating under a funding mechanism that received an 80-vote margin in May.

Let's end the quibbling at this moment on what we do and give the plan a chance to have its final merits judged and weighed by the man who is on the ground.

As I said at the outset of my remarks, I can completely respect the statements everybody made and the opinions of everybody here. But this is a very serious question. And we should vote, and will vote, tomorrow at 11. When we do, I will not vote for cloture because I want to continue the commitment that was made by this body in the middle of May on the funding of the Iraq supplemental, the timetable for reports to come back, and the conditions upon which we would change, a new way forward, if and only if, those benchmarks were not met and progress was not being weighed.

I think we owe it to Lucy Harris. We owe it to the legacy of the sacrifice her son made and the sacrifice made by the countless men and women who are in Iraq and those who have served before them.

I yield the floor.

EXHIBIT 1

[From the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, July 15, 2007]

SENATORS GRAPPLE WITH IRAQ POLICY

(By Halimah Abdullah)

For Rick and Lucy Harris and the small town of Ellijay, Ga., the Iraq war isn't just some policy debate raging on the floor of the U.S. Senate. It's about the frailty of life and

the power of one young man's sacrifice to spur others into action.

First Lt. Noah Harris's death two years ago while serving in Iraq brought the conflict home to that community. Now, the Iraq war dominates conversations.

''It's the discussion in classes. It's the discussion in town. Everyone is very interested in what is going on,'' said Noah's mother, Lucy Harris.

So it's with no small degree of annoyance that the Harris family has watched the back and forth in the Senate over changing Iraq war policy.

''They should just defer to Petraeus,'' Lucy Harris said of Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of forces in Iraq. ''It's a political game.''

Republicans leaders such as Georgia Sens. Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson are in a tough position as they try to assuage the concerns of people at home, like the Harris family, while helping the GOP navigate the debate on funding an increasingly unpopular war backed by a president whose support is also on the wane.

A recent Gallup poll showed President Bush's approval rating at 29 percent, and 71 percent of Americans favoring a proposal to remove almost all U.S. troops from Iraq by April 2008. The president's job approval rating in a recent AP-Ipsos was 33 percent.

As Chambliss and Isakson consider changes to the Iraq war policy they do so amid a climate of several high ranking Senate Republican defections, Including that of Sen. Richard lugar, R-Ind., the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The departures have included Sen. John Warner, R-Va., and the moderate-leaning Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine.

For Republicans, the signs of strain are starting to show.

''It is Important for us to continue to pursue the goals of the surge, and have a debate not in advance of the facts but after we know the facts as they stand,'' Isakson said on the Senate floor Wednesday.

The White House has urged Republican lawmakers to wait until Petraeus, the top U.S. military commander in Iraq, gives a report on the war's progress in September before voting on any major policy changes.

While most Republican leaders have agreed to do this, they've also acknowledged that congressional and public patience for the war effort is growing thin.

''I think what's happening is that we've come to a critical point,'' Isakson said,

Jennifer Duffy, a political analyst and managing editor with the nonpartisan Cook Political Report, put it bluntly.

''There's just so many bullets for a lame duck president—especially an unpopular one, that (Republican leaders) can be expected to take,'' she said.

''Georgia, like most of the South is still more supportive of the war in Iraq than the rest of the nation,'' said Charles Bullock, a political science professor at the University of Georgia and author of the book ''The New Politics of the Old South.''

The Harris family and the folks in Ellijay could not care less about the politics behind the war, or how Senate votes and defections will impact politicians. As a community that has watched their young people go off to war, they are intensely interested in seeing just how military leaders will define victory In Iraq.

''We're talking about boots on the ground, real people,'' Harris said. ''When I think about my son who could have done anything with his life, but he fought because he believed in his country. In what we were doing in Iraq . . . I just don't want it to be in vain.''

That range of emotions surrounding military sacrifice isn't lost on Chambliss and Isakson.

Recently, Chambliss made sure a measure to provide wounded soldiers better medical care was included in the defense authorization bill currently being debated by Senate.

Such efforts are welcome news to Harris, who often speaks at public events about her son.

''My son's mantra was 'I do what I can,' '' she said, her voice trailing off.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the next Democratic speaker be Senator HARKIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I rise to express my very deep concern about the administration's ongoing policy in Iraq. As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and chairman of the Subcommittee on Readiness, I have had the privilege to hear the testimony of our troop commanders, to hear our soldiers, to hear their families, and now—now more than ever—I insist we bring an end to this conflict.

Already too many lives have been lost, too many men and women have been wounded and permanently injured, and too many spouses, parents, and children have suffered the pain of separation and too often permanent loss of a loved one.

Yet according to the new National Intelligence Estimate, al-Qaida is growing stronger, and we are no closer to achieving a sustainable security in Iraq. We must make it clear to the Iraqi political leaders that the future of Iraq is in their hands, and they must learn to reach the political compromises necessary for a functioning democracy.

Once again, we are at a crossroads. We can either continue to pursue a policy that is no longer working or we can move forward and implement a strategy that will set us on a new course. The time is now to reevaluate the costs of this war.

We must understand that the long-term responsibility for caring for those injured during their service and for the families of those who died is a true cost of war. Over 3,600 members of the Armed Forces have given their lives in the service of this Nation. Thousands more will come home with injuries, both physical and psychological, that will require treatment and rehabilitation, processes that can take, as we know now, many years. Invisible wounds that are difficult to detect, such as PTSD and mild to moderate traumatic brain injury, will affect a great many servicemembers. In addition, it will make it difficult for them to adjust to civilian life as they deal with long-lasting visions and experiences they encountered in combat.

While we can help the brave troops by passing critical legislation that will provide much needed counseling, these invisible wounds will take a long time to heal. Clearly, the total cost of the current conflicts includes both the loss of lives and resources needed to help a new generation of young combat veterans heal.

The American people also believe that now is the time to begin the process of bringing our troops home. According to a recent poll, 63 percent of Americans believe that we should no longer continue on the present course of action set by the administration. They believe, as I believe, that the present surge has not been a success, and waiting until September to reconsider our approach is simply prolonging a war that is no longer our fight.

I urge my Senate colleagues to support the Levin-Reed amendment to the Defense authorization bill, which will send a clear message to the citizens of this country that we hear their concerns and we agree it is time to bring our loved ones home.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. MCCASKILL). The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. Madam President, I do not speak very often on the floor on issues such as that we are talking about today. We have a wonderful heritage in this country, and somehow we find ourselves in the midst of a mess. We find ourselves in a position where we have made decisions, some of them poor, some of them good, but we find ourselves—and I agree—at a crossroads.

The question in front of us is threefold: One is we have a plan which we instituted less than a month ago and that we set up early this year, which we are now wanting to change with the Reed-Levin amendment before we have data to tell us one way or another, and that is debatable. We have a large number of Americans who have given the ultimate sacrifice in the war in Iraq. But the question before us is what is the world like today? What is it that is going to change if we leave Iraq? What are the consequences?

Senator LIEBERMAN spoke very eloquently about what the plans of al-Qaida are and what they have told us, but what happens to the Middle East when we leave?

I am reminded of the history of this country that we do not walk away if we have a mess and allow millions of people to die and millions of other people to be displaced without having a strategy that will solve that situation. And I do not see that in the Reed-Levin amendment.

I know the contention is that because we are there, we incite more violence; because we are there, al-Qaida has focused there. But the very thing we attempted to do in Afghanistan, we will recreate the situation prior to our going into Afghanistan if we leave Iraq. But the more important question for me is: Do we as a nation have a moral obligation, regardless of the past?

The fact is we are in Iraq today and some situations are improving and some are not improving nearly as fast as any and all of us want. But is there a moral obligation for this country not

to allow this to lead to 2 to 3 million deaths, not to allow for sure the 450,000 people who have been successful helping us who will come under the threat of death, not to allow the displacement of another 2 to 5 million Iraqis out of Iraq? Do we have a moral obligation not to allow Iran to be in control and use Iraq as a basis for their dominance of the Persian Empire again in the Middle East? Is there any obligation for us in that regard? I think there is.

I look at the situation in Iraq as a cancer, as a physician and also as a cancer survivor. There is lots wrong in Iraq right now. We are at the point where we have to make very hard choices about whether the patient can be saved. My concern is that because the treatment is tough, because the risk of the treatment is high, we are to the point where we are going to let the patient die. The fact is the patient does not have to die.

I do not dispute my colleagues who have a different opinion on where we should go in Iraq. What I do dispute is whether we recognize fully the obligations we have for the future.

What is going to happen as we withdraw? Can anybody in this body guarantee to me 2 or 3 or 4 years later down the road that we are not going to put a whole lot of American lives at risk because of the decision we made to turn off the chemotherapy, to turn off the radiation for the patient? What we are saying is, we are going to ration this; we started down the road, but we are not going to finish it.

There has not ever been a time in my life, being alive during the Korean war, the Vietnam war, and this war, that I have not seen controversy about any war we have been in. Anybody who has been around those three wars knows that is the truth. The question for me is what is the best long-term—long-term, not short-term—policy for our country in terms of stabilizing the Middle East? What is the moral obligation for us as a nation? Having invaded Iraq and set in motion many of these situations, how do we measure it and how do we live up to the heritage we have as a country that stands to fulfill moral obligations?

I have to answer a couple of statements that were made earlier. Any innuendo that members of the Republican conference are having their arms twisted to support the President in this war is a bold face misrepresentation of the facts. On issues such as this, all my colleagues know nobody is twisting their arm to be against it and no one is twisting my arm to support the policy. As a matter of fact, the statement by the Senator from Ohio that Vice President CHENEY comes in every week and gives us a pep talk on the issue—I have been attending the conference for 2½ years, and I heard him speak once in 2½ years on Iraq. So the politics of negative comments taken out of context should be labeled what they are.

The other fact I know, the Senator from New Jersey talked about maybe more of the Members of the Senate should have our children in Iraq. I know the Presiding Officer had a son recently return, but I know there are people in this body who have children in Iraq—one of Senator MCCAIN's sons is due to ship out this month—who have an opinion, a different opinion than what the Reed-Levin amendment would consider.

So I think it is highly unfair to speculate as to what I think is divided with those who have had children with this experience.

There are some facts I do know about our country. I do know the war is tearing at the fabric of our Nation. I do know that we as a nation are war weary. I think we ought to talk about what is great about our country, what is good about the military.

My impression from being in Iraq and here is I do not know of finer individuals in our country than those who are serving in the military. I can also tell you I do not know of more informed citizens of all the issues that face our country than the military.

We have made a lot of mistakes in the policy in the Middle East, there is no question. I think we can agree with that point, and I think we can all admit to it. But it does not change where we are and what the consequences are if we leave.

I served as a medical missionary in Iraq after the first gulf war. I developed friendships with Kurds and Shia and Sunni. We talk in the abstract over here about the Iraqi people and their leadership. But I wish to tell my colleagues, I didn't see a whole lot of difference in what those people wanted and what we want for our families. For us to speak in a sterile way that there will be no impact whatsoever on all those Iraqis, no matter what their faith or their heritage, belies the fact that millions will die. That is not my estimate, that is the estimate of many very learned scholars on the Middle East.

We heard this week a mention from the Secretary General of the United Nations advising against a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq in terms of how that would play out in the Middle East.

I think of the children that I did skin grafts on in Iraq who are now in their middle twenties, and the hope that they have for a safe and secure freedom, to actually have a Government that is a function of the beliefs of the multitudes who live in Iraq. Despite all our mistakes, should their hopes be dashed?

We look at the sacrifices, we look at the moneys we have spent, but we never look at it in terms of the lives of the Iraqis. The contention is we cause more violence because we are there than what will happen when we withdraw. If I could know for sure that what the experts tell us is wrong and millions of Iraqis will not die, I could probably be in agreement with some of the positions of those who want to change our course right now. But I don't know that and, as a matter of fact, the experts say the exact opposite will happen and millions will die. So we do have a moral obligation.

The other question we ought to bring forward is the contention we want to change the rules of the Senate on a vote tonight when everybody knows that a cloture vote and a requirement of 60 votes on major issues has been the rule of the Senate for years. It is a precedent longstanding that we have found on both sides of the aisle, no matter who is in charge, works well on contentious issues.

The vast majority of Republicans are ready to vote on cloture tonight. We didn't have that opportunity. We are going to vote on cloture tomorrow morning at 11. But we also know that if cloture fails, we probably will not be on the Defense bill.

The question I have for my colleagues is, they control the Armed Services Committee. They wrote the Defense authorization bill. Why in the world, when our troops need guidance, when we need new reauthorizations, when we need items for the military that are highly important to the success now, not just in Iraq but throughout the world, would we pull a bill and not continue to work on it?

As a matter of fact, this debate, which we had 2 months ago and now are having again, is keeping us from doing some of the business we need to be doing in terms of observing and doing oversight of the Federal Government.

This Defense authorization bill has $13 billion worth of earmarks, earmarks that the Pentagon does not want, but we want, we want for constituencies, we want for campaign supporters, we want because we know better—the very type of thing that is going to hurt in the long run the confidence of the people in this Chamber. So instead of continuing to work on the Defense authorization bill, it is going to get pulled in the morning and we are going to go to higher education reconciliation.

The question we ought to be asking and what the American people ought to ask is, because one vote fails on cloture, do we not have an obligation to go on and authorize defense expenditures? I believe we do. One vote should not make or break that bill. It was not part of the original Defense authorization bill that came out of committee. Why would we not continue to work on it and give our military the authorization to do what they need to do in the future?

Someone asked me earlier today if this was a political stunt? No, I don't think so. I think we need to have this debate. I think the more the American people learn about what the consequences are when we leave Iraq, the more likely they are to have a second thought about the pressure and tension they feel on this terrible situation. And as they learn what the consequences will be and also see a perspective about

at least giving General Petraeus until September 15, as they hear that debate, I think minds will be changed or at least attention will be turned to it.

A couple of things that I think also ought to be asked on the Reed-Levin amendment are, How does the Reed-Levin amendment address Iranian influence in Iraq in the future? How does the Reed-Levin amendment address increasing Iranian influence in the region, including Iran's adverse influence on the Arab-Israeli peace process? How does the Reed-Levin amendment guard against a regional conflict? If the policy of the Reed-Levin amendment became law, would the United States stay out of the humanitarian catastrophe and ethnic cleansing that will surely follow with a precipitous withdrawal of U.S. forces? If the policy of the Reed-Levin amendment became law, would the United States offer financial assistance to neighboring countries forced to absorb the massive number of refugees fleeing such a conflict? If the policy of the Reed-Levin amendment became law, what would the cost be to the U.S. Treasury in lives if the United States eventually had to return to the Middle East, in terms of forces?

I don't think those questions can go unanswered in this debate, and yet they have not been addressed. What we do know is we have a tinderbox. What we don't know, but some are suggesting, is the tinderbox will quiet down if we leave. If we leave, I hope they are right. I don't think they are right.

I think this is a time that will really test the mettle of this country. I think the conflict we see over the debate in this body is not bad for our country; I think it is good for our country. It is one of the attributes that make us strong.

Leaving Iraq, losing in Iraq will be terrible for our country in the long run—not in the short run but in the long run. It will limit our influence in the Middle East. It will limit the trust and viability of our Nation with every other nation under which we have any type of security arrangement. But most importantly, it will put us back 10 to 15 years in terms of doing what we need to do in the world.

Senator DURBIN and I are working hard on the Darfur situation. Darfur is going to seem like a blip on a screen compared to what is going to happen in Iraq when we leave.

What we do know is what is happening in Iraq today, the concentration of the violence, especially the suicide bombers. Two things are happening. One is they are moving away from the areas in which the surge is employed. That is why you see Kirkuk the first time hit. But we also know that 85 percent of the suicide bombers aren't Iraqis; they are al-Qaida, from outside of Iraq. I suspect they are going to overplay their hand like they did in Anbar Province, which is why those Sunnis now are allied with coalition forces.

So I would ask the Members of this body, No. 1, to not assume that any of us who support the present course until September in Iraq have had our arms twisted. We have not. We actually believe it is the best policy. I don't believe we need to have our moral compass checked, as suggested by the Senator from New Jersey. We just happen to have a difference of opinion. And the difference really doesn't stem on any factual basis, but it stems on long-range versus short-range thinking.

When I took the oath for this office, my oath was to uphold the Constitution and to do what was best for the country—not for my political career, not what will win the next election, not what will get me more seats in the Senate, but what I truly thought in my heart and mind would be great and best for this country.

The Iraq war is a perplexing situation for all of us. I believe it is wrong for us to stop in the middle of a surge that is having some progress. Not what we would like, maybe, not to the degree we would like, but for the first time, in approximately 2 years, it is making positive things out of things that were very negative.

It is my hope that as we continue this debate, we will recognize that the most important question is, Then what? What happens if the Reed-Levin amendment becomes law? What happens to our military? What happens in the Middle East? What happens in Iran, which is now known to be training a vast number of people to influence the outcome? What happens to the morale of our military? What happens to our relationship with allies around the world when we can no longer be counted on as a reliable partner? What next?

That is the question we should be debating—what next? What are the consequences of not fulfilling a moral obligation to clean up a mess we helped create? You can say we don't have that obligation, but we do. History will judge this Nation on how it handles this situation. We may, in fact, walk away, but if we did, and if we do, I believe we belie the heritage of the sacrifice that has been made by so many people for so many years in our history that predates us.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I have listened to most of the comments made by my friend from Oklahoma, and I think he asked some good questions, things we all have to consider about what will happen when we leave.

The Senator talked about the moral obligations, what moral obligations we have. I wonder what moral obligation we had back in the 1980s when Donald Rumsfeld went to visit with Saddam Hussein? What moral responsibility did we have in the Reagan administration when we supported Saddam Hussein, gave him weapons, and gave him information in his war against Iran? What was our moral obligation at that time?

We hear about what will happen when we leave, all this talk about a bloodbath and everything. Well, Madam President, I can remember Vietnam. I can remember the same things: Oh, if we leave Vietnam—we either fight them there or we fight them here. We have to stop the Communists in Vietnam or it will be the Philippines next and then Japan. We have to stop them there. And if we leave, there will be a bloodbath in Vietnam. All of the people who supported us will be slaughtered in the streets.

Well, it didn't happen. Here today, with Vietnam, we have diplomatic relations. I think we just had the new Ambassador or President come over and meet with President Bush in the White House. Cruise ships, these big cruise ships now dock over in Saigon and people get off and go into Saigon. Americans take cruise ships over there in Vietnam and go to the beaches. You look back and you think about those 50,000-plus Americans who died over there, and you wonder, what was that all about? What was that moral obligation all about?

So, again, we haven't learned from the past. The specter is always raised that calamities will happen if we don't follow what the President wants. Well, the President is not always right. This President and his colleagues here couldn't be more wrong about our course in Iraq.

So I have come to the floor this evening on behalf of many Iowans who have been calling and e-mailing my office. The overwhelming majority of people in my State have turned against the war in Iraq, as have the overwhelming majority of Americans elsewhere. According to a USA Today/Gallup poll released last week, 71 percent of Americans favor removing all U.S. troops from Iraq by April 1 of next year.

The American people are sick of seeing our brave men and women killed and maimed in what has become a vicious civil war in Iraq. They want to chart a new course in Iraq, a course out of that civil war. They simply can't believe President Bush and his allies in this body have responded to their wishes with a strategy of obstruction, filibuster, and veto threats. They can't believe Republican Senators here are blocking votes on the No. 1 issue before our Nation, the No. 1 issue on the minds of the American people.

All we are asking of our Republican colleagues is let us vote. Let us vote up or down on whether we want to extricate ourselves from Iraq and bring the troops home. In a nutshell, people have been calling my office saying that Republican Senators certainly have a right to support President Bush's war in Iraq, they have a right to advocate that we stay the course, but our Republican colleagues should not claim a right to block simple up-or-down votes on amendments calling for a new course in Iraq.

The President and his allies are demanding we wait until September before we act, but this is the same game of obstruction and delay they have been playing for years now. Time and again, the President has announced a new plan, a new strategy for victory in Iraq. Time and again, the President has asked for patience. Time and again, he has cited progress and suggested that success is just around the corner. Sounds just like Vietnam. Meanwhile, with each new plan, with every new strategy, the United States gets dragged deeper and deeper into the quagmire in Iraq. More Americans get killed and maimed, more innocent Iraqi men, women, and children are killed and wounded, and Iraq spirals deeper into chaos and sectarian division. Sounds just like Vietnam.

The President's spokesmen insult our intelligence, saying that the surge is only a couple weeks old, that we should give it a chance. As we all know, it was announced in January, more than 6 months ago. I remember very well because 1 day after the President announced his surge, 640 soldiers from the 133rd Infantry of the Iowa National Guard were told they would not be coming home from Anbar Province as planned. Instead, their combat tour would be extended to 16 months—nearly a year and a half in the middle of the most deadly combat in Iraq.

Since the surge began back in January, 615 more U.S. troops have died in Iraq. Many thousands more have been injured. Since the surge was announced, eight more soldiers from Iowa have been killed in Iraq, including a second soldier from the small town of Tipton, IA. Think about that, a small community of 3,100 people in rural Iowa has lost two of its sons in Iraq.

On Sunday, the Washington Post published a story about Tipton, IA, and its growing disillusionment with the war in Iraq. The story noted that in the first 6 months of this year—since the surge began—125 troops from 10 Midwestern States have died in Iraq, the bloodiest stretch of the war so far.

Mr. President, as more and more Iowans and other Americans turn against this war, as more and more of our young men and women are killed and wounded, the administration asks us to be patient. But patience is not a virtue in the face of a manifestly failed policy, and there is no virtue in staying the course when the course you are on is dragging you deeper and deeper into a geopolitical disaster.

Just last week, the administration issued the required progress report on benchmarks for Iraq. As expected, the report shows that the Government in Baghdad has failed to meet any of the benchmarks for political and economic reform. The Iraqis have failed to make progress in passing a law governing the sharing of oil revenues. They have failed to make progress in allowing former Baath party members to return to their jobs. They have failed to make progress in disarming militias. They have failed to make progress in organizing new provincial elections. Failure after failure after failure. Indeed, the only thing the Sunni, Shiites and the Kurds in Parliament have agreed on is that they will go on vacation in the month of August.

The American people refuse to be patient in the face of this monumental failure. And I agree wholeheartedly with Senator LUGAR's remarks on this floor to the effect that we cannot and should not wait until September to begin to chart a new course. The war has been spiraling downward for 52 months. What possible difference could 2 months make?

Indeed, I can predict right now what will happen when we get General Petraeus's report in mid-September. Against all evidence to the contrary, the President will cherry-pick the report to claim positive military results from the surge, and he will say those results justify staying the course until the end of the year or into next spring or for another year. Indeed, yesterday, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said the surge could well be followed by a request for even more troops. I was told today that about 50 percent of our troops in Iraq are now National Guard and reservists.

Well, it is abundantly clear to me that this President has no intention whatsoever of changing course or reducing the number of troops in Iraq through the end of his term on January 20, 2009. He will only change course when and if he is compelled to do so by the Congress, and that is exactly what a clear majority of the Senate is attempting to do with amendments to this Defense authorization bill.

The Levin-Reed amendment was basically passed by the House. But now, Republican Senators here will not allow us to vote on it. All we are asking is to let us vote up or down on the Levin-Reed amendment. The President and his allies are responding with a furious campaign of obstruction, filibuster, and veto threats. They refuse to listen. They refuse to learn. They refuse to consider a new direction. All we are asking is, let us vote. Let us vote.

I personally know many Iowans serving in our Armed Forces. Whether Active Duty or the Guard or Reserve, they are disciplined professionals who love their country. Even those who profoundly disagree with the war and the surge will continue to do their duty. They deserve our profound respect and admiration. But we need to listen to them. We need to listen to their families.

So I have come to the floor tonight to read just a few of the e-mails and letters I have received in recent days. One of them is from Peggy—I won't use her last name—from Council Bluffs, IA, whose son is serving in Iraq, and here is what she writes:

> My 19-year-old son is in Iraq with the United States Army. Please, please get us out of this horrific nightmare and bring them all home. I can't go a day without crying, as I worry about him. Every single member of our brave military that dies in this quagmire is a waste, a tragic waste of life. If my son were to be killed over there, I could never reconcile to it due to the fact that we should not be over there in the first place. We invaded a country based on lies and have caused the death and suffering of untold thousands of Iraqi people. Please vote to withdraw the troops.

Peggy, all I can tell you is that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to get a vote up or down to get your son and the troops out of Iraq and bring them home. But our Republican colleagues will not allow us to have that vote.

I received the following letter from Regina—again, I will not use her last name—from Bloomfield, IA. She writes:

> While reading some articles yesterday, I ran across several stating the possibility of extending even more the tours of duty of our soldiers in Iraq. Is there anybody thinking about these soldiers other than how many live in a day and how many die? Do they understand how hard this is on these soldiers, and costly to our Government? And more important, the tremendous pain and agony on the families of these troops? Have you ever been in a war zone for an extended time, or members of your family—in Vietnam, Kuwait or Iraq? . . . If you sense frustration here, it is. [I feel it] every time we lose a soldier over there for something we can never win. . . . I have never taken as much to heart, and fear for my grandchildren. . . . Where is the common sense of our country?

Regina, we are here, pleading with our Republican colleagues for common sense. Let us vote up or down on the Levin-Reed amendment, that is all we ask. That is what all these letters are asking, basically.

Let me read portions of a letter from Barbara of Waverly.

> I sit here to write this letter, not knowing why, since I'm feeling like no one cares anymore or will be able to do anything about it. I am a 41-year-old woman, a military wife of 23 years and a mother of 3. My husband's unit is currently serving in Iraq and has been gone for 16 months so far on this mission. The soldiers and the families were finally feeling like we were seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. As the new year began, we started our countdown for our reunions expected in April. Our worlds came crashing down once again as we learned that our loved ones would not be coming home in April but were being extended until August, thus being deployed for almost 2 years by the time they return. I am angry, I am devastated. How could this happen? I have lost all hope and faith in our Government. I don't understand politics, so my biggest question is, if so many people are against this war and the increase in troops being sent over, then why is the President not listening? Doesn't he care? I voted for him and believed in him and he has let me down. . . .Please think about the effects this is having on our soldiers and their families. We have all given so much and though we are proud to have been part of serving our country, it is time for our soldiers to come home. Please, bring them home.

Barbara, all I can say is that is what we are trying to do. All we are asking is that we be allowed to vote up or down on the Levin-Reed amendment.

Let me read excerpts from one more letter. That is why I am reading these.

There are probably a lot of things I can say about this issue, but I think it is more poignant to read the letters from Iowans, people who have been tragically touched by this war. This one is from a mother in Dows, IA.

I have a 19-year-old son, my only child, who is fighting in Iraq. He is a smart, strong and brave infantry soldier. He has always wanted to be a soldier and is proud to serve in the United States Army. He is our pride and joy. Heaven forbid if anything happens to him in Iraq, my husband and I will be crushed beyond measure. . . . My point in telling you all this is that we are talking about young lives that have a bright future. This is not some political game. Why should our Government put our soldiers' lives at risk for a civil war in Iraq? Like it or not, that's what it is, a civil war, and our precious soldiers are smack dab in the middle of it. . . . Why should our soldiers be losing limbs and even dying for a group of people who can't get along and will probably never get along? Iraq did not attack us. . . . Things are going from bad to worse in Iraq. . . . Unless you have a loved one fighting in Iraq, you can't begin to understand how difficult it is. It is time to get the troops back home and back to their families. Every one of these soldiers who have died meant ''everything'' to someone. They were a husband, wife, son, daughter, grandchild or close friend to someone. . . .I am neither a Republican nor Democrat, I am just an American mother who wants this violent war stopped and to get our soldiers home safe.

I can say to this mother, that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to get a vote. Let us vote. Let us vote up or down on a deadline for getting our troops out of Iraq. What are the Republicans so afraid of? Why are they so afraid to let the Senate express its will?

I want all of our colleagues to listen especially closely to the final words from this soldier's mother. This is from Dows, IA. She writes:

With the overwhelming majority of the American people wanting to bring our soldiers home and stop the war, don't you think, since you actually work for the American people and are elected by the American people, that you should seriously consider our views and hear our voices? Someone told me I was wasting my time writing this letter, but I believe otherwise. I want my voice heard and isn't this what democracy and freedom are all about? I plead with you with all my heart that you will consider this and do what is best for our troops, their families, and the United States.

That is the end of that letter. Yes, you are right, we actually work for the American people. Your voices should be heard. That is what democracy and freedom is all about. Yet we are not being allowed to have your voices heard here on the Senate floor in terms of a vote. Because of the Republican filibuster, we can't. Once again, all we are asking is a very simple request from our Republican colleagues: Let us vote up or down. Why are you so afraid of that?

The letters and e-mails coming to my office are heartbreaking. They tell the story of lives disrupted, lives put at risk, lives in a war that the overwhelming majority of Americans believe was a tragic mistake. Now 6 months into a surge that has failed to significantly reduce the violence in Iraq, 6 months into a surge that has utterly failed to bring about any progress or reconciliation within the Iraqi Government, Republicans in the Senate are pulling out the stops to block a simple up-or-down vote on charting a new course in Iraq.

Once again, I plead, I ask, let us vote. Let us vote. All we are asking is just that opportunity, a simple up-or-down vote. Let us have the vote.

Frankly, I was shocked last week when Republicans on the other side of the aisle filibustered Senator WEBB's amendment which was even supported by the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator WARNER. The amendment would only have required that active-duty troops receive as much time at home recuperating and training as they spend deployed in combat. The amendment even allowed for a Presidential waiver if the troops were needed for an emergency. This ought to have been an amendment to have drawn strong bipartisan support. After all, many troops in Iraq are now in their third or even fourth deployment. The Army Chief of Staff has warned Congress that the current pace of combat deployment threatens to ''break'' the Army.

The Webb amendment would have passed if we had been allowed a simple up-or-down vote, a majority vote. Isn't that what we believe in? We believe in a majority vote. Majority votes elect the President. Majority votes here pass bills. There was a majority here to pass the Webb amendment, but because the Republicans filibustered it, we needed 60 votes. We couldn't get an up-or-down vote on that amendment.

The wives and mothers and family members who have written to me and whose words I placed here in the RECORD tonight have their own idea of what it means to support the troops. They believe it means allowing the Senate to have a straight up-or-down vote on these amendments to ensure decent treatment of our troops. They believe it means allowing a straight up-or-down vote on whether we need to have a new direction in Iraq. But they are being denied this by a willful, obstructionist minority here in the Senate, a minority that believes, frankly, they know better than the American people; a minority that insists on endlessly prolonging a war that the American people want to bring to a close.

The American people are not only angry about this war, they are angry the way our brave men and women in uniform have been misused and mistreated. The President rushed our troops into combat without proper equipment and in insufficient numbers. He has insisted on staying the course of that failed policy for more than 4 miserable years. He has sent troops back to Iraq for a third and even fourth rotation, with insufficient time to retrain and regroup.

In January he decided to roll the dice one more time by throwing another 30,000 troops into the middle of this sectarian civil war in Baghdad. Now the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is suggesting that come September the President may decide to send even more troops to Iraq. At this point, the single best way to support the troops is to tell President Bush more than 4 years of bungling, bad judgment, and bullheadedness is enough. We have complete and total confidence in our troops, but we have no confidence in your leadership or in pursuing this war any further.

This evening we have reached an extraordinary juncture. We have a surge in Iraq now 6 months old which was designed to give the Iraqi Government breathing space for reconciliation.

As I said, the only thing the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds in Parliament have agreed on is that they will go on vacation in August. Meanwhile, here in Washington we have a President refusing to listen to the American people, supported by a Republican minority in Congress that is determined to obstruct any legislation charting a new course. If they prevail, if the President and his Republican obstructionists in the Senate prevail, our military units will be deployed again and again and again until they finally break and the United States will stay bogged down and bleeding in Iraq, creating terrorists around the world faster than we could ever hope to kill them.

It has reached the point, frankly, where you are either on the side of the President and his failed policies or you side with the American people and our military commanders who have concluded there is no military solution to the mess in Iraq. You either support this endless, pointless war or you support a smarter, more focused campaign against the terrorists who truly threaten us. It is unconscionable that the Republican leader, at the behest of President Bush, is refusing to allow the Senate to vote on changing our course in Iraq. At long last it is time for them to listen to the American people, to the families of our troops in the field. The Senate should be allowed to vote on the No. 1 issue facing this country.

It is time the Republicans stop their obstruction to allow the Senate to work its will. It is time for Republicans to let us vote, up or down, simply up or down on the Levin-Reed amendment to chart a new course in Iraq.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this very important issue. We are here in this wee hour of the morning. There have been a lot of accusations flying back and forth today, this evening, about why we are here and what this is about. But I do want to remind my colleagues of what this is about. The underlying legislation, the Defense authorization bill, H.R. 1585, says it very clearly here. It is:

To authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2008 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

That is what we are here for. We are here to do something we do every year, or that we have done every year for the past 45 years, and that is pass the Defense authorization bill. What that Defense authorization bill does is it authorizes a 3.5-percent across-the-board pay raise for all military personnel. It increases Army and Marine end strength to 525,400 and 189,000, respectively. It also approves $2.7 billion for items on the Army Chief of Staff's unfunded requirement list, including $775 million for reactive armor and other Stryker requirements, $207 million for aviation survivability equipment, $102 million for combat training centers and funding for explosive ordnance disposal equipment, night vision devices, and machineguns.

The bill also authorizes $4.1 billion for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles, known as MRAP vehicles, for all of the services' known requirements.

That is what the underlying bill would do. That is what this debate should be about. It ought to be about taking care of the needs of our men and women in uniform who we have asked, day in and day out, to do a very difficult task, and that is to protect America's freedoms around the world. We have lots of them deployed in different places around the world.

What is interesting to me, as I have listened to the debate about this particular amendment, the Levin-Reed amendment, throughout the course of the day, is I keep hearing this distinction between Afghanistan and Iraq, and how somehow Afghanistan is a good war and Iraq is a bad war. The reason is in Afghanistan we aren't having as many casualties as we are in Iraq. We are taking on a lot of casualties in Iraq. That is where they are killing our soldiers, and the reason we are taking on casualties in Iraq is because that is where our soldiers are. If we move troops to Afghanistan, they will starting killing our troops there because that is what they are and that is what they do; they are killers whose goal is to kill Americans and they are going to keep coming at us.

I do not think sometimes our colleagues on the other side see this for what it is, a titanic struggle between good and evil, between radical Islam and nations that cherish freedom.

I have to say I believe the men and women in uniform understand that when they are fighting al-Qaida, it doesn't matter where they are fighting them. They are our enemy, they are our adversary, they are the people who are out to kill and destroy us, whether that is in Afghanistan or in Iraq. They are a global terrorist network intent on destroying us and our allies.

Our young men and women in uniform deserve to have this Defense authorization bill passed so they have the funding and the equipment and the weapons and the training and everything that is necessary for them to succeed and to achieve their mission, which is to protect us from terrorist organizations and terrorist threats, such as al-Qaida.

I have also heard it said that al-Qaida is—there were a lot of quotes today from the National Intelligence Estimate about where the real threats are around the world, but I have to read for you what some of the judgements and findings were of the National Intelligence Estimate. It says:

We assess the greatly increased worldwide counterterrorism efforts over the past 5 years have constrained the ability of al-Qaida to attack the U.S. homeland again and have led terrorist groups to perceive the homeland as a harder target to strike than before 9/11. These measures have helped disrupt known plots against the United States since 9/11.

That is the good news.

But it goes on to say:

We assess that al-Qaida will continue to advance its capabilities to attack the homeland through greater cooperation with regional terrorist groups. Of note: We assess that al-Qaida will probably seek to leverage the contacts and capabilities of al-Qaida in Iraq, its most visible and capable affiliate and the only one known to have expressed a desire to attack the homeland.

In addition, we assess that its association with al-Qaida in Iraq helps al-Qaida to energize the broader Sunni extremist community, raise resources, and to recruit and indoctrinate operatives, including for homeland attacks.

We assess that al-Qaida will continue to try to acquire and employ chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear material in attacks and would not hesitate to use them if it develops what it deems to be sufficient capability.

That is what the National Intelligence Estimate has to say about our enemy and what their capabilities are. And again, I have to reiterate that I think, as I have listened to this debate throughout the course of the day, that people continue to make a discrepancy between Afghanistan, the good war, and Iraq, the bad war. The problem is, it is the same enemy, it is the same al-Qaida, intent on the same objective to kill and destroy Americans. We have to fight al-Qaida every place we can to make sure they do not take that war right here and those attacks of the United States to our homeland.

Debating a change in policy in Iraq, particularly given what we just did last May, is premature, and that is why I am going to oppose the Levin-Reed amendment.

This past May, the Senate passed the 2007 Iraq supplemental which required two reports by the President. The first was released just days ago, and the second will be released in September. These reports will assess whether the Iraqi Government is making sufficient progress with respect to the 18 benchmarks. The interim July report stated that we are making satisfactory progress toward meeting 8 of the 18 benchmarks. While there is much work that remains to be done, the new strategy is still in its early stages.

We need to make sure our forces can set the conditions for that progress to continue and to succeed. There have been some encouraging signs, but we will not see the full effect of this new strategy until General Petraeus's September report. This assessment will provide a clearer picture of how the new strategy is unfolding and what, if any, adjustments should be made.

But I reiterate, that was in May. This Senate acted on an Iraq supplemental in May requiring those two reports. We just received the first report. The final report we will get in September, and yet here we are today once again debating withdrawal resolutions before we have even given our commanders and our troops an opportunity to succeed in this new strategy.

The surge operation is intended to clear insurgent opposition so that we can protect the Iraqi population and provide the Iraqi Government a stable environment in which to conduct their business. I have said on several occasions that my support for this war is not open-ended. But we have to give General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker a chance.

We have a viable plan in place to gauge the surge operation, success of the Iraqi Government, and I cannot support a plan such as this, the Levin-Reed amendment, to abandon the legislative provisions we have already enacted. Congress cannot legislate the war strategy, nor do we have the expertise, the staff, or the constitutional authority to micromanage the war. American generals in Iraq, not politicians in Washington, should decide how to fight wars. What we are doing as legislators right now is trying to get into the middle of that very important chain of command.

As legislators, our actions on this war have not been consistent. On the one hand, we unanimously confirmed General Petraeus with the hopes that he could bring stability to Iraq; then, on the other hand, we at every turn consider Iraq withdrawal language here on the floor of the Senate. So we keep sending conflicting signals.

I would remind my colleagues that back in March, the vote to confirm General Petraeus was 81 to 0. Eighty-one Senators—no Senators objecting—voted to give him this new responsibility, to entrust him with this very difficult task. Then, in May, we said we would give him at least until September, when he would report back to us about the progress he has made. No one said the progress was going to take place quickly. We have to be realistic about the pace and scope of change in Iraq. But mandating timelines for withdrawal or other amendments like reauthorizations of the war are not the answer. We are too eager to declare the surge a failure before it has even been fully implemented.

This debate should not be about how quickly we can withdraw but how

quickly we can succeed in Iraq so that our troops can come home. Now, sadly, many of the provisions we have been discussing here on the floor of the Senate are politically motivated by legislators thousands of miles away from the battlefield.

During the course of the endless Iraq policy debate, there have been statements from the Democratic leadership such as:

> We are going to pick up Senate seats because of this war.

And:

> We will break them, the Republicans, because they are looking extinction in the eye.

Those are direct quotes. These are not legitimate policy statements but the sad politicization of the war on terror.

I would add to those some other statements that have been made more recently. Someone said today, earlier this evening, that this has been characterized as a publicity stunt, keeping the Senate in all night. Members on the other side have gotten up and reacted to this and said this is not a publicity stunt. Well, you have a senior Democratic aide on FOX News who said: Is this a publicity stunt? Yes. You have the majority leader saying: I do not know if we will get 60 votes, but I will tell you, there are 21 Republicans up for reelection this time. You have other statements by the majority leader saying: We are going to pick up Senate seats as a result of this war. Senator SCHUMER has shown me numbers that are compelling and astounding.

I do not condemn my colleagues for their legitimate Iraq policy positions. As Senators, we have a right to offer amendments. But I would again stress that I believe this is not the time to debate this question. We have made it very clear in previous legislation that the time for that debate will be in September of this year. I fear that the current Iraq policy debate taking place on the Defense authorization bill will endanger its passage. This is a bill which, as I said earlier, specifically is designed to increase the size of the Army and the Marine Corps, provide increased authorization to purchase more MRAP vehicles, provide a 3.5-percent pay increase across the board for our troops, and further empower the Army and Air Force National Guard. We should not endanger this bill when we can have a full and comprehensive debate on Iraq in September, which is what this body, this Congress specifically directed as recently as May.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, I am committed to seeing this bill pass on the floor of the Senate. I believe it would be a complete failure of leadership on our part if we failed to pass this very vital measure, while our men and women are engaged in a difficult conflict.

I will not support amendments to mandate a strategic military shift by force of law. As I have said multiple times, Congress should not, Congress must not get into the habit of injecting itself into the military chain of command. To do so invites disaster and moves our country through the premise of conducting wars and military operations with one commander in chief to fighting wars by committee. And history has proven and shown that fighting wars by committee does not work.

Last week, I attended the funeral of SSG Robb Rolfing. Sergeant Rolfing was an Army green beret killed in action by insurgents in Baghdad. And I have to say that, again, he was a young man who was incredibly skilled and gifted, someone who had tremendous success in academics, in athletics, was an inventor, was a very gifted young man, someone who had demonstrated great leadership abilities, someone with a big heart, someone who always gave all to everything he had no matter what he did.

After September 11, he was compelled to the service of his country. As he did with everything, he wanted to do the best, and he became the best, he was the best of the best. He was a green beret. Before his tragic death, Sergeant Rolfing expressed to his family that he believed in what he was doing and there were good things happening in Iraq, that the whole story was not being told.

Well, Sergeant Rolfing's voice may be silent, but his message is not. I will honor Sergeant Rolfing's sacrifice in my own way—by allowing our troops, led by General Petraeus, to continue the work they believe in and work that I believe in.

Our obligation to the troops and our efforts in Iraq extend far beyond these benchmarks. We all want our troops to begin coming home, but we must first set the conditions for that to happen, without risking a humanitarian disaster in Iraq, sanctuaries for terrorists, or a broader regional conflict. If you do not believe what I say, there are a lot of people who know a lot more about this subject than I do who have come to the very same conclusion.

You can look at the comments of GEN Anthony Zinni, who has said:

> We cannot simply pull out of Iraq, as much as we may want to. The consequences of a destabilized and chaotic Iraq, sitting in the center of a critical region of the world, could have catastrophic implications. There is no short-term solution. It will take years to stabilize Iraq. How many? I believe at least 5 to 7.

Well, I hope he is wrong. I hope it does not take 5 to 7 years. It is very clear from the experts in this region of the world who have repeatedly stated the great risk and danger we put our troops and we put the region and we put the United States in if we abandon this important mission without finishing it.

The Iraq Study Group—the Baker-Hamilton report—has been quoted a lot on the floor during the course of this debate, sometimes selectively. But I also wish to quote for you what that particular report said.

It said:

> Because of the importance of Iraq, the potential for catastrophe in the role and the commitments of the United States in initiating events that have led to the current situation, we believe it would be wrong for the United States to abandon the country through a precipitous withdrawal of troops and support.
>
> A premature American departure from Iraq would almost certainly produce greater sectarian violence and further deterioration of conditions leading to a number of adverse consequences outlined above. The near-term result would be a significant power vacuum, greater human suffering, regional destabilization and a threat to the global economy.
>
> Al-Qaida would depict our withdrawal as a historic victory. If we leave and Iraq descends into chaos, the long-range consequences could eventually require the United States to return.

That is the Iraq Study Group Baker-Hamilton report, which I think also points out the very serious and disastrous risks we face, the consequences we face of quitting before this job is done.

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said:

> Precipitous withdrawal would produce a disaster, one that would not end the war but shift it to other areas like Lebanon, or Jordan or Saudi Arabia, produce greater violence among Iraqi factions and embolden radical Islamists around the world.

Those are people who, as I said, are incredibly knowledgeable, people who have great experience in this region of the world.

But I would like to share with you too, if I might, a letter or an e-mail I received from a soldier who has spent a good amount of time in Iraq. Here is what he said:

> I hope that you do not defect from the current policy on Iraq.

And this came into my office in the last couple of days.

> Having served there for over 7 months, I know first-hand that this is a fight that is worth fighting and winning. To admit defeat and pull out now would be dishonorable to those that have served. Please allow the military to conduct the war in Iraq and not the politicians. The military commanders are professional soldiers. How many of the members of the Senate have ever served in the military or even know the sacrifices that are endured each and every day? Watching the news, listening to briefings, or going and visiting for a couple of days to the war-torn nation is not ''experience.'' When the commanders say it is time to leave, it is time to leave. Please respect the input of one Marine who has seen the sacrifice and lived the sacrifice and knows what is at stake if we abandon our post.

I think his sentiments capture very effectively the way a lot of our soldiers view these events.

I cannot speak from personal experience as this soldier can. I have visited Iraq on three different occasions. I will tell you that having been there basically three different times a year apart, there has been significant progress in some areas of the country. When I went the last time, I went to Ramadi, Fallujah, and Al Anbar Province.

In the Washington Post, one of the headlines the week before we went over there said, ''Armed and Ready in Ramadi.'' Well, if you look at what has happened in Al Anbar Province—and John Burns from the New York times recently characterized that the capital city of Anbar, Ramadi, has ''gone from being one of the most dangerous places in Iraq to being one of the least dangerous places.''

Mr. McCAIN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. THUNE. I will yield.

Mr. McCAIN. The Senator and I also went together and saw at that time how Ramadi and Fallujah were basically battlegrounds of enormous proportions. Isn't it true that recently both Ramadi—particularly Ramadi, but also Fallujah is a basically secure area. The last time there has been an attack at Ramadi—they have gone many days. Yet somehow that escapes the notice of some of our colleagues.

In fact, I don't know if my friend from South Dakota is, is aware of what Lieutenant General Lamb, the British lieutenant general, the deputy commander of Multi-National Force, said the other day when the growing sentiment in our Congress to bring U.S. troops home sooner affected the mood of troops deployed in Iraq.

He said: I find it a touch difficult because it was so clear to them that we are making progress. It is not reflected by those who are not in the fight but are sitting back and making judgment upon what they, the troops, can see with absolute clarity.

I guess my question for the Senator from South Dakota is, Is there a disconnect between the rhetoric we hear and all of this stuff about how we are losing—and the majority leader of the Senate said we had lost—and the realities on the ground as reflected by the men and who are fighting?

Mr. THUNE. My colleague from Arizona, for whom I have the greatest respect—and I have had the opportunity to travel a couple of different times to Iraq with you. I know you have been back since then and have seen the marked improvement in that region.

I know from having traveled there on several different occasions and having seen the progress that has taken place and talked with the troops on the ground, those who are there now and those who have been there, as I visit with them, both in my State and different places around the country, it is very clear that they view this to be a disconnect. They are very frustrated at the fact, as I said—the soldier whose funeral I attended, the green beret who was killed kicking down a door and was shot by an al-Qaida insurgent, before that happened expressed to his family the incredible progress he had noted and the fact that does not get adequately covered back here.

I think that is a fair statement. The letter, the e-mail I read from the marine here that I just received in the last couple of days said the very same thing. Watching the news, listening to the briefings, or going and visiting for a couple of days to the war-torn nation is not an experience. He believes that we—as do I—that we ought to let our commanders make decisions with regard to our effort there.

I would also add that I believe General Petraeus, in whom I have great confidence, will be very candid when he comes before the Congress in September, and I think we ought to give him and our troops an opportunity to succeed. The strategy has just been fully implemented as the troops have arrived there just recently. In my view it would be premature to do something which would undermine their efforts, and I think the debate we are having here on this particular amendment would do just that, if it is successful.

So I hope my colleagues will see their way to do the right thing for our troops, listen to the judgment of our commanders, listen to what our troops are saying, listen to what our enemies are saying, because I think that is a very relevant point as well. Look at what Zawahari and bin Ladin are saying about Iraq and its importance. They realize full well that this is where the battle line is drawn.

So I will, as we get to the final vote tomorrow at 11 clock on cloture, I will be voting against cloture.

Mr. WEBB. Would the Senator from South Dakota agree that the United States military is made up of people with the same diversity of political views as the country at large?

Mr. THUNE. I don't profess to know the answer to what political persuasion the members of our military are.

Reclaiming my time——

Mr. McCAIN. Regular order.

Mr. THUNE. Reclaiming my time, if I could answer the question of the Senator from Virginia, I talk to military personnel all the time. I have heard, as I have heard you express, a poll that the military doesn't like what we are doing in Iraq. That has certainly not been my experience in any conversation I have had with any member of the military. I would question any poll result that would conclude what you have stated, as I have heard you state, with regard to the views of our military about our work in Iraq.

Mr. WEBB. If I may clarify the polls for the Senator.

Mr. THUNE. Go ahead.

Mr. McCAIN. Regular order, Madam President.

Mr. WEBB. Excuse me?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator can only yield for a question.

Mr. THUNE. I will continue. I appreciate the comments of my friend from Virginia. I have to say——

Mr. WEBB. If I may say, it is more than one poll.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, reclaiming my time——

Mr. McCAIN. Madam President, we have to observe the regular order here in the Senate. The Senator from Virginia is clearly not observing the regular order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota has the floor.

Mr. THUNE. Thank you, Madam President.

Let me say, as someone who has been to the area—my understanding is that the Senator from Virginia has not traveled to Iraq; perhaps his experience in visiting with members of the military is different from mine—I have talked regularly with members of the military. As I have noted from the communication I received from this marine, it was reflective of the general response I get whenever I talk about what is happening in Iraq with members who are there currently. I think that is very reflective of the general overall view of those who wear the uniform of the United States. They believe in our mission, what we are doing. They want to give the strategy a chance to succeed. I believe we need to do that. I hope we will be able to defeat the Levin-Reed amendment when it comes up for a vote tomorrow.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I rise because I believe we need to have an up-or-down vote on the bipartisan Levin-Reed amendment. I believe it is time to change course in Iraq. I believe a majority of the Senate believes we need to change course in Iraq and change the combat role the United States is playing to a role of support. We have lost more than 3,600 U.S. soldiers, and my State of Washington has been deeply involved from the very beginning, from the deployment of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* to the service of the Stryker brigade from Fort Lewis and the continued service of that brigade on the front lines in Iraq today. The Stryker brigade has suffered severe casualties, and they continue to serve us well.

The cost of this war has been great, over $450 billion. The United States is now spending $10 billion a month in Iraq. What we are asking is the ability to find out whether a majority of the Senate supports changing the course in Iraq. By filibustering, the other side is preventing us from finding that out. I am not saying I don't support the rights of the minority to filibuster. I do. But I also respect the strong desire by the American people to see where every Senator stands on this proposal to change the course in Iraq being proposed today. That is what the debate is about, whether we are going to see how each Senator votes on this issue. If the filibuster continues, we won't see that vote.

Some people have talked about the surge. I respect those who believe and advocate for the surge. I do not support the surge as a strategy. This Senator bought into the milestones that this body approved in the Warner-Frist amendment. I believed in a bipartisan effort of 79 Senators, in legislation that was a part of the Defense authorization

act that was then signed by the President of the United States in January 2006.

The Warner-Frist amendment said, in a bipartisan fashion, what this body wanted to see happen in Iraq. It said that 2006 should be the year of significant transition. We said that 2006 is when Iraqi Security Forces should take the lead. That is when they should create conditions for a phased redeployment of United States forces from Iraq. That was the goal at the end 2006. I took those goals seriously.

The Warner-Frist amendment said we should be telling the leaders of all groups and all political parties in Iraq that in 2006 they needed to make the political compromises necessary to achieve the broad, sustainable political settlements that were essential for bringing Iraq together and defeating the insurgents. Even during that time period, President Talabani of Iraq said that by the end of 2006 they would be able to take over all 18 provinces under their security. So, yes, this Senator was greatly disappointed when those goals were not met. Again, I did not support the surge because the 2006 milestones were not met. It showed that we were not making sufficient progress in Iraq and needed a change of course.

And by any measure today, the Iraqis have not and are not making progress on the political and security benchmarks that need to be achieved. Debaathification reform, amendments to the Iraqi Constitution, the passage of an oil law—all of these things are being stymied. Only seven of the 18 provinces have acquired full responsibility for their own security, even though there are 349,000 Iraqi security forces that have been trained and equipped.

The violence continues in Iraq, everywhere from Kirkuk to Basra. This Senator wants to see a change in how we are approaching this situation. I want to see more of an aggressive effort on diplomacy and international engagement to press for political solutions to stabilize Iraq.

This is what the Iraq Study Group called for. It said:

> The United States should immediately launch a new diplomatic offensive to build international consensus for stability in Iraq and the region.

That is what the Iraq Study Group recommended. It saw that at the heart of the violence in Iraq were political disagreements causing a lot of turmoil within the country. Those disputes require a diplomatic and political solution.

I believe this is what is at the core of the Levin-Reed amendment—a strategy to press for a political solution. I know my colleagues disagree on dates and guidelines in the amendment. However, I believe in the Levin-Reed amendment, which calls for a comprehensive diplomatic, political, and economic strategy that includes sustained engagement with Iraq's neighbors and the international community for the purposes of collectively bringing stability to that region. I applaud Senator HAGEL for including language in this amendment requiring the United States to work with the United Nations to appoint an international mediator for Iraq.

I know people believe the United States should continue to play a primary role in Iraqi disputes, but the United Nations and United Nations Security Council must have a significant role. The international community should engage in these political and ethnic issues that are stymying us. I believe it is time for the international community and the United States not to be for the long, hard slog of deployment but for the long, hard slog of diplomacy. The Levin-Reed amendment creates a framework for international engagement that has been missing.

Why do I believe this is so important? I believe this is important because I think one of the key benchmarks we are missing that has caused great consternation is the issue of equitable distribution of Iraqi oil revenue. I wish the Iraqis had successfully passed an oil law and it had stabilized the region. It is no surprise that three different regions of the country are concerned about the distribution of oil revenue. There is a lot of concern about exactly who will have control over the oil in those areas, how much oil revenue will be distributed by the federal government, and what role the new Iraqi national oil company will play. But also at the heart of this dispute are Iraqi fears that, in the draft oil law, there is a great deal of benefit for foreign oil companies. In fact, the Bush administration has pushed the current draft of an oil law that allows for the privatization of Iraqi oil.

I know that there is a dangerous perception that somehow we went to Iraq for oil. That was not something this Senator believed. However, there have been many statements that concern me. In fact, Ahmed Chalabi was quoted as saying:

> American companies will have a big shot at Iraqi oil.

Another European oil executive said:

> For any oil company being in Iraq is like being a kid in FAO Schwarz.

This Senator did not pay much attention to that, but I am paying attention now to the fact that this current draft of an oil law says the Iraqi National Oil Company would have exclusive control—that is the federal entity—of just 17 of Iraq's 80 known oil fields.

All the rest, along with all the undiscovered oil, would be open to foreign control. So the majority of oil in Iraq would be open to foreign control. Why is this such a big deal? It is important because at one time Iraqi oil reserves were seen as the second largest in the world. Today they are probably somewhere between the third and fourth largest oil reserves.

In fact, the Heritage Foundation, in 2003, released a paper advocating for the privatization of Iraq's oil and arguing that Iraq's reconstruction and privatization of its oil and gas sector could become a model for oil industry privatization in other OPEC states as well.

I know that may be attractive to people who think we should stay there and somehow glom on to Iraqi oil. This Senator does not believe that is what we should be doing.

I know that many people have mentioned former Secretary of State Kissinger's recent policy op-ed piece. He said we cannot allow the Iraqi energy supply to be controlled by a country with Iran's revolutionary and taunting foreign policy. He suggested that, if we leave and Iran takes over, they will have control of the Iraqi oil. But I would refer those who agree with Kissinger to the Iraq Study Group's conclusion:

> The United States can begin to shape a positive climate for diplomatic efforts internationally with Iraq through public statements that reject the notion that the United States seeks to control Iraq's oil or seeks to have permanent bases within Iraq.

We are sending the wrong message in Iraq if we continue to support a policy that gives the Iraqi people and the Iraqi Government the notion that we are there to try to control the oil.

Like the Iraq Study Group, I believe the international community and international energy companies should invest in Iraqi oil. Foreign expertise in investment is important to upgrading the infrastructure and boosting production. But that international involvement must come at Iraq's initiative, and the Iraqi people must decide what level of foreign participation is best for their country.

We need to send the Iraqi people, the people of the Middle East, and the world a message that is loud and clear—we do not intend to stay in Iraq for their oil. To that end, I am happy to cosponsor with my colleague Senator BIDEN a resolution that calls on us to clearly articulate that we have no intention of keeping permanent U.S. bases in Iraq or any intentions of exercising control over Iraqi oil.

Before we went into Iraq, there were a lot of people, including the Vice President, who said we would get X million barrels a day from Iraq. Former Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz estimated at one point in time the oil revenues of that country would bring us between $50 and $100 billion over the next 2 to 3 years. One State Department spokesperson said oil would be the ''engine of Iraq's reconstruction. No one is talking about a Marshall plan for Iraq because the oil will take care of that.''

That did not happen. Today we see a bogged-down political process in Iraq because they are fighting over oil. We can move ahead, and this amendment by my colleagues Senators LEVIN and REED gives us the framework to do that. Our efforts here in the Senate are moving forward on a diversified plan to

get off our overdependence on Middle East oil. They are also critically important.

I know some would say: Well, it is important that we make sure that terrorists don't get their hands on Iraqi oil money. I would remind my colleagues that a U.S. Government report that was obtained by the New York Times said many insurgents involved in terrorist attacks in Iraq are already raising $25 to $100 million a year from oil smuggling and criminal activities.

It is important to secure Iraqi oil infrastructure and for the Iraqis to resolve their disputes over oil rights.

I believe we should move ahead on a framework that has more international involvement. The United States and the international community should be trying to bring Iraqis together to reach compromises on these important issues. I believe this is something the United States can achieve.

Some people may look at the problems in Iraq, the ongoing ethnic violence, the division between the Sunnis and Shiites and the Kurds, and think it is impossible to stabilize the country. But the United States has stepped up to serious international challenges in the past and stabilized new governments that have also been plagued by ethnic violence and long histories of dispute.

How did we do it? All we have to do is look at the former Yugoslavia where the international community got together with various parties, from the European Union to Russia to NATO to countries in the region, and built a framework that ended serious ethnic violence. The civil war in Bosnia resulted in 100,000 to 110,000 deaths. While it is not on the same scale as the challenges we face in Iraq, the peace the United States was able to help achieve was nonetheless remarkable.

We must do the same thing in Iraq. We need the help of the United Nations, the Arab League, and the rest of Iraq's neighbors, and we need the framework in the amendment my colleagues Senators LEVIN and REED have authored. It would put us on a path toward a real comprehensive diplomatic and political solution for Iraq.

We deserve the chance to have an up or down vote on the Levin-Reed amendment. It is now an important time for us to realize that the benchmarks we set have not, and are not, being met. We need a change of course in Iraq. We need to have more involvement by the international community in solving the political problems on the ground. The Levin-Reed amendment would make a strong statement about what the U.S. hopes to achieve in stabilizing the Iraqi government. And we need to put to rest the notion that the United States will stay in Iraq for oil or for permanent U.S. bases. We cannot continue in an endless combat role in Iraq.

We need to change the course, and we can have a policy that allows us to do that by holding an up or down vote on this amendment today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). The Senator from Maine.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, first of all, I express my profound gratitude to my friend and colleague from Arizona, Senator MCCAIN, the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, for his unsurpassed and exemplary leadership on so many defense and national security issues throughout his distinguished career.

I rise to speak to the monumental, consequential matter before us with regard to the future course of the United States and our courageous men and women in Iraq, and specifically to express my support and cosponsorship of the amendment that is presently before the Senate that has been authored by the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Senator LEVIN, and Senator REED of Rhode Island. I thank them for their hard work and outstanding leadership on this historic matter.

I recognize that none of us arrives at this debate lightly. In my 28-year tenure in Congress, I have witnessed and participated in debates on such vital matters as Lebanon, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Indisputably, a myriad of deeply held beliefs were expressed on those pivotal matters—some in concert, some complimentary, some in conflict. Yet, without question, all were rooted in mutual concern for and love of our great Nation. Without question, that remains so today with the various proposals that are before us.

I remind my colleagues in the Senate that the framework that has been embraced in the amendment authored by Senator LEVIN and Senator REED is one that is not without precedent throughout our history in the actions taken by this institution in previous conflicts. So it is not a departure from precedent but very consistent with precedent in the past. Where we make decisions to impose our imprint on a longstanding conflict is obviously of critical consequence to this Nation.

In my view, 4½ years following the commencement of our military operations in Iraq, and 6 months after the troop surge was announced and was initiated, we now stand at the crossroads between help and reality with respect to the Iraqi Government's ability or even willingness to achieve national reconciliation for its own country and its own people.

The time has come to address that reality. The time has come to determine if our military and our strategy should continue on the basis of perpetually hoping the Iraqis will succeed or whether they actually possess the desire and the drive to place their national interest above their sectarian ambitions.

In my considered examination and analysis, taking into account my visits to Iraq—most recently in May—the facts and information we already have had at hand, the record of serial intransigence on the part of the Iraqi Government regarding its inability to forge the political underpinnings essential for national reconciliation, and the fact there is universal agreement that a military solution alone is not possible, I believe a dramatic and fundamental change in our strategy in Iraq is essential and that Congress must require it based on that reality.

Because while the hands of time have now advanced in what has been described as sort of the 11th hour for Iraqi political reconciliation, in fact, in many ways, I see progress has moved in a regressive fashion. We can no longer afford to place more American service men and women in harm's way to instill a peace that the Iraqis seem unwilling to seek for themselves.

I do not come to this conclusion casually or abruptly. Far from it. Indeed, following the President's address to the Nation in January, in which he unveiled a ''New Way Forward in Iraq'' through primarily increasing troop levels, I was among the first to publicly oppose that plan. In my view, it addressed neither the root cause of the violence in Iraq that was fueled by longstanding and deep-seated sectarian conflicts, nor the failure of the Iraqi Government to either demonstrate the will or capacity to quell that sectarian violence.

It is incumbent upon the Iraqi people and their Government to work toward their own national unity. At that juncture, when we were about to assume even greater risk on behalf of the future of Iraq, there was, frankly, no compelling evidence that the Iraqis were willing to assume similar risks for a united future that only they can truly secure.

Therefore, I then joined my colleagues Senators BIDEN, LEVIN, and HAGEL, in introducing a Senate resolution that opposed the surge and instead would have urged the President to increase our counterterrorism efforts, maintain the territorial integrity of Iraq, promote regional stability through a renewed diplomatic offensive, and continue the training of the Iraqi security forces—all without withdrawing precipitously.

I said at the time that it was essential for the Congress to make our voices heard in a policy that has significant implications not only for our Nation and the Middle East but, indeed, the world community. I believe our bipartisan proposal would have offered a clear expression for a new strategy that would have compelled, in the words of the resolution itself, ''the Iraqi political leaders to make the political compromises necessary to end the violence.'' Unfortunately, the measure did not generate sufficient support at the time, and now we find ourselves confronting a similar situation only 6 months later.

In May, I traveled again to Iraq, where the good news was mixed and the bad news was deeply disturbing. First and foremost, I want to say our troops

were performing superbly and courageously and in an extremely complex and challenging environment. I am certain every Member of this body would agree when I say the men and women fighting for this great Nation are integral members of the most professional and dedicated military the world has ever witnessed. So there is no question—no question—of our troops' heroic commitment.

Indeed, I witnessed the improved security situation, as has been mentioned many times on the floor, in Ramadi. I was part of the first congressional group to travel into downtown Ramadi and visit a joint security post. In that city, the tribal sheiks and the Iraqi forces have begun to work in conjunction with our own forces to fight a common enemy, and that common enemy is al-Qaida. We know the success, and clearly it was a model of success and cooperation. However, we also were told that what worked in Anbar might not necessarily work in the other provinces, that the threat varies from province to province, as we have already discovered. The threat varies from city to city, and the threat is multidimensional. What we have witnessed in Anbar where the ''enemy of my enemy is also my enemy'' does not necessarily suggest that it can apply across the board and may not be a model that can be replicated in other provinces and in other cities. Certainly, we should use it where it can work and can be applied, but certainly it may not be possible in all of the other areas within Iraq, because the common enemy within al-Anbar was, of course, al-Qaida.

So I happen to believe it is abundantly apparent that we must send a strong message to the Iraqi Government that by linking our continued strategy in Iraq to the level of progress they made in attaining the political benchmarks they themselves had agreed to were so central to securing an Iraqi Nation. After all, by the President's own account, the Baghdad Security Plan, the surge, was designed to be the final window of opportunity for the Iraqis to institute those benchmarks. They had to know it was a window we would close if they did not act with commensurate urgency.

That is why, upon my return from Iraq, I, along with my colleague, Senator BAYH from Indiana, introduced bipartisan legislation that would have required the Iraqi Government to meet the benchmarks outlined by the Iraq Study Group and the administration. If the Iraqi Government failed to do so, our bill directed that the surge forces would redeploy and the remaining forces would transition to a far more limited mission that included the training and equipping of the Iraqi forces, assisting the deployed Iraqi brigades with intelligence, transportation, air support, and logistics, protecting U.S. and coalition personnel and infrastructure, and maintaining rapid reaction teams to undertake counterterrorism missions against al-Qaida.

I argued in May that we are at a critical juncture and that we were at a point where we must be pivoting toward a policy that responsibly brings us to a resolution on the future course of America's involvement in Iraq. I believed at the time the bipartisan legislation that I introduced with Senator BAYH would place the onus and the burden rightfully where it belongs—on the Iraqi Government and its political leaders to enact and to implement the benchmarks that, again, they themselves had pledged to achieve.

Our legislation would have required General Petraeus to come before the Congress and testify 14 days following his September report and, if the political benchmarks had not been met, to submit a plan on phased redeployment of the surge troops associated with the Baghdad security plan and a change in mission for all of the troops, consistent, again, with the recommendations set forth by the Iraq Study Group report.

Senator BAYH and I crafted the bill with the intent of garnering bipartisan support and called for not a mandate but, rather, an objective of completing the transition and redeployment 6 months later—which would have been approximately the end of March 2008.

As I said at the time, we cannot further countenance political intransigence on the part of the Iraqi Government, while our men and women are on the front lines confronting sacrifices and making sacrifices each and every day. I am pleased that many elements of the Snowe-Bayh bill were included in the measure that was drafted by our esteemed colleague Senator WARNER, which was incorporated into the supplemental legislation which the Senate passed on May 24 and that became law, which established the 18 benchmarks to evaluate the performance of the Iraqi Government.

Yet here we are now, nearly 2 months from the passage of that supplemental, and coming off the bloodiest 3-month period for American troops since the war began, with 331 deaths in that period, and more than 600 since the surge began. And yet, as last week's White House interim report only underscored, there still has been no significant progress on any of the political benchmarks whatsoever.

Among other failures, they have not passed an oil law which fairly divides oil revenue among Iraq's ethnicities and religious sects. Last month, the largest Sunni political grouping announced its four Cabinet ministers were boycotting the Government and were withdrawing its 44 members from the Parliament, and there was a ''no confidence'' vote scheduled to take place even against Prime Minister Maliki. Perhaps most incredible, given this stunning lack of progress, is the fact that the Iraqi Parliament will not be in session for the entire month of August.

That effectively means that the Iraq Parliament—even assuming—even assuming—they can attain the required quorum to conduct their affairs given that in the past 2 months, the Parliament has had considerable difficulty obtaining a quorum and has rarely had enough members in the chamber to vote—has another 3 weeks remaining in session before the month of September arrives; all the while, our soldiers continue the battle, while the Iraqi Government will take a recess, having failed to make significant progress on any of the benchmarks included in the supplemental bill we passed 2 months ago.

These stark facts have led our top military, diplomatic, and intelligence officials in Iraq to the conclusion that the political reconciliation which the surge was meant to facilitate is not being undertaken. Last month, General Petraeus stated that conditions in Iraq will not improve sufficiently by September to justify a drawdown of U.S. military forces.

Thomas Fingar, the Deputy Director of National Intelligence and chief of the National Intelligence Council, testifying before the House Armed Services Committee last week, stated that while the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has made ''limited progress on key legislation,'' that ''scant common ground between Shias, Sunnis and Kurds continues to polarize politics.'' Mr. Fingar even stated that the majority Shiite bloc that Maliki heads ''does not present a unified front.''

Let us also consider the words of key Iraqi leaders themselves, which are even more disturbing and telling. Indeed, Iraq's foreign minister said recently that ''These are not your benchmarks, these are our goals. Why do you make it yours?'' This, despite the fact that American troops are selflessly risking and giving their lives to make it possible for such officials to achieve the political, economic, and security benchmarks which were agreed to in September of last year by Iraq's Political Committee on National Security and reaffirmed by the Presidency Council on October 16.

So, frankly, given statements such as these, it is not a surprise that, last week, the administration issued a report—the interim report—that found that the Iraqi Government had failed to accomplish any of these political objectives the Iraqis themselves set.

Let's look at those deadlines and those goals and the track record.

In October 2006, provincial elections law, a date for provincial elections, and a new hydrocarbon law—the new oil revenue-sharing law—were supposed to be approved. But that deadline came and went.

A debaathification law and a provincial council authorities law were to be enacted in November. But that deadline came and went.

In December they were to approve a law demobilizing and disarming the

militias. But that deadline came and went.

The Constitutional Review Committee was to complete its work in January, independent commissions were to be formed in February, and a constitutional amendments referendum was to be held, if required, in March. But those deadlines also came and went.

What does it suggest when a U.S. official—and actually it is incorporated in the interim report—recently observed that political reconciliation is largely trailing any advances in security—calling it a ''lagging indicator''? But if the Iraqi Government were truly serious, shouldn't concrete steps toward reconciliation be the predictor—shouldn't it be a leading indicator—of an inner fortitude and intention to accomplish those benchmarks that are supposed to be happening in tandem with the surge—if the surge was designed to be that window of opportunity, to give the breathing space to the Iraqi Government to create the conditions on the ground that will allow them to make the political compromises so essential to unifying their country?

Security will only come through a belief by the Iraqis that they will have a political and economic future. That is why Iraq's fate is in the hands of the Iraqi leadership and its Government. The only way they will be able to secure their future is to be able to quell the sectarian violence, to integrate the minority population, to create power-sharing arrangements to diffuse the sectarian conflicts. In that way only can Iraq maintain its integrity as a unitary state.

So I ask, if the intelligence community assessed in February that ''with the current winner-take-all attitude and sectarian animosities affecting the political scene the prospects for reconciliation are bleak''—that is the intelligence community's assessment—and General Petraeus stated in March, ''there is no military solution'' and that ''a political resolution . . . is crucial,'' and the general is quoted in the Air Force Times last month saying ''counterinsurgency is roughly . . . 80 percent political,'' as codified in his own counterinsurgency manual—and the interesting part about that is in that manual General Petraeus states that the host nation has to win it on its own, and that is exactly what the surge was all about; it was to allow them to accomplish those key political goals that would demonstrate to the Iraqi people they had a government that was representative of all the people and not just a few—and the Iraqi Government has failed to accomplish these political benchmarks that were established by their own leadership and the Government of Iraq, then doesn't it make sense to begin to choose an alternative course? Because it is difficult to see the wisdom of this current strategy without holding the Iraqis accountable, the time has come to stand up and to speak out on behalf of the American people to say that the current strategy is unacceptable and the moment has arrived to change that direction.

That is why I have joined with Senators LEVIN and REED on a bipartisan basis because in my view, given the record of demonstrated inaction on the part of the Iraqi Government, we are now beyond nonbinding measures. That is what we have accomplished in the last 6 months. We considered nonbinding measures. But now we are a mere 2 months from General Petraeus's September report, with no demonstrable evidence to suggest political progress. What time is more important than now, as we consider the pending Defense authorization bill, to maximize our voice and opportunity to send an unequivocal message that if the Iraqis fail to chart a different course politically, then we will chart a different course militarily?

The fact is, America requires more than Iraq's commitment to accomplishing the benchmarks that will lead to a true national reconciliation. We must see demonstrable results. That is why we are at this critical juncture. That is the answer to why now and why wait until September. Because given all we know, I happen to believe we cannot lose precious time in delivering an unmistakable message that the Iraqi Government must take the consensus-building measures necessary for reconciliation.

For those who characterize this bill as tantamount to a precipitous withdrawal, let me say it is neither precipitous nor a withdrawal. I urge my colleagues to read the legislation, to read the amendment that has been drafted, to actually look at the language. I think it would be worthwhile, because I have heard mischaracterizations of what this legislation would accomplish. This legislation would result in redeployment, a change in mission, and reduced forces, but it does not suggest—it does not require—a precipitous withdrawal. In fact, it does not do that. It would reduce our troops and change our mission, beginning 120 days after passage, while specifically allowing the troops to remain for critical missions such as counterinsurgency and attacking al-Qaida, providing force protection, as well as training the Iraqis—again, goals that are very consistent with the Iraq Study Group.

I think it is very important for Members of the Senate to read—to actually read—the language which has been incorporated in the amendment that is pending before the Senate, because it requires a very different mandate than has been described here on the floor of the Senate. It is not a precipitous withdrawal. In fact, it allows the discretion to maintain troops by the commanders in order to complete those missions as described in the amendment that would allow us to continue to train the Iraqis and to fight al-Qaida.

Some of my colleagues have also opined that this proposal will limit the President's ability to conduct the war on terror. Last week we heard the President state that we are working to defeat al-Qaida and other extremists and aid the rise of an Iraqi Government that can protect its people. Well, again, this amendment rightly does nothing to detract from that objective. In fact, as I said, the amendment defers to the commanders on the group to determine the number of troops and forces necessary to fight al-Qaida.

Specifically, the amendment empowers the Secretary of Defense to deploy and maintain members of the Armed Forces in Iraq to engage in targeted counterterrorism operations against al-Qaida, al-Qaida-affiliated groups, and other international terrorist organizations, which encompasses maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity against terrorist groups, including those backed by foreign countries. So that is the reality of the language which has been included in this amendment that is pending before the Senate—not as some have described.

Furthermore, this measure would not take effect until 120 days after the passage of this legislation—after the passage of the Defense authorization. Let me note that in the last 4 years, the earliest approval of the National Defense Authorization Act occurred on October 17. That was the earliest date in which it became law in each of the last 4 years. So this isn't rash. This is reasoned, and this is responsible. Indeed, the language crafted by Senator HAGEL in the amendment also seeks to internationalize our effort by calling on the U.N. to appoint an international mediator in Iraq and that the auspices of the United Nations Security Council, which has the authority of the international community to engage political, religious, ethnic, and tribal leaders in Iraq, and include them in the political process. This mediator will seek to bridge the divide between the competing sects to bring stability to Iraq and prevent a spillover into a civil war.

The Levin-Reed amendment specifically states it shall be implemented as part of a comprehensive, diplomatic, political, and economic strategy that includes sustained engagement with Iraq's neighbors and the international community for the purposes of working collectively to bring stability to Iraq. As the Baker-Hamilton report concluded, Iraqi political accommodations can be achieved only within a constructive regional framework supported by the international community, a statement that I believe highlights the necessity now in the United States to refocus its policy, its leadership, and its resources on directly helping the Iraqis to establish an inclusive political framework to begin to diffuse the violence.

Finally, to those with concerns about the April conclusion date included in the Levin-Reed amendment, let me also point out this is not an arbitrary date the Congress imposed but, rather,

it reflects the reality on the ground. The ability to maintain this large force in Iraq becomes virtually impossible because of the overall size of the Army. We cannot sustain current troop levels in Iraq indefinitely. General Peter Shoomaker, the prior Army Chief of Staff, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in March that sustaining the troop increase in Iraq beyond August would be a challenge, he said. In fact, Andrew Krepinevich of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in April that our ground forces, the Army in particular, are ''broken'' or in danger of ''breaking.'' The reality is that without significantly changing the force structure or employing a ''different force mix,'' we must begin to redeploy.

The bottom line is this is a defining moment. It is a defining moment for America's policy in Iraq and it is a defining moment for the Senate—indeed, the entire Congress—as to whether we are now prepared to assert our legislative prerogatives and authorities that are not without precedent, as I said earlier, to direct a different course and to alter our strategy—a strategy that reality warrants and demands. The decision before us is one of grave consequence because it is a matter of war. It demands that we look past the rhetoric and the partisanship which often enshrouds and clouds many of the most significant issues of our time, and that is certainly true with respect to this war.

We expect passion to run high, but I hope it doesn't create the inability on the part of our collective wisdom and desire to do what is right and what is best for our country and for the men and women in uniform who are on the front lines each and every day performing magnificent sacrifices, as we all well know, with the loss of lives we have experienced in each of our States across this country. Frankly, if it weren't for those men and women, you know, we wouldn't be the greatest Nation on Earth, because they have woven the fabric for greatness for this country throughout the generations.

So I would hope that at this moment in time, we can rise to the occasion and that in spite of the spirited debate, we can come together to try to resolve this major question, because that is what the American people want. That is what my constituents want in the State of Maine. They are hoping and praying we can come together and unite and to do what is right for this country at this most challenging and vexing and consequential moment in our Nation's history. I hope we can live up to the moniker of the Senate as the world's greatest deliberative body, because certainly that moment is upon us.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona is recognized.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Maine. I know she has thought long and hard about this issue, and I appreciate her thoughtful remarks. We are respectfully in disagreement.

I wish to make a few points, and then I know the Senator from Michigan and others are waiting. I intend to, I tell my colleagues, exercise my right of recognition as we go from speaker to speaker, as we are at 10 minutes of 3 in the morning.

The Senator from Maine and others have described this amendment in ways I don't quite agree with, including, among other things, some confidence in the United States permanent representative to use the voice vote and influence the United States and the United Nations to seek the appointment of an international mediator in Iraq under the auspices of the United Nations Security Council. I am not prepared to put the future of Iraq under an international mediator of the United Nations Security Council. The United Nations Security Council's record has not been very good, whether it be Iran, North Korea, or other crises, including Bosnia where we had to go in basically and bail them out.

In this resolution, I would call to the attention of my colleagues that it says: After the conclusion of reduction in transition, the United States forces to a limited presence as required by this section, the Secretary of Defense may deploy or maintain members of the Armed Forces in Iraq only for the following missions, and the third one is engaging in targeted counterterrorism operations against al-Qaida, al-Qaida-affiliated groups, and other international terrorist organizations.

How do you do that? How do you do that? There are some people planting IEDs who are going to kill our troops, and you say: Excuse me, sir. Are you al-Qaida or are you a Shiite militia? Oh, you are a Shiite militia? Excuse me.

What is that all about? That is one of the most unrealistic scenarios I have encountered in warfare. There is a degree of naivete associated with this resolution which is a disconnect between the reality of how warfare is conducted and the utopian United Nations Security Council international mediator. Our troops can be there in Iraq in diminished numbers, but they can only engage in targeted counterterrorism operations against al-Qaida. So I guess al-Qaida would be required to wear T-shirts that say ''al-Qaida.'' In that way, we would know, and it would be OK—it would be OK: You are al-Qaida? OK. A Shiite militia? Do whatever you think.

It was al-Qaida that blew up the Golden Dome mosque in Samara. Following that was horrendous sectarian strife. We are finally getting around—finally, belatedly—to asking those who want this withdrawal and who support this resolution to tell us what happens if this strategy fails, if the pullout fails. I quote from today's Los Angeles Times. It says:

> Many lawmakers who have pushed President Bush to bring troops home from Iraq have not developed plans to deal with the violence that could follow a pullout, interviews with more than two dozen Democrats and Republicans show. Many of them acknowledge that Iraq might plunge into vicious sectarian fighting, much like the ethnic cleansing that consumed Bosnia a decade ago.

They acknowledge that Iraq might plunge into sectarian violence that consumed Bosnia, which was so offensive that we went into Bosnia to stop it, but if it is in another part of the world, then we won't go in. In fact, the article goes on to say:

> ''I wouldn't be surprised if it is horrendous,'' said House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey, Democrat, Wisconsin, who has helped lead the drive against the war. 'The only hope for the Iraqis is their own damned government, and there is slim hope for that.''

More incredibly, the article goes on to say:

> Some proponents of a withdrawal decline to discuss what the United States should do if the violence increases. ''That's a hypothetical. I'm not going to get into it,'' said Senate majority leader Harry Reid.

Senator REID is the one who announced on the floor of the Senate that the war was lost. If the war is lost and we are going to pull out, what is hypothetical? What is hypothetical about assessing the consequences of this withdrawal?

> Many Democrats, however, believe that any increase in violence would be short-term and argue that a troop drawdown eventually would lead to a more stable Iraq and Middle East.

I know of no expert who agrees with that statement. I know of no one. In fact, the Secretary General of the United Nations, not exactly known as a strong supporter of the war in Iraq, said:

> I would like to tell you that great caution should be taken for the sake of the Iraqi people. The international community cannot and should not abandon them. Any abrupt withdrawal or decision may lead to a further deterioration of the situation in Iraq.

That is a statement by the Secretary General of the United Nations.

I know my colleagues are waiting, but I wish to point out again another fact. General Petraeus came before the Senate Armed Services Committee on January 23, 2007. General Petraeus at that time articulated the strategy which would be employed and needed to be employed and needed to be given time to succeed. In fact, General Petraeus was asked at his confirmation hearings, which was later ratified by this body by a vote—without a dissenting vote:

> General Petraeus, in your view, since you have been intimately involved in Iraq from the beginning, suppose we announced tomorrow that we would withdraw within 4 months to 6 months. That happens to coincide with the 120 day withdrawal that we are talking about here. What are the results there in Iraq and in the region?
>
> GEN Petraeus: Well, sir, I think that sectarian groups would obviously begin to stake out their turf, try to expand their turf. They

would do that by greatly increased ethnic cleansing. There is a very real possibility of involvement of countries from elsewhere in the region entering Iraq to take sides with one or the other groups. There is a possibility certainly of an international terrorist organization truly getting a grip on some substantial piece of Iraq. There is the possibility of problems in the global economy should in fact this cause a disruption in the flow of oil and a number of other potential outcomes, none of which are positive.

That is what General Petraeus said at his confirmation hearings. Everybody confirmed him. Everybody knew in this body what the mission was, what they intended to do, what the strategy was, and here we are a few months later pulling the plug, or attempting to pull the plug, on what General Petraeus wants to do.

I am proud of the United States of America that we went to Bosnia and stopped the ethnic cleansing. I am proud the United States of America went to Kosovo and stopped ethnic cleansing. I am ashamed we haven't gone to Darfur in some way and effected the stop of ethnic cleansing there. I am ashamed we didn't stop the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people in Rwanda, and so are all of us. That is a majority opinion in this country and in this body. But now—but now, in the case of Iraq:

I wouldn't be surprised if it is horrendous.

''I wouldn't be surprised if it is horrendous.'' That is what we are condemning the people of Iraq to. And on the other side, the majority leader of the Senate—and I apologize, because I will ask him about it again on this floor:

That's a hypothetical. I'm not going to get into it.

Now, I don't know of anybody who believes that is a hypothetical. The fact is, when we leave there is going to be a vacuum, there is going to be chaos, and there is going to be genocide. I can quote on the floor Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft, General Lynch, General Petraeus, literally—General Zinni, those who oppose our presence in Iraq opposed the initial invasion, and yet believe that at least we should face up to and begin to address the consequences of withdrawal. It is not hypothetical. It is not hypothetical.

I appreciate the courtesy of my colleagues, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

Ms. STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. President.

At this 3 o'clock hour in the morning, I think it is important to refocus on exactly what the vote will be in the morning as it relates to the issue in front of us, the Levin-Reed amendment. First, let me do this. Let me thank Senator SNOWE, who was here a moment ago, for her eloquence and her courage in laying out the facts, and for her thoughtfulness. I wish to thank our Senate majority leader, Senator REID, who has been laser focused on what, in fact, we need to be doing to change the course in Iraq based on the facts, based on the iron will of the American people.

I appreciate all he has done to keep us focused on this critical issue of our time.

I also thank Senator CARL LEVIN, my senior Senator from Michigan. We are very proud of him in Michigan for all he does, advocating for our troops and for a foreign policy and an armed services policy that makes sense for our country, for all of us. I thank Senators LEVIN and JACK REED for introducing an amendment that is currently being filibustered.

What we have in front of us and what we are doing is demonstrating through this all-night debate—which is very important, regardless of where someone comes from on this issue; it is very important that we have this debate and discussion. I appreciate all of my colleagues expressing themselves. What we have in front of us is the question of whether we are going to end a filibuster tomorrow, and whether we are going to have an opportunity to have a simple majority vote—a yes-or-no vote—on a change in direction in Iraq, which would in fact change the mission by next year, by April 30 of next year. I find it amazing that our men and women right now who are fighting for democracy, fighting for majority rule—to put together a coalition to create a working majority and that the majority should rule. Yet here we are not allowed to have the majority make the decision—a majority being 51, or in this case 50 at the moment, being able to vote and determine what the policy is.

Last week, we had a very significant debate and issue in front of us that Senator WEBB from Virginia brought forward in terms of supporting our troops, supporting them as it relates to the deployment and redeployment policies right now for our National Guard and our full-time military. There were 56 members—a clear majority of this body—who voted for that policy, that change in policy. So if you are deployed for 12 months, you would be home on dwell time for 12 months with your family and with an opportunity to be retrained, to regroup, in order to be able to go back. Fifty-six members, a clear majority, said yes. Yet we were stopped. Why? Because our Republican colleagues insist on filibustering and not allowing a vote.

We are saying to the other side of the aisle, let us vote. Let us do what we assume everybody in the American public assumes in a democracy with a majority, that the majority would have their say, that whoever is in the majority has an opportunity to win a vote. But that is not the case anymore in the Senate. We are not talking about 50 or 51 but 60. So we have in front of us a filibuster that is going on as to whether we will even vote on a policy that has a majority of this Senate, and it is clearly supported by a majority of the American people.

(Mr. DURBIN assumed the Chair.)

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, there are no good wars or bad wars; there are only necessary wars or unnecessary wars. Five years ago, I was proud to stand along with the distinguished Presiding Officer on the floor of this body and argue that going into war with Iraq was unnecessary. It wasn't an easy day for any of us. No burden weighs heavier on the shoulders of any one of us than questions of war and peace. We deliberate countless and important issues in this Chamber, but none are as serious as sending America's sons and daughters into harm's way. I stood here that day in October and said this is a vote of conscience, also a vote of historic consequence, because what we debate and decide here will not only significantly affect this great Nation, but will immediately influence global events for years to come. No matter how difficult the decision may be, it is one each of us must make for the sake of our country. We have an obligation and a duty to carefully weigh the consequences of a preemptive attack. I went on to say that before we engage in war, we must understand that the results of war are irrevocable and a peaceful solution should always be our first choice.

Today, we are living with the consequences of this war. We will continue to live with those consequences in our communities, in terms of young lives lost and shattered, and families who will never be whole again, and the emptiness left by neighbors who gave their last full measure in this fight. As a nation, we will live with these consequences for years to come as we face a world we shaped by this unnecessary war—a world in which we must now deal with a reinvigorated al-Qaida and a less stable Middle East today than when the first American tanks rolled into Baghdad.

We cannot go back and change the mistakes and missteps that have brought us here, but we can and we must begin to dig ourselves out of the hole that we have dug in Iraq. We can and we must embrace a strategy that brings our troops home safely and responsibly. We can and we must make the tough choices to end this war.

Twenty-three of us stood up against the war on that October afternoon. Today, there are more of us. We have all watched the events of the last half decade play out in front of us. We have watched the violence and the horror of modern war play out on our television sets. We have listened over and over again as the administration's rhetoric has become more and more detached from the reality of what is going on in Iraq. What were merely predictions and concerns in 2002 have today become reality. Militarily, we are paying the price every day for the administration's neglect in planning for the aftermath of initial combat operations in Iraq.

Our troops are fighting and working in extreme conditions. They face an

enemy they often cannot identify, one that has shown a total disregard for human life and a willingness to sacrifice themselves, their families, and innocent bystanders merely to inflict damage on American forces and innocent Iraqi citizens. Every day, they face an environment to test their physical limits, in 100-plus degree heat. We know it is very hot now. Those of us who have been to Iraq understand the kind of conditions with the heat and the sand and the conditions that are happening there that are, in many cases, unimaginable. They face an Iraqi Government that refuses to take responsibility for the future of the people of Iraq, one that leans on American forces instead of effectively partnering with them to allow our forces to step back and Iraqi security forces to step into the front line.

Our fighting forces are stretched to their limit. They are getting the job done and they are bravely doing that. We are proud of them. But by forcing multiple redeployments without proper rest, this administration has let them down. We have alienated countless foreign allies, squandered the international good will that was at our fingertips after the attacks of 9/11. We turned Iraq into a breeding ground and training school for terrorists, providing international rallying points for extremists. There was not an organized presence of al-Qaida in Iraq until this administration chose to invade.

The administration's own National Intelligence Estimate, released today—yesterday at this point—specifically notes that ''al-Qaida will probably seek to leverage the contacts and capabilities of al-Qaida in Iraq, its most visible and capable affiliate and the only one known to have expressed a desire to attack the homeland.''

This NIE reveals the sobering truth. Not only has this unnecessary war not increased the safety of the American people, but al-Qaida's recovery is a direct result of this administration's decision to invade Iraq. Meanwhile, conditions in Iraq have spiraled. The daily headlines of our newspapers seem to be ripped from the pages of a Greek tragedy: Suicide bombers; civil war; American soldiers unable to tell friends from foes; units serving second and third and now even fourth redeployments; American troops returning home physically mangled, emotionally drained, and psychologically injured; lives and families changed forever.

Five years ago, Americans had never heard of an IED or a traumatic brain injury. They are now part of our everyday news. We have paid the price in American lives—3,613 dead and 26,806 wounded. We have paid the price in misdirected resources. The billions we have spent in Iraq represent countless missed opportunities here at home, opportunities to strengthen our communities, schools, and hospitals, to create jobs and support our families. When I think of the fact that the latest numbers are now $12 billion a month being spent, and we will debate next week a children's health care plan that we want to fund at $10 billion a year—$12 billion a month versus $10 billion a year to cover every child of a working low-income family who doesn't have insurance in America—this is wrong.

We have also paid the price with our international reputation. America, the world's moral leader, has lost the faith of too many. The hearts and minds we needed to win have too often turned their backs on this administration's arrogance. For too long now, I have watched the Republican leadership engage in legislative games and political posturing to avoid taking an up-or-down vote on this war.

That is what we are asking for. Let us vote. Stop the filibuster and let us vote. They have turned their backs on their responsibilities to the people who elected them and to our troops—most important—and their families because they don't like that they may lose a vote. I have stood on the floor of the Senate time and again to voice my opposition to the war.

Sending more Americans into combat without a strategy for success will not improve the situation on the ground, and it will not bring our men and women in uniform home any sooner. Only the Iraqis can secure Iraq, and American troops cannot be seen as a substitute for Iraqi resolve.

The so-called surge has done nothing but reinforce this reality. We are rushing more American troops into combat every day and not seeing the increase in security that is needed. Why would we go farther down the path that has led us to this point? Why? Why would we repeat previous mistakes and call it a new strategy?

This administration failed our troops by committing them to this war without a clear reason or goal. This administration failed our troops by not having a clear mission for our armed services in Iraq. This administration has failed our troops by not providing the proper equipment, body armor, and logistical support for our forces. They failed our troops with poor planning for the invasion of Iraq and their total lack of planning for how to secure the country. They have failed our troops by sending them back into harm's way over and over and over again, without the proper rest between redeployments.

Our armed services have traveled a tough road since we invaded Iraq. They have shouldered a heavy burden with pride, patriotism, confidence, and honor. We have asked extraordinary things from them at every turn, and at every turn they have delivered magnificently. They have made us all proud. They have faced tough situations. They have made tough choices and done their duty. Now we need to do what is right for them.

Unlike the President, all of us go home and face our constituents—our neighbors. We see them at church, at the grocery store, at the kids' schools, and at events all over our States. They sent us here to be their voice. As we know, this is not Washington, DC's war. We may set policy here, we make speeches here, we take votes here, but this is America's war. The men and women putting their lives on the line in Iraq every day are from every size town and city—from farms and factory towns. There is no red or blue America when it comes to the war in Iraq. War knows no political party. Americans do not watch their nightly news or read about the troops that didn't make it home in their local papers and think, well, I am a Republican or a Democrat. They think I am an American, I want a change, I have had enough. Enough is enough.

We sit here in this historic Capitol while Republican colleagues filibuster and stop the Senate from voting yes or no on a proposal to change course and end this war. While we do that, communities across the country bury their loved ones, schools hold vigils for alumni laid to rest too young, churches comfort parishioners who have lost sons, daughters, husbands, wives, mothers, and fathers.

We are the voices of these communities, of these towns and cities and counties. We were elected with their sacred trust to come to Washington and speak out for them, to make our mark for them on the issues that face them and face our country.

By continuing to stonewall a vote on this Levin-Reed amendment, the Republican minority has stripped all Americans of their voice in this debate. They have said to the people who elected us that this issue of war is not important enough to have their elected representatives vote yes or no on the substance.

Too often in the white noise of politics, we lose sight of the responsibilities we bear. We get bogged down in the politics of partisanship and lose sight of why we were elected.

I believe we owe it to the American people to take this vote—take the vote—not to just stop the filibuster but to have the vote on the policy. There is nothing more important or more pressing to the people of this country right now than this war. It is the responsibility of the Congress to engage in shaping the policy concerning the war on behalf of all of the American people.

The Levin-Reed amendment is as simple as it is necessary. It sets a firm start and end date to transition the mission and begin the reduction of U.S. forces, beginning 120 days after its enactment and completed April 30 of next year, 2008.

The amendment limits the U.S. military mission after April 30 to counterterrorism, training of Iraqi security forces, and protection of U.S. personnel and assets.

Finally, it requires that the reduction in forces be part of a comprehensive, diplomatic, regional, political and economic effort, and it appoints an international mediator to bring together the warring factions.

The President's strategy in Iraq has not worked. This war was started on a

false rationale. It was executed based on false assumptions. It has led to heartbreaking consequences.

Supporters of the war in Iraq have claimed that one of their goals is to spread democracy throughout the region—an ironic statement considering they are stifling the democratic process right here on the floor of the Senate. This issue is too serious not to take an up-or-down vote on changing policy. The American people want to bring our sons and daughters home. It is our job to vote yes or no and let them know where we stand, not to use parliamentary procedural votes to stand in the way of the people's will.

I have said it before and it remains true tonight: History will judge this administration on how they have waged this war. History will judge us on how we end it. We have all walked different paths to get to this point. Many of us were here when the war began. Some have joined this body in the intervening years. Many who today stand with us were once for the war. None of that matters at this point. What matters is the facts and what we are prepared to do about them. Are we prepared to stand up to the White House and say enough is enough? Enough is enough.

It is morning in Baghdad right now, and our troops are waking up or are on duty, another day on the front lines. The unpleasant truth is that too many American men and women will be wounded today while doing their jobs. Odds are that some will lose their lives in service to their country. But they are there, focused on their job. They are focused on their duty. They assume we are back here focusing on the mission and the strategy and making sure we get it right. They are counting on us to get it right, as they are focused on their jobs every day. They are getting the job done. Everybody who woke up in Iraq this morning and put on the uniform is a hero. Every day we let this war drag on is another day they are fighting without a strategy that works for them. We should all be able to agree that is simply unacceptable.

I would like to close with the same words I closed with in October of 2002. We have witnessed a lot in the last 5 years, but these words are as true tonight as they were then:

> We are a strong and powerful nation, made that way by our willingness to go that extra mile in the name of liberty and peace. The time is now for us to work together in the name of the American people and get it right.

I urge my colleagues to vote to end the filibuster and support the Levin-Reed amendment.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, we are indeed dealing with a serious subject that gives us all great pause and concern. I know my colleagues have had a sign that they have put up: Let us vote. I think it is important to recall that 53 days ago, we voted. We voted in this Congress to authorize and appropriate the funds to execute the surge that General Petraeus is right now executing in Iraq. That is what we did. It was a vote of 80 to 14. Less than 2 months ago, we voted to do that. Many of the speakers tonight saying we must withdraw right now, we must have a new strategy, have forgotten that when we cast those votes 53 days ago, we were executing a new strategy then. Are we now going to have another one?

Virtually all of the individuals who spoke voted for that funding, voted knowing that General Petraeus would lead this surge and voted knowing that we would be having a report in September and we could work through that report to decide how we would conduct this war in the future.

The Levin amendment is, indeed, a very important amendment. There is nothing small about this. It is critical. It requires our full attention. We must recognize that. I do believe it is inescapable that the Levin amendment calls for a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq. Those troops not withdrawn will be directed by this Congress today by this vote on how they will conduct operations in Iraq. As our distinguished colleague, the Senator from Arizona, said, we will be telling our soldiers what they can and cannot do, whom they can and cannot wage war against, and how they will be conducting it. A group of politicians in an air-conditioned room sitting in Washington developing a political compromise is going to tell commanders how to deploy our soldiers in the field. So the issues have special urgency because right now American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are in harm's way.

No one is afraid to stand up to the President. Our challenge is to do the right thing, the right thing for America, the right thing for our soldiers, the right thing for history. I believe my colleague from Michigan said we will be judged on how we leave. I was thinking the other day about that phrase someone said: Nothing so became them save their manner of leaving. I would alter it somewhat and suggest that someone might say: Nothing so ill became them save their manner of leaving. If we do it wrong, if we do it in a way that leads to mass slaughter or disorder, death, instability in the entire region, it is a threat to the peace of the region.

It is this Congress, not just the President, which authorized the use of force in Iraq in the beginning. We have confirmed the commander of those military personnel that are there now. We have provided the money and resources to maintain and to carry out that military operation. Those wonderful military personnel of ours have worked and fought and bled and died as a result of the policies we have authorized. It is our responsibility. We can't just blame it on the President. They have performed nobly and served this country well.

While I have never felt that I have had enough time in Iraq and that I have been able to learn everything I would like, I have visited that country six times. I talked to our soldiers there, our Guard, Reserve, Active Duty, those from Alabama and from other States. I talk to them in airports and their families in my State. They have done a great job. The biggest complaint I have heard consistently is: Why don't people tell the good things that we do and that occur? All we hear is the bad. I hear that a great deal.

But the truth is, for reasons unconnected to the fine work of our soldiers, things have not gone as well as we had hoped in Iraq. The Iraq mission has been very difficult in terms of lives lost, wounded, and the cost. While the initial military action went far better than many of us expected, the aftermath has been marked by errors, violence, and frustration. Particularly at this point, we are disappointed that the Iraqi Government has been unable to produce the kind of political leadership that would be beneficial to reducing the violence. It is a real frustration for us. There is no easy solution to it. They say we don't understand their difficulties. I suspect some people can't understand why Congress can't do things as they would like to have them do also.

Perhaps our biggest error as we went into this war was to underestimate the difficulty of creating a functioning government in an area of the world that has not had one before. This is not an easy thing. It is a very difficult thing. We have to be realistic about that in the future. For those in Congress, for the American people and our generals, there is certainly no one easy solution, and there is no certain outcome. But we do know the outcome is very important to the Iraqi people, to the people of the region, and to us. We need to get it right.

I earnestly hope we can draw down our troop levels in Iraq soon. Nothing would make me happier than to see that happen. But we must do it correctly, smartly. We can't do it precipitously. We can't do it here, without even listening to our general in Iraq whom we just sent there to command those troops, without even getting his opinion. This is his third year, third tour in Iraq. He was there when the initial invasion occurred. I visited with him when he commanded the 101st Airborne in Mosul. He came back and trained the Iraqi military. He came back home for the second time and wrote the manual on how to defeat an insurgency. Now he is back over there executing that, and we knew all that when we sent him. How can we write a policy of withdrawal and to direct the limited purposes for which our troops can be used and then set forth three purposes for which they can be used and the people that they can take military action against and we haven't even heard from our commander? What kind of sense is that? What kind of responsibility is that?

They say: If we don't threaten to withdraw, they won't reconcile and do all the things we want them to do in the Government. If we have to do more than threaten to withdraw if they don't do those things, we are going to have to just withdraw because they haven't satisfied our ambitions and goals for their successful political development.

Proponents of the Reed-Levin amendment claim that we must withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq because it is the only way to bring a responsible end to the war and to force the Iraqi Government to act. Actually, such a withdrawal required by the amendment is far more likely to consign the Iraqi people to mass slaughter.

The Iraq Study Group specifically—that is the group which has been so often cited, the independent group—concluded:

> A premature American departure from Iraq would almost certainly produce greater sectarian violence and further deterioration of conditions.

The study further concluded:

> The near-term results would be a significant power vacuum, great human suffering, regional destabilization, and a threat to the global economy.

Similarly, the intelligence community concluded in the NIE, the National Intelligence Estimate, earlier this year that the consequences of withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq prior to Iraq being able to provide for its own security would be sectarian violence, that sectarian violence would significantly increase, accompanied by massive civilian casualties and displacement. Get that? Sectarian violence would significantly increase, accompanied by massive civilian casualties and displacement.

The intelligence community pointed out how this mass chaos in Iraq would directly threaten the security of the U.S. homeland as it concluded al-Qaida would attempt to use Anbar Province to further attacks outside Iraq. General Hayden, Director of the CIA, succinctly testified to the Senate Intelligence Committee, in response to the question what would happen if we pulled out now from Iraq—that was the question to the Director of the CIA—he said succinctly three quick areas: more Iraqis die from the disorder inside Iraq; Iraq becomes a safe haven, perhaps more dangerous than the one al-Qaida had in Afghanistan; and the conflict in Iraq bleeds over into the neighborhood and threatens serious regional instability.

The Iraq Study Group concluded al-Qaida would depict our withdrawal as a historic victory. They have already claimed historic victory over the Soviet Union.

I ask: Is this a responsible way to leave? Is this a way to see what we have done in Iraq end?

Senator REID, the Democratic leader, said we need to pull out of Iraq so we can ''drive the terrorists back to the darkest caves and corners of the Earth.'' Well, that is a good goal, I suggest. But tell me how that goal would be furthered if we pulled out and gave a safe haven in Iraq to al-Qaida and provided them with a victory of historic proportions. Wouldn't that embolden them? Wouldn't that enable them to recruit more people? Do you think they are then just going to be satisfied there? Wouldn't they then have the initiative? Would not they then be looking where they would hit next?

Our Democratic colleagues argue that it is somehow wrong for those who oppose the Levin amendment to utilize the full procedural protections available to a minority in the Senate. It wasn't wrong when they were using those manners on a regular basis, trust me. I think we set a record last year or the year before on these filibusters and the number of times it took 60 votes to do something or not succeed in getting 60 votes. But they suggest that somehow it is inappropriate to use our well-established, commonly used procedure, routinely done, to require 60 votes on a matter of great importance such as this. Of course, I would suggest that is when, in matters of great importance, the 60-vote rule is most needed and most appropriate.

To press the point further, I strongly believe that whatever the inclinations of Senators on the conduct of the war in Iraq, to change our strategy now before we even hear from General Petraeus in September would be a colossal blunder for a host of reasons. To do so would be unthinkable. It must not and I believe will not happen. This Senator would be derelict in his duty if he did not make use of every traditional proper rule of procedure in this Senate to see that it does not happen, and that I will do. We agreed to execute this surge and to take a report in September. That is what we should do. We already have a new strategy.

We debated it at length in April and in May. Bipartisan meetings occurred. The Democratic leader and the Republican leader went to the White House, and they talked and they talked, and we finally agreed and passed, 80 to 14, the bill that funds this surge. That is our new strategy.

We knew exactly what we were voting for. There was no dispute about it. We were voting for an increase in American soldiers in Iraq and a new emphasis on General Petraeus's strategy of counterinsurgency and increasing security in Baghdad particularly. That is the strategy General Petraeus is now executing. Are we now to change it again? Are we now to have a strategy de jure or a new one every week based on coffee shop talk or some poll that just came in?

Senator REID earlier today quoted polls that said people agree with him. He said someone talked to his brother. Let's get real here. The established bipartisan policy that we passed 80 to 14, 53 days ago, must not be lightly changed on polls and anecdotes—change without even listening to the general who is in Iraq, seeking his opinion. It would embarrass the United States before our allies and the world. Indeed, U.N. Security General Ban Ki-moon yesterday urged us to exercise ''great caution'' in considering a rapid withdrawal from Iraq. He said:

> It is not my place to inject myself into this discussion taking place between the American people, government and Congress. But I'd like to tell you that a great caution should be taken for the sake of the Iraqi people. Any abrupt withdrawal or decision may lead to a further deterioration.

Well, is that a product of President Bush's pressure or some hardheadedness? No. The Secretary General is very worried that we may abruptly alter our commitments and policies without any rational plan for what would happen next.

A rushed withdrawal, I think, could even signal political panic. It could signal a lack of seriousness and thoughtfulness. It is unthinkable that the Senate would vote to flip-flop our strategy while our soldiers at this very moment work to execute the congressional policy we assigned them 54 days ago.

Senator REID and Speaker PELOSI will have in effect taken over, I suppose, as Commander in Chief in conducting this military action and begun to direct the very deployment of our soldiers on the battlefield, telling them what they can and cannot do, without any advice from the military and, indeed, contrary to our Commander's wishes and opinions. They do not even want to hear his report, the one we asked him to give just a few days ago.

Well, maybe somebody, if they are going to take over that, would have to tell him what we voted on if this bill were to pass. Hopefully, it will not. A phone call might go like this: General Petraeus, this is Senate Majority Leader HARRY REID. I know we confirmed you to lead the new surge, and after much debate we voted on May 24, 80 to 14, to approve and to fully fund your new surge strategy. I voted ''yes'' for it, too. But that was then. That was 54 days ago. Since then we have heard from antiwar activists—some of them come in cute pink suits and wear crowns—from many concerned citizens, and somebody talked to my brother, and maybe a few pollsters and political consultants have been consulted. So just forget that old strategy. We now have voted for a new one. It will be very popular here. Prepare for rapid withdrawal of your forces. Your work is a failure. You will not succeed. We do not want to listen to your report. Just make sure you comply with our mandates and pull out of there.

Well, he might go on—the majority leader might—well, yes, we did say you would have until your report in September, but that promise was a long time ago. It was 54 days ago. Much has changed here at home. Just follow our new strategy. Well, General Petraeus, I know you feel something is owed to our soldiers out there who are at risk working to execute the surge strategy

we supported just 54 days ago. Just tell them we changed our minds. You say they will be let down if they are stopped before they have an opportunity to achieve success? I do not think so. They will get over it.

Well, maybe that is a bit unfair. Maybe that is not a fair way to deal with it. But with a little senatorial poetic license, I think it makes a sort of point. Many have said that President Bush lied to get us into this war. I reject that. But what is the integrity in voting on a policy in May that puts 30,000 more soldiers in harm's way and then we pull the plug on them before they have half a chance to be successful?

Our military will go where we ask them to go. They will go into harm's way. They are willing to put their lives on the line. They do not want to be put on the line if we are not going to follow through to success in the end. Among the other adverse ramifications of a precipitous withdrawal, a failure of will by the Congress that denies our military a fair chance to be successful, I think could be damaging to the morale of the finest military we have ever had. I think it is an important matter.

There are a lot of things we need to be thinking about. I do not know how this war will come out. I am anxious to hear General Petraeus's report. He finished at the top of his class at West Point or near the top. He was No. 1 in his class at the Command and General Staff College. He has his Ph.D from Princeton. He is a Ranger combat commander of the 101st Airborne, and he has written the manual on how to defeat an insurgency. He has only had his full complement of the surge troops about 3 weeks.

I believe it is premature and immature for us to react in this way and vote to bring those soldiers home, to reorder how they will be deployed without even seeking his opinion or giving it sufficient thought.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, the Senator from Minnesota has been waiting patiently for, I believe, an hour or so. I note the Senator from New York is on the floor. So I will speak for a few minutes and then yield the floor.

I want to point out that again, yesterday, British Army Lieutenant General Graeme Lamb, Deputy Commander of Multinational Force, Iraq, and senior British military representative in Iraq, was asked by Jamie McIntyre of CNN about how ''the growing sentiment in our Congress to bring U.S. troops home sooner affected the mood of troops deployed in Iraq.''

Lieutenant General Lamb responded that those troops find it ''a touch difficult because while it is so clear to them that we are making progress, it is not reflected by those who are not in the fight but are sitting back and making judgment upon what they, the troops, can see with absolute clarity.''

Lieutenant General Lamb noted that those making such judgments and not taking note of the progress ''are not going out every day in a humvee.'' Moreover, he further noted that the progress the troops see is ''seldom reported.'' They see provincial councils. They see water going to people who did not have it before. They see electricity coming on line. They see stability to the networks. They see all the stuff that no one portrays.

That is the view of our deputy to General Petraeus over in Iraq. Yet I hear on the floor here—I hear again there has been no progress made, that the status quo remains, that there has been no progress. And as we get into the debate, we find that those who are supportive of this particular amendment, which requires after 120 days a departure from the conflict, have no plan B themselves. I have been asked continuously what plan B is. And plan B, after the surge, I believe details a set of difficult options. But I think it is important that we point out what has been happening in Iraq as a result of the surge, even though it has been a very short period of time.

In Anbar Province—which we all know is over here, as shown on the map. Here is Fallujah. Here is Ramadi. The fact is that last year Anbar Province we believed was lost to al-Qaida. The U.S. and Iraqi troops cleaned al-Qaida fighters out of Ramadi, which I visited last week, and other areas of western Anbar Province. Tribal sheiks broke with the terrorists and joined the coalition side. Ramadi, months ago, was Iraq's most dangerous city. It is now one of its safest. Attacks are down from 30 to 35 a day in February to zero on most days now.

Fallujah. The Iraqi police center established numerous stations and divided the city into gated districts. Violence has declined. Local intelligence tips have proliferated.

Throughout Anbar Province—this area shown right here on the map—thousands of men are signing up for the police and army, and the locals are taking the fight to al-Qaida. All 18 major tribes in that province are now on board with the security plan. A year from now, the Iraqi Army and police could have total control of security in Ramadi, allowing American forces to safely draw down.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I am glad to yield for a question.

Mr. SESSIONS. I was in that area, also, in the spring and was there last fall. Last fall, I thought it was one of the worst briefings, the most troubling briefings I had about the condition in the al-Anbar region. I say to the Senator, you have been there, I guess, within the last week. It was a dramatic turnaround. One of the thoughts that went in my mind was: Why would I ever want to bet against the U.S. Marines. They were out there having a tough challenge, but this thing has turned around, has it not? I ask the Senator, is that his view, from talking to the people on the ground, as they explained it to us?

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, in response to the Senator's question, I would say a couple things have happened. One is obviously, as the Senator has pointed out, the bravery and courage of our Marines and Army personnel who are there. But in addition to that, al-Qaida has been so cruel, so disruptive, and causing so many difficulties that the sheiks, the Sunni sheiks have come over on our side.

About a year ago, they were recruiting about 20 to 25 people a month to join the local police. The last time they had a recruitment drive, some 1,200 young Sunnis showed up.

Now, I will freely admit to my friend from Alabama, you will never see this probably in much of the media reporting today. That is why you have to go over there and get feet on the ground, as I know the Senator from Alabama has, the Senator from Minnesota and others, as well as the Senator from New York. But you have to see it, and you have to talk to these people.

It brings up another point. These soldiers, marines, airmen, others, men and women, pay attention to what is going on here on the floor of the Senate. They pay attention when the majority leader of the Senate says the war is ''lost.'' They pay attention when people, previous speakers have said nothing has changed, no improvement. They pay attention to that.

General Petraeus said in response to a question I asked him a long time ago—I said:

> Suppose we send you additional troops, and we tell those troops we support you, but we are convinced you cannot accomplish your mission, and we do not support the mission we are sending you on. What effect does that have on the morale of your troops?

That is a question I asked General Petraeus back in January. General Petraeus said:

> Well, it would not be a beneficial effect, sir. Obviously, a commander would like to go forward with as much flexibility as he can achieve. I was assured yesterday by the Secretary of Defense, if we need additional assets, my job is to ask for them.

Of course, Lieutenant General, British Army General Lamb was much more frank in his response, where he said:

> While it is clear to them that we're making progress, it is not reflected by those who are not in the fight but are sitting back and making judgment upon what they, the troops, can see with absolute clarity.

So my answer to the Senator from Alabama is—and I will go through some more areas where we made progress—it is very unfortunate that more Americans do not know not only about the success but of the incredible difficulty of this kind of combat, and yet these young people are doing such a magnificent job.

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I am glad to yield for a question.

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, my experience is much like the Senator from Alabama. When I was there in the fall, it was described to me as the ''Wild West'' and it was not very uplifting. When I was there in April, we had Minnesota National Guard soldiers who were serving in Anbar Province, and they told me of an incident in a town called Habbaniya, where a suicide bomber drove into a crowd coming out of a mosque, killing or wounding 70 Iraqis. It was the American soldiers and National Guardsmen giving blood, even though not a single American had been hurt or injured.

Then they told me, the next day, or shortly thereafter, the local mayor and the local sheik came in with a list of al-Qaida operatives and said: These are the enemy. We want to work with you side by side to root them out.

I ask the Senator, in your experience there, have you also seen incidents or heard of incidents where the brutality of al-Qaida against Sunnis has evoked a response from local sheiks and local elected officials to work side by side with the Americans—be they the Marines, Army, or National Guard?

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I say to my friend from Minnesota, he is exactly right. The fact is the people there are sick of al-Qaida, as he well points out. The sheiks are on our side. Al-Qaida has reacted, predictably, very violently. They have assassinated some of these sheiks. They have assassinated their families. Their lives are threatened every day.

But the fact is, they are sick and tired of al-Qaida. They are turning out in large numbers to join the local police. And they are doing, frankly, a job that surprises many of us.

I wish also to comment in my remarks that this is a long way—a long way—from the security situation we want. But somehow to stand on the floor of the Senate and say we have not had some signs of success I think flies in the face of the assessment of the generals and those we placed in charge and the facts on the ground.

South of Baghdad, as I was saying, in this area, as shown on the map, Operation Phantom Thunder is intended to stop insurgents present in the Baghdad belts from originating attacks in the capital itself.

A brigade of the 10th Mountain Division, which I visited, is operating in Baghdad belts that have been havens for al-Qaida. And the slog is tough. It is very tough in that part, south of Baghdad, since many of the al-Qaida and other insurgents have migrated out of Baghdad into that area. But the soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division are moving forward, all of them. Commanders report that the local sheiks there are increasingly siding with the coalition against al-Qaida. Southeast of Baghdad, the military is targeting al-Qaida in safe havens that they maintain along the Tigris River. In Baghdad itself—the key to all of this—the military, in cooperation with Iraqi security forces, continues to establish joint security stations and deploy throughout the city. These efforts have produced positive results, according to General Petraeus and others. Sectarian violence has fallen since January. The total number of car bombings and suicide attacks declined in May and June. The number of locals coming forward with intelligence tips has risen.

Make no mistake, violence in Baghdad remains at unacceptably high levels. Suicide bombers and other threats pose formidable challenges, and other difficulties abound. Nevertheless, there appears to be overall movement in the right direction.

North of Baghdad, the Diyala area—up here—Iraqi and American troops have surged and are fighting to deny al-Qaida sanctuary in the city of Bakuba. For the first time since the war began, America showed up in force and did not quickly withdraw from the area as had been the case in the previous failed strategy. In response, locals have formed a new alliance with the coalition to counter al-Qaida. Diyala, which was the center of Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi's proposed Islamic caliphate, finally has a chance to turn aside the forces of extremism.

I offer these observations not in order to present a rosy scenario of the challenges we continue to face in Iraq. As last week's horrific bombing in Salah ad Din Province illustrates so graphically, the threats to Iraq's stability have not gone away, nor are they likely to go away in the near future, and our brave men and women in Iraq will continue to face great challenges. What I do believe is that while the mission to bring a degree of security to Iraq, into Baghdad and its environs in particular, in order to establish the necessary precondition for political and economic progress, while that mission is still in its early stages, the progress our military has made should encourage all of us.

It is also clear that the overall strategy General Petraeus has put into place, a traditional counterinsurgency strategy which emphasizes protecting the population and which gets our troops off the bases and into the areas they are trying to protect, is the correct one.

Some of my colleagues argue that we should return troops to the forward operating bases—that is basically what would happen if we passed the Levin-Reed amendment—and confine their activities to training and targeted counterterrorism operations. That is basically what this resolution says. That is precisely what we did for 3½ years, and the situation in Iraq got worse—precisely. I am surprised my colleagues would advocate a return to the failed Rumsfeld-Casey strategy. No one can be certain whether this new strategy, which remains in the early stages, can bring about greater stability. We can be sure that should the United States seek to legislate an end to this strategy as it is just beginning, then we will fail for certain.

Mr. President, I read this earlier, this resolution. This resolution incredibly says that we can only—the mission is restricted to only fighting al-Qaida. I guess al-Qaida will have to wear T-shirts that say they are al-Qaida. I guess our troops are expected, if someone is planting an IED, to say: Excuse me, sir. Are you al-Qaida or Shiite? If you are Shiite, go ahead and plant it. Please.

Now that the military effort is showing some signs of progress, the space is opening for political progress. Yet, rather than seize the opportunity, the Government, under Prime Minister Maliki, is not functioning as it must. We see little evidence of reconciliation and little progress toward meeting the benchmarks laid out by the President. The Iraqi Government can function; the question is whether it will.

I would like to urge my colleagues to take a look at one more chart. I appreciate the indulgence of my colleagues, but I think we ought to look at the region. I think we ought to have a look at this region today. With Iraq obviously in the center of an area of the world from which comes the world's supply of oil, from which comes the recruits for al-Qaida, from which comes the primary source—not the only source, as we have found, but the primary source—of suicide bombers and people who would rather commit suicide and take others' lives along with their own, what happens when Iraq evolves into chaos and genocide?

Iranians are already exporting the most lethal IEDs into Iraq, IEDs that are capable of even penetrating the armor of our tanks. They are exporting into Iraq not only terrorists and those who have orchestrated attacks, including the kidnapping of American soldiers—there is very compelling evidence that they were paid to do that—but they are also increasing their influence in all of southern Iraq. Religious leaders have gone into southern Iraq, into the small towns as well as Basra. Basra has become, unfortunately, a very dangerous city, thanks to Iranian influence. In the meantime, the Iranians, emboldened by our failure in Iraq, continue to do other things as well, including developing nuclear weapons, including providing support for Hezbollah and Hamas.

We see the Saudis now becoming more and more concerned about the fate of the Sunnis. In fact, a few weeks ago, the King of Saudi Arabia made comments very critical about the United States of America for the first time in anyone's recorded memory. Why would he do such a thing? One, our failure; two, they live in the neighborhood and they can't leave. When we talk about telling them we are leaving, then they have to adjust to it. There is very little doubt that the Saudis, with their support of madrasas and other extremist training grounds, are responsible for many of the problems.

Jordan now has—see how small Jordan is—Jordan now has 750,000 Iraqi

refugees. How many more do you think will pour into Jordan if this instability and chaos ensues, which the majority leader of the Senate has stated, as short a time ago as yesterday, as hypothetical. I think there is very little doubt that the destabilization of Jordan would be at least increased.

What about our friends the Syrians who continue to export people who are suicide bombers into Iraq? The majority of suicide bombers, according to experts, aren't Iraqis; they come from other parts of the Middle East, from Saudi Arabia, from Pakistan, from Afghanistan, and other places. What about the Syrians? If you might remember, after our initial victory in Iraq and the assassination of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Hariri, Mr. Assad, Bashar Assad, a former optometrist in London, when his father died, was on his heels. There was supposed to be an investigation going on of the Syrian involvement in the assassination of Hariri, and there have been other assassinations as well.

Meanwhile, in southern Lebanon, despite a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for the disarmament of Hezbollah, Hezbollah is now being rearmed by the Syrians, and their rockets are being resupplied—Katyusha rockets and other weapons are being supplied to the Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. Some believe it is a matter of time before there is a reignition of rocket attacks and conflicts in southern Lebanon.

What about on the other side? What about the Palestinian area? We now see a situation in the Palestinian areas where Gaza is now controlled by Hamas, an organization dedicated to the extinction of the State of Israel. My friends, here is a stark fact: We pull out of Iraq, Iraq devolves into chaos, and the pressures and the danger to the State of Israel is greater than at any time in its history. I don't say that is my opinion; that is the opinion of the military and political leaders of Israel today.

One other aspect that I wish to point out. We know the Kurdish area is probably the most stable part of Iraq for a variety of reasons, including their experience in self-governance. But the Turks have made it very clear that if the Kurds attempt to establish an independent state, they will not stand for it; they will take action militarily. I am not saying that; they have said it. So we have a deterioration in Baghdad, in Iraq, the Kurds declare their independence, and the Turks then feel they are required to take military action because of the insurgency of Kurds who have launched attacks out of the Kurdish areas into Turkey.

So I think it is important for us to recognize there is a lot at stake here. It isn't just Iraq. Certainly, Iraq is part of it, but it is not just Iraq; it is certainly other parts of the region as well.

I hope when my colleagues say, as the majority leader said, ''It is only a hypothetical'' if chaos evolves in the region, that we are required to consider the situation in the entire region and what happens right here where the world's supply of oil—the majority of the world's supply of oil—comes from as well, that we consider the consequences of our actions.

I thank my colleagues for their indulgence, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. KLOBUCHAR). The Senator from New York is recognized.

Mrs. CLINTON. Madam President, the description of the problems that are currently existing in Iraq and in the region by my friend and colleague is not only accurate but, unfortunately, an indictment of the policies of this administration. What has been described in terms of the instability in Iraq and the consequences for further conflict are ones I take very seriously.

The issue before us now is what is the best approach we as a nation can take which will fulfill our obligations to our men and women in uniform, which will make clear to the Iraqi Government and people that their lives and futures are at stake, and which will strengthen the hand of the United States diplomatically to deal with the consequences of the misguided policies that have brought us to this point.

There are no good answers. Anyone who stands here and believes that he or she has the truth, the facts, understands both what is going on and what is likely to flow from whatever decision we take, is most probably to be proven wrong by reality as it unfolds. Many of us have been searching for the best approach to take with respect to our involvement in Iraq for a number of years, but we don't do it with any sense that we know everything that will happen, no matter what decisions are taken. But what we do have is a history of miscalculation and mistakes we are now attempting to deal with.

The Levin-Reed amendment attempts to put into law a new direction for Iraq, one that I and others believe is long overdue. The reason I have come to support this amendment is because if one looks at the actions of our military in Iraq, based on the authority under which they are operating, they have achieved the missions they were given. They were asked to remove Saddam Hussein from power and bring him to justice, and they did so. They were asked to provide the Iraqi people with the opportunity for free and fair elections, and they did that as well. They were asked to give the Iraqi Government the space and time to make the difficult political decisions that are required in order to have any hope of stabilizing Iraq over the longer term, and they did that as well. Our military has performed not only heroically but successfully, with courage and determination, against odds and enemies from all sides.

What we know is that when the people of Iraq turn against violence, there is a chance for success. That is the basis of the counterinsurgency strategy. It cannot succeed unless the people on the ground are part of the winning strategy. What has happened in Al Anbar Province is an example of that. The tribal sheiks and the people turned against the violence and extremism of the al-Qaida factions, many of whom were led by foreign fighters who violated not just the human rights but the cultural norms that existed in the area. So there became the opportunity for an alliance—an alliance between our military and local people against al-Qaida. That is why the Levin-Reed amendment includes the continuing efforts against al-Qaida as a remaining mission and a vital national security interest of the United States.

If one looks, though, at the map that was just on the easel, that does not describe the situation in the rest of Iraq. In the south, I think it is clear that Iran is the political occupier, that Iranian agents are largely calling the shots, and that there is an internecine struggle for power among a variety of Shiite militias.

The lawlessness inside Basra and in the surrounding region cannot be quelled by any external force. The British have not only drawn down their troops, but they have withdrawn to their bases. They know they can't go out and calm the waters because the various factions are vying for power. They are going to continue to do so until someone emerges, and Iran is largely influential in determining who that might be.

In Baghdad, we have gone from neighborhood to neighborhood, and yes, where we are, we secure the area, the violence recedes, only to pop up somewhere else, either in Baghdad or maybe in Diyala or Bakuba or somewhere else.

Madam President, the problem is that Iraq is not al-Anbar Province. Al-Qaida is not the major source of the instability in Iraq. It conducts the most violent and spectacular mission. It provides the suicidal killers, who blow themselves up and blow up the cars and trucks in which they live at the moment. But they are not the primary cause of the violence and instability in Iraq. Therefore, the counterinsurgency cannot succeed unless there is a dramatic change in the attitude of both the Government and the people of Iraq. I do not see that happening.

The Iraqi Government has not been willing to make the hard decisions. The debate as to whether they are incapable or unwilling is beside the point. They have not done it. We keep hearing every year, every month, every week that things will be different. How many times have we heard that as the Iraqis stand up, our troops will stand down? How many times have we heard that in 6 months, 8 months, or 12 months our troops may start coming home? Meanwhile, there are more American troops in Iraq today than ever before. The Iraqi Government is more fractured and less effective. The right strategy before the surge and the right strategy

now, postescalation, is the same: Start bringing our troops out of this multisided sectarian civil war.

I believe since our troops have accomplished the mission that was originally set forth, withdrawing them from urban combat, from patrol duty, from the kind of hand-to-hand engagement they are currently confronted with, is the right military and political strategy. It is clear that as we look at where we are today in Iraq, we are asking our young men and women to police a civil war. There is no argument about the very basic premise that there is no military solution. Yet the political front has been neglected.

If there had been a political surge and a diplomatic surge, we might be looking at a different situation. We also know that the training and performance of the Iraqi Army and police forces has not been sufficient to relieve our troops of the primary responsibility for the fight. In fact, because of setbacks and other problems, the numbers of Iraqi troops that are actually available to fight alongside or to take responsibility for the fight has diminished. As our troops serve alongside Iraqi Army officers and soldiers, they find that, yes, some do have loyalty to Iraq. Others, however, are loyal to sectarian militias. Others have looked the other way when the insurgents have planted bombs. Some have even taken up arms against Americans while wearing the uniforms that we help provide.

The catalog of miscalculations, misjudgments, and mistakes in Iraq shocks the conscience, from the unilateral decision to rush to a preemptive war without allowing the inspectors to finish their work, or waiting for diplomacy to run its course, to the failure to send enough troops or provide proper equipment for them, to the denial of a rising insurgency, and the failure to adjust the military strategy, to continue support for a government unwilling to make the necessary political compromises, to the adherence to a broken policy more than 4 years after the invasion began.

Many of us believe it is time for us to move our troops out of harm's way in the middle of the Iraqi civil war. We believe that is an appropriate military decision that will be made sooner or later. The recent report, which was an interim report, did not have very much good news in it. In September, we will get another report, which I predict will be also mixed, which will put the best face on whatever the facts are. But the bottom line will remain the same: Our troops and their families are paying the price for this administration's policies.

Since the Bush administration announced this escalation, 14 brave New Yorkers have been killed in Iraq, and hundreds more wounded. Two soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division, based in Fort Drum, are listed as captured or missing. Since the war began, 3,619 young Americans have been killed, 26,000 have been wounded, many with very visible wounds, such as loss of limbs and loss of eyes, others with those wounds that are invisible but no less injurious, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and traumatic brain injury.

We have spent more than $450 billion so far, $10 billion each month. We are straining our budget. The President's two major initiatives since he was sworn into office in January 2001 have been tax cuts for the rich and the war in Iraq, neither of which is paid for. They have been put on the American credit card. They have been funded by borrowing money from foreign countries, further undermining our standing and our leverage in the world. Our involvement in Iraq continues to erode our position. It has damaged our alliances and it has limited our ability to respond to real threats. The unclassified key judgments of the recent National Intelligence Estimate, called ''The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland,'' says the threat of al-Qaida is persistent and evolving. The report states that al-Qaida will probably seek to leverage the contacts and capabilities of al-Qaida in Iraq, its most visible and capable affiliate, and the only one known to have expressed a desire to attack the homeland.

This reality is a sobering one and I believe one that demands a new direction. I continue to press for a basic three-step approach. First, start bringing our troops out of harm's way now.

Second, demand—and back up those demands—that the Iraqis take responsibility for their country or lose the aid we are providing them. Everyone knows the Iraqi Government is as much a client of Iran as it is an ally of the United States. Our presence in this multisided sectarian civil war, without a diplomatic or political strategy, makes it unlikely that the Iraqi Government will seek the resolution of the disputes that lie at the heart of this ongoing civil war.

Thirdly, we should begin long overdue intensive regional and international diplomacy on a sustained basis. Diplomacy in and of itself does not promise any great solution, but we have neglected it at our peril. Others have rushed to fill the vacuum. In fact, the problems that were pointed out on the map of the region have also been impacted by the administration's failure to pursue smart diplomacy. As we look at the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, the pressures on the Israeli Government because of the rise of Hamas and the strength of Hezbollah, we can see the consequences of both our failed diplomatic strategy and our problems in Iraq today.

I have called for the strategic redeployment of U.S. forces out of Iraq for several years. I have introduced legislation to end the war but to remain committed to vital national security interests that can be enumerated and more carefully defined. I voted against funding the war without any plan for ending it, or without any companion effort to engage in realistic political and diplomatic initiatives. That is why I have joined a bipartisan majority in supporting the Levin-Reed amendment.

It has been very difficult to get the President's attention. I hear that from both sides of the aisle. The Congress has both a duty and an opportunity to try to do that. We have one Commander in Chief at a time and we have seen repeatedly this administration's failure to deal with the realities we confront in Iraq and elsewhere around the world. When they do change course, as long as it takes them to make that decision, as we have seen in North Korea, the results can be very positive. I can only hope that in the remaining 18 months of this administration, similar actions are undertaken to deal with the problems we confront in the larger region, including Iraq and the Middle East.

I believe, too, it is imperative that the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs inform the Congress of the plans they have for redeployment and withdrawal. Withdrawing troops is dangerous and difficult. We must not redeploy out of Iraq with the same failure of planning with which our troops were deployed into Iraq. Yet I wrote several weeks ago to Secretary Gates and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Pace, asking whether there is planning—very specific planning, not the usual response that, yes, we plan for everything, for every contingency—and what is the planning that will protect our troops when they do withdraw, which will happen, whether it happens in 120 days, or next year, or whether it happens the year after; what have we done to make sure that we do it in as careful and orderly a way as possible.

I believe our troops, as well as the American people, deserve a vote, yes or no, on this bill. If you believe in giving the President the continued power to pursue a failed strategy, without checks or balances by this Congress, make your case and cast your vote. If not, then put partisanship aside and stand with the bipartisan majority working to end this war.

Our message to the President is clear: It is time to start thinking of our troops and our broader position in Iraq and beyond—not next year, not next month, but today. I hope we will be able to vote on the Levin-Reed amendment. I fear we will not, in the face of concerns and objections on the other side. But we are postponing the inevitable. Come September, we will have another inconclusive report. We will have more casualties. We will have more who are injured. We will still have the same Iraqi Government waiting us out. We will continue to empower Iran and to destabilize Jordan and to give a free hand to Syria and Hezbollah. We will face an even more dangerous set of choices then. There is no reason to wait.

Madam President, on behalf of the leader, I ask unanimous consent that Senator COLEMAN now be recognized for

up to 15 minutes, to be followed by Senator CASEY for 15 minutes, Senator BARRASSO for 5 minutes, and following the remarks of Senator BARRASSO, Senator REID be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

Mr. COLEMAN. Madam President, I note that if we adopt the Levin-Reed amendment, we would be doing what the Senator from New York said we should not do. We must not redeploy out of Iraq with the same failure of planning there was going in.

This amendment before us today is a directive from the Senate to redeploy out of Iraq without any planning. Simply sitting here in this air-conditioned Chamber, making a statement that this is what we are going to do, without talking to the commanders on the ground would be a tragic mistake.

Earlier this year, when the President talked about the surge, I raised an objection. In my travels to Iraq, it was clear to me that we were facing a battle in Anbar Province against al-Qaida in Iraq, the Sunni insurgency; and that battle, by the way, we were winning, and we see the results of that today. But in Baghdad we faced sectarian violence and faced American soldiers being in the midst of a civil war, and that troubled me. I raised concerns.

But then 54 days ago we had a discussion in this Chamber. We took a roll-call vote on a bill, and the bill passed 80 to 14, with over four-fifths of the Senate agreeing that day, with rare bipartisanship that we achieved in this Chamber. That wasn't about naming a post office or a courthouse. We got an agreement to address the future of our involvement in Iraq. In that bipartisan effort on the floor of the Senate, we gave support to General Petraeus, who was confirmed unanimously in the Senate, who would provide a report to this body on the surge that I had concerns about no later than September 15. General Petraeus and Ambassador Corker, our Ambassador to Iraq, who served in Pakistan right before being selected as Ambassador to Iraq, would come back and deliver a report to this body and the President, with the President delivering a report no later than September 15. We required this report because we decided as a body that regardless of our concerns about the new strategy, we should allow General Petraeus and Ambassador Corker to execute the new strategy and to report on their progress.

We recently came to broad bipartisan agreement that we should give the strategy a chance to work. How did we end up here tonight picking a date for withdrawal before the report and testimony that we mandated? I don't have the answer. I am afraid that question itself causes me to oppose the Levin-Reed amendment. I have the utmost respect for the Senator from Michigan. We have served together on the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations for years, working as a team to defend America and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse. Recently, we dealt with the possibility of dirty bombs being developed in this country. So I know he is a good man. I believe the amendment is well intentioned and I believe the transition is a goal that I share. The bottom line is we need a mission in Iraq in the sense that we cannot be fighting the Iraqis' war for them. They have to step forward and achieve power and reconciliation—things they have not done to date. We cannot, however, have a precipitous withdrawal.

I serve on the Foreign Relations Committee, and we have had hour after hour of testimony on the consequences of a precipitous withdrawal and the impact it would have on the ethnic cleansing in Iraq. I will talk more about the region.

Ultimately, our safety is my concern. Precipitous withdrawal would set in place a series of events, none of which are positive. I didn't hear anyone come before the Foreign Relations Committee to talk about that. The Iraq Study Group, which so many have looked at and pointed to, made it clear—no precipitous withdrawal.

Right now, we have an amendment that sets a withdrawal, that doesn't consult the commanders on the ground, that flies in the face of action we took 54 days ago. I can't answer the question, why now? In part, I hear from the majority leader and others. Are there polls? Do we lift our finger to the wind and say: Well, 54 days ago, we told General Petraeus to move forward. We have our troops on the ground who are carrying out their mission. Yet we are debating today to say we are going to move forward with a plan for withdrawal which has not been thought out, which has not been planned, which has not been processed in a way that you would think one should do that. We are concerned about the consequences, in spite of the fact that 54 days ago we sent a message to General Petraeus: Go forth with the surge, and then come back and report to us.

There are consequences to precipitous withdrawal. If you look at Iraq—and the Senator from Arizona talked about this a little earlier—in the northern region, Turkey has troops on the Iraqi border and inside Iraq. If we were to withdraw and if there were to be that division, you would have a Kurdistan. There are deep concerns that the Turks would move forward. There are concerns about terrorism, a group called the PKK. You have that issue of instability. You have Anbar Province in which there has been much discussion about the successes we have achieved in Anbar Province with the local sheiks joining our side. But you have foreign fighters coming in, without anyone stepping in between, from Syria, the Syrian border there, landing at Damascus Airport and coming through and then destabilizing that region and perhaps setting back the gains we have made.

In the south, we have Iran. Iran clearly, as my colleagues on both sides have noted, is playing a major part in what is happening, not just in the south but in the region. The fact is, in Lebanon, Hezbollah is a proxy of Iran. The weapons Hezbollah has have come through Iran through Syria. In the Gaza Strip in Israel, Hamas is a tool of Iran. So if we were to simply withdraw without planning, if we were to put in place a series of events that caused disruption and conflict in the region, we would give Iranians a chance to strengthen their hand. If they do that, then what do the Saudis do?

I have had conversations with Saudi leaders. I am ranking member of the Near East Subcommittee. I have had conversations with Egyptian leaders, the Jordanians. They don't want to see Iran go forward. They don't want to see Iran expand its power.

It is fascinating, because the Senator from New York talked about our position in the world and long overdue international diplomacy. The moderate Iraqi States in the region see the threat of Islamic extremism as fostering the support of Moqtada al-Sadr, the support of Hezbollah, the support of Hamas. They understand that is a greater threat to them than Israel. So they don't want to see us precipitously withdraw.

Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, has been quoted repeatedly on the floor, saying to us that we need to understand the serious consequences if we were to simply withdraw. There are consequences not just for the region but, ultimately, for us in terms of the threat of terrorism being expanded with an al-Qaida victory, if America is out. They drove the Russians out of Afghanistan. America is driven out of Iraq. That represents a threat to us. That represents greater recruitment. It represents the battle being brought from there to here. That is a real concern.

We have a situation where 54 days ago we said to General Petraeus in September: Come forward with a report. Then, from that, we will go forth with a plan of action.

I would hope that right away the administration now is looking at a series of choices. Senators LUGAR and WARNER have put that on the table. I hope that is going on now, that we understand that the Iraqi Government has not done the things that have to be done to move forward with power sharing and reconciliation. They have not met the benchmarks. I have grave concerns about their ability to do so. We have to be looking at alternatives. We have to be looking at a range of options. But why now? Why at this point in time, other than there are, I presume, interest groups on the left who are concerned that the Democratic majority hasn't done what MoveOn.Org wants them to do, which is to get us out of Iraq?

We had a bipartisan agreement in this body to have a reasoned course of

action, that we need to be out of the central sectarian violence. The Iraqis need to be fighting their battle. We need to maintain the gains we have had in places such as Anbar and not step back and allow that ground and that blood that has been shed to be shed for naught. But why now? Why now? What is the event that has somehow triggered the necessity to move forward today, to be here all night? If anything, from what we heard from General Petraeus on the military side, we are moving forward. On the benchmarks for things the Iraqis haven't done, we have until September.

I presume one of the good things that will come out of this debate will be that we put continued pressure on the Iraqis to do what they have to do. I don't know whether Maliki has the ability to do that. I have my doubts. But I think it is really important.

The Senator from Michigan said we are going to be measured by how we leave. Ultimately, we are not going to be in Iraq fighting their battle forever. We may be in Iraq a long time. If you look at this region, we may be there a long time. We have been in Germany a long time, Korea a long time. We have been in Kosovo a long time. But we need to be there, not being in the center of a sectarian battle, not being in the center of a civil war, but to make sure the Iranians don't sweep through and expand their influence. We have to make sure the Turks don't step down and destabilize the one stable region, to make sure foreign fighters don't move forward and come into Damascus Airport and come across the border near Anbar Province.

We need to do that in a way in which it doesn't happen because of political pressure, it doesn't happen because of a poll, it doesn't happen because we picked a date out of thin air that says: We are doing a Defense authorization, so now we are going to get a plan for withdrawal on the floor of the Senate without listening to General Petraeus, after 54 days ago telling him he could go forward and come back in September.

It is our responsibility to act in the best interest of our Nation's Armed Forces who have sacrificed so much. It is our responsibility to avoid, as Madison and Hamilton described in Federalist 62, the impulse and passion of what might seem like the easiest path—simply ending our involvement in Iraq and hoping for the best. We cannot do that. We must give the strategy the time we said we would give to it work, while at the same time preparing for our next step, something Senators WARNER and LUGAR have articulated so well. We need to continue to plan for the future and continue to evolve as we address new challenges and a changing environment.

We need to remember that Iraq is not just a war; it is a country that is in the center of a very critical region. We have invested blood and treasure in a way we never anticipated, something I remember every time I visit Walter Reed. While our commitment is not open-ended, it is a commitment whose new strategy requires us to live up to the obligations we made when we said to our general: Move forward; when we put our troops there and said: Be in harm's way; and then to come back in September.

We need to change the mission. We shouldn't have a precipitous date for withdrawal. We are going to be there long term, but we have to do it thoughtfully, strategically. We cannot have it poll driven. We cannot have it special interest driven. We should not be doing it here in the Levin-Reed amendment, which I will oppose tomorrow.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized for 15 minutes, and if I could have a 2-minute warning so I don't go over time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, we are gathered here at this early morning hour, as we have now for hour after hour, to talk about the situation in Iraq. We are here in particular to focus on one amendment, the Levin-Reed amendment. I rise this morning to support that amendment for a variety of reasons. One of the reasons I think it should be passed is not just because of the policy contained within it but also because it is a bipartisan amendment. It is the product of a lot of work over a long period of time. Many months of work have gone into this important amendment.

The question we face is very basic. It is the same question we have faced for a long time when it comes to the policy in Iraq. The question is, Where do you stand? Do you stand for a new direction in Iraq, a new policy, or do you stand for the other side of the coin, more of the same, stay the course, supporting the President's policy?

I argue to a large extent what has happened in the Congress the last couple of years, including this year by some Members of the House and Senate, is rubberstamping of the Bush policy in Iraq. That is what we are here to talk about: Where do you stand? You are either on one side or the other. I argue that we should all stand for a new direction for a variety of reasons.

We know the numbers pretty well: 3,600 Americans—more than that now—have lost their lives. From my home State of Pennsylvania, 69 lives have been lost. They gave, as Abraham Lincoln said, the last full measure of devotion to their country. The number we don't talk enough about is the number of wounded. Nationally, over 25,000 have been wounded. Again, in Pennsylvania, the number is very high as well. Over 1,100 Pennsylvanians have been wounded. Even that doesn't give the full sense of what we are talking about. Many of these soldiers have been grievously, permanently, irreparably wounded in this conflict. So we are thinking about them today. We are thinking about those who perished already. We are thinking about their families who have had to endure this suffering and trauma and heartache for a long time now.

The troops have done their job. There was a lot of talk in the last couple of hours, last night and this morning, and I am sure it will go on into tomorrow, about defeat, that if this amendment is adopted, that somehow there will be a defeat. I don't believe that. I don't believe that for a moment. Our troops have done their job. They took down a dictator. They allowed a government to take shape in a country. They have done their job.

It is about time that, as the troops have done their job, this Congress and this President do our jobs. One of the jobs we should never ask our troops to do is what we have asked them to do at least in the last couple of months, if not for more than a year. Unlike any American fighting men and women in the history of the country, this Government has asked our troops to referee a civil war. We should never ask Americans to referee a civil war, not in this war and not in any war.

All this talk about defeat not only misses the point, it is misleading. I am afraid it is deliberately misleading. To adopt this amendment is not adopting defeat. Adopting this amendment is about talking about a light at the end of the tunnel and to make sure we make the right decision on this policy.

We hear a lot about Levin-Reed. Let me spend 30 seconds on who LEVIN and REED are. Senator CARL LEVIN and Senator JACK REED are both members of the Armed Services Committee. They bring to bear decades of experience in this body combined when they talk about the war in Iraq and when they talk about armed services and defense matters. They both bring distinguished references even beyond their service on that committee. Some people in this body remember that Senator JACK REED was an Army Ranger and paratrooper, served in the 82nd Airborne Division. Senator CARL LEVIN, long a supporter of a strong national defense, was given in 2003 the Distinguished Public Service Award, the highest honor given to a civilian. So these are not two rookies talking about our policy in Iraq; these are people of broad experience who have already proven their credentials in supporting the armed services. They are also people who have worked very hard with the other Members of the Senate over many years to get this right.

I mentioned before that several Senators on the Republican side are cosponsors. I won't do biographical sketches of each of them, but suffice it to say, there is an awful lot of military and U.S. Senate experience with the cosponsors of this amendment.

What is this amendment? What does it say? It says a number of things. I

won't read all of it, of course, but it does talk about, in the opening lines of this amendment, a deadline for commencement of a reduction of forces. It says that the Secretary of Defense shall commence the reduction of the number of U.S. forces in Iraq not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of the act. It talks in subpart (b) about a comprehensive strategy, diplomatic, political, and economic strategy. It talks about sustained engagement with a focus on stability in Iraq. It also speaks to an international mediator in Iraq to help our Government get this policy right. Finally, the amendment speaks of a limited presence of our troops in Iraq and to focus the mission on protecting the United States and coalition personnel, infrastructure, training and equipping, providing support for Iraqi security forces and, thirdly, engaging in targeted counterterrorism.

It talks about a limited presence and a limited mission. But it doesn't talk about, as some have mischaracterized it, a precipitous withdrawal. Just because you say that 100 times, as the other side has said it hour after hour, doesn't mean it is true. That is not what we are talking about here.

A couple of months ago, almost more than 6 months ago now, the President justified his surge policy by arguing that additional U.S. forces would provide security in Baghdad and other areas, providing so-called breathing space. Remember what the President said at that time, way back in January:

> I have made it clear to the prime minister and Iraq's other leaders that America's commitment is not open-ended. If the Iraqi government does not follow through on its promises, it will lose the support of the American people, and it will lose the support of the Iraqi people. Now is the time to act.

So said the President back in January. Six months later, any fair and objective evaluation of the situation in Iraq would conclude that the surge strategy has not succeeded and the Iraqi Government has failed to follow through on its promises. It should come as no surprise the American people no longer support an open-ended involvement of our combat forces in this growing civil war. We know it from the numbers on sectarian violence. We know the violence that has moved from one part of the country to another. We also know that despite the President's pledges, there is no substantive evidence Iraqi security forces are successfully holding territory that has been cleared of insurgents and militia fighting forces by U.S. troops. When it comes to the clear and hold strategy, there is a lot of clearing, but the holding remains woefully inadequate.

We know the problems with the Iraqi Government: Cabinet members boycotting meetings, the Iraqi Government talking about taking a break for 30 days, on and on. The evidence is clear that they have not made the kinds of commitments they should be making to meet the benchmarks and to inspire confidence in our country that this is the kind of political commitment we are going to need to bring stability.

I have to say when it comes to what the President says, and who pays the price, it is very clear what happens. Every time the President asks for more time, every time the President says we need to stay the course, every time the President says: Ratify my policy yet again, every time the President says: Just give us a little more time, we will get this right this time—every time he promises, and it does not come true, and every time he asks for more support, who pays the price for that?

It is not a Senator or a Congressman or the President. It is no one in his civilian leadership. In fact, it is not a lot of Americans. Every time the President asks for more time on his policy in Iraq, there is only one group of Americans that pays the price for that: the troops and their families. Over and over and over again, they pay with their sacrifice. They do all the dying, all the bleeding for this policy. Yet the President talks about this policy as if it is a Democratic and Republican fight. No, this is about the troops in the field. They are paying the price over and over again.

I will make one more point because I am short on time.

When it comes to who is doing the fighting in Iraq against us, the President said the other day: ''The same folks that are bombing innocent people in Iraq are the ones who attacked us in America on September the 11th.'' Actually, he is not accurate when he says that. There is a group in Iraq consisting primarily of Sunni extremists and relying on the assistance of foreign fighters seeking to intensify sectarian conflict and create unacceptable levels of violence. They were founded in 2003, after the invasion, and this group goes by the name of al-Qaida in Iraq.

While this group draws inspiration from the al-Qaida that attacked the United States on September 11, the two groups are distinct enemies. Our intelligence community has reported that the group is overwhelmingly Iraqi and draws its financing from kidnapping and other local crimes, and seeks largely to incite ethnic cleansing and massacres against Shiite militias. But there is absolutely no evidence—no evidence—that this group is responsible for various terrorist plots in Western Europe or the United States.

We saw in the last couple of hours the report that al-Qaida around the world is as strong as they were on September 11, 2001. So how can it be—if the President is telling us the truth, and if the President's policy is right—how can it be that we made this commitment in Iraq, with all the mistakes of our civilian leadership, all the incompetence of our civilian leadership—despite the brave and noble service of our troops—how can that be with this commitment in Iraq at the same time that al-Qaida is as strong as it was on September 11, 2001?

No, I think it is very clear that this vote and this choice is very simple. We can either stay the course or we can chart a new course. That is what this is about.

I say in conclusion, this is also about whether this Congress will do what it must to prove ourselves worthy of the valor of our troops. That is part of what we have to do. I am not saying one amendment or one vote or one debate will do that. We have a long way to go to prove ourselves worthy of their valor. But I think this amendment is one way to move in that direction, one way to show our troops and their families that we will do everything possible to get this policy right.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. President.

This is the first time I am addressing this body. I am filling the seat of former U.S. Senator Craig Thomas, a marine, a warrior, and an American hero. He was a gentleman from Wyoming who has left large boots to fill.

Now, some people have suggested that when I give my first speech, I do it at a time during the day when many people back home in Wyoming would be watching television.

Mr. President, you are also from the Rocky Mountain Time Zone, and you know people get up early. But at home it is now 3 a.m., and I doubt we have many viewers at home.

I was sworn in a little over 3 weeks ago, but it is like I have never left home. As a physician, an orthopedic surgeon, trauma surgeon, I am used to getting up at this hour and working at all unusual hours. People of Wyoming know that, and they call on me day and night. That is why I am here at this hour.

About 21 hours ago, we had a bipartisan breakfast to discuss this very issue. At that body, I told the whole group I was the most prepared to be up at this hour working. I am delighted to be with you. But we are here debating a very serious issue.

I spent a lot of time with Senator Thomas in the last year, driving him around the State of Wyoming, discussing the war, visiting about the war, about his trip to Baghdad, talking about the fact that we are threatened in a global war on terror, and that this is a threat to our way of life.

As a background, as a trauma surgeon and also as a Wyoming State Senator in the State Senate, I chaired the Transportation, Highways, and Military Affairs Committee. In that position, I asked to go and make sure that the Wyoming troops were getting everything they needed in Afghanistan and Baghdad. I was unable to make that trip. The arrangements could not be made. But I was able to go to Walter Reed. At Walter Reed, I was able to visit the troops, the wounded warriors,

because I wanted to make sure that both as a State senator and as an orthopedic surgeon those folks were getting the kind of care they deserved.

What I saw were hero warriors, people who lost a limb or two limbs, and they wanted to return to combat. They wanted to do anything they could to get back with their buddies and fight for freedom.

Wyoming has paid the price, as has every State. I have been to services for young people who have lost their lives. I have held and tried to comfort family members. A little over a month ago, I got a call from my physician assistant. Her son is in Iraq. Her nephew was also in Iraq, and she had just gotten the news that her nephew had been killed. I went to visit the family.

These are brave warriors. These are people doing everything they can for freedom and for our Nation. They did not die in vain.

This past weekend, I was home in Wyoming. I had a town meeting in Douglas. I was also home over the Fourth of July. I had town meetings in Jackson and in Lander. I went to a couple rodeos, as I am sure you do as well. I talked to hundreds of folks traveling around the State. When I went to the rodeos—whether in Casper, or on the Fourth of July in Cody, where I attended it with a former U.S. Senator from Wyoming who has served on the Iraq Study Group—when they ride into the arena holding the American flag, people stand, take off their hat, and put their hand over their heart. The announcer does not have to tell them to do that. They just do it.

At both of those rodeos, in Casper and in Cody, they dedicated the ''Star Spangled Banner'' with a salute to Craig Thomas, former marine. Susan Thomas was there at both events and received the love of the crowd. Then, at both events, the announcer asked for prayers for the bravest men and women in the world, those who are fighting to keep us free.

What I heard from people all around Wyoming was: Do not quit. Do not pull out. Support the troops.

What are the consequences of withdrawal? Well, we heard it today with the Cornyn amendment. It passed today 94 to 3. The purpose: ''To express the sense of the Senate that it is in the national security interest of the United States that Iraq not become a failed state and a safe haven for terrorists.''

We can go through the findings.

The Senate makes the following findings:

A failed state in Iraq would become a safe haven for Islamic radicals, including al Qaeda and Hezbollah, who are determined to attack the United States and United States allies.

The Iraq Study Group report found that ''[a] chaotic Iraq could provide a still stronger base of operations for terrorists who seek to act regionally or even globally.''

The Iraq Study Group noted that ''Al Qaeda will portray any failure by the United States in Iraq as a significant victory that will be featured prominently as they recruit for their cause in the region and around the world.''

We can go on and on, but to me, the Iraq Study Group's final report, page 67, says it best:

The point is not for the United States to set timetables or deadlines for withdrawal, an approach that we oppose.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll and the following Senators entered the Chamber and answered to their names:

[Quorum No. 6 Leg.]

Barrasso	Enzi	McCaskill
Casey	Gregg	Pryor
Clinton	Kennedy	Reid
Coleman	Kerry	Smith
Corker	Klobuchar	Sununu
Durbin	Leahy	Tester

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. A quorum is not present.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to instruct the Sergeant at Arms to request the attendance of absent Senators, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion of the Senator from Nevada to request the attendance of absent Senators.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Delaware (Mr. BIDEN), the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. BYRD), the Senator from Delaware (Mr. CARPER), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CONRAD), the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN), the Senator from Iowa (Mr. HARKIN), the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. INOUYE), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. JOHNSON), the Senator from Louisiana (Ms. LANDRIEU), the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. LIEBERMAN), the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON), the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROCKEFELLER), the Senator from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW), and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WEBB) are necessarily absent.

Mr. LOTT. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from Utah (Mr. BENNETT), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. BUNNING), the Senator from Georgia (Mr. CHAMBLISS), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. COBURN), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAIG), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAPO), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. DEMINT), the Senator from North Carolina (Mrs. DOLE), the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. DOMENICI), the Senator from Nevada (Mr. ENSIGN), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Nebraska (Mr. HAGEL), the Senator from Texas (Mrs. HUTCHISON), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. KYL), the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. LOTT), the Senator from Florida (Mr. MARTINEZ), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. MCCONNELL), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. ROBERTS), the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. SPECTER), the Senator from Alaska (Mr. STEVENS), and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER).

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 37, nays 23, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 251 Leg.]

YEAS—37

Akaka	Feingold	Nelson (NE)
Baucus	Kennedy	Obama
Bayh	Kerry	Pryor
Bingaman	Klobuchar	Reed
Boxer	Kohl	Reid
Brown	Lautenberg	Salazar
Cantwell	Leahy	Sanders
Cardin	Levin	Schumer
Casey	Lincoln	Tester
Clinton	McCaskill	Whitehouse
Dodd	Menendez	Wyden
Dorgan	Mikulski	
Durbin	Murray	

NAYS—23

Allard	Corker	Shelby
Barrasso	Enzi	Smith
Bond	Grassley	Snowe
Brownback	Gregg	Sununu
Burr	Hatch	Thune
Cochran	Lugar	Vitter
Coleman	Murkowski	Voinovich
Collins	Sessions	

NOT VOTING—40

Alexander	Domenici	Lott
Bennett	Ensign	Martinez
Biden	Feinstein	McCain
Bunning	Graham	McConnell
Byrd	Hagel	Nelson (FL)
Carper	Harkin	Roberts
Chambliss	Hutchison	Rockefeller
Coburn	Inhofe	Specter
Conrad	Inouye	Stabenow
Cornyn	Isakson	Stevens
Craig	Johnson	Warner
Crapo	Kyl	Webb
DeMint	Landrieu	
Dole	Lieberman	

The motion was agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. A quorum is present.

CONGRATULATING SENATOR BARRASSO

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I just wanted to congratulate the Senator from Wyoming on the speech he gave this morning. It is his first speech on the floor since he arrived. It is not necessarily his official first speech, but it is his first speech. I wish to congratulate him on doing a very admirable job. He accurately reflected the feelings of Wyoming which he has collected from his extensive travels in the 3 weeks since he has been in office. He has held a lot of town meetings; he has been to a lot of places; he has listened to a lot of people. I also appreciate very much the comments he made about Senator Thomas and also the tribute that has been paid to Susan Thomas at the events he has attended.

I appreciate the indulgence of the Chair, and I thank my fellow Senator for his excellence comments.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I join with the senior Senator from Wyoming in congratulating the new Senator, the junior Senator, for his comments. All of us miss Senator Thomas. I had the occasion to work with him on committee. He was a very fair, decent person and really looked for the center ground here and tried to make things happen. I certainly hope his successor will follow in that good tradition. We thank him for his comments.

Mr. President, I listened, as we all have, to portions of the debate up until now, and it struck me—particularly, I listened to the Senator from Minnesota who was speaking prior to the vote we just had. He made a lot of points that I think most of us would agree with, which is one of the problems with this debate—that Senators on the other side are setting up a lot of straw men and then knocking them down, talking about the strategic interests we have in the region, but then drawing a quick, and in my judgment, inappropriate conclusion that the change in strategy being proposed in the amendment we are debating is somehow going to play into the negative side of those particular strategic interests.

For instance, we have heard again and again how al-Qaida is the central focus, and how if we were to start withdrawing our troops, Iraq is going to be taken over by al-Qaida and America's interests will be hurt. Well, that conclusion is, first, speculative and, secondly, erroneous even in speculation. Why do I say that? Because al-Qaida was not in Iraq until we invaded it. Al-Qaida was not the threat it is today in Iraq until we made a series of errors, which are compounding now with the strategy we are pursuing.

The fact is our presence has been used by al-Qaida as an organizing tool, a recruitment tool, and it has been easier for al-Qaida to play Sunni and Shia off against each other because of our presence than it would be absent it. The experience in al-Anbar Province recently underscores the point we are making on our side of the aisle, which is that once the sheiks, the chiefs, in al-Anbar made the political decision that they were going to take on al-Qaida and actually stand up for their independence, they began to drive al-Qaida out of al-Anbar. Most of the Iraqis I have talked to in the course of the visits I have made there have indicated to me—I haven't met one Iraqi, Sunni, Shia, or Kurd, or various factions within Shia or Sunni, who believes that al-Qaida is a long-term threat in Iraq. Why? Because they don't want al-Qaida in Iraq and because, ultimately, if we are not there acting as the magnet and cohesive glue of al-Qaida's organizational efforts, and if we don't make al-Qaida in fact important to the ability of the militias or insurgents, Sunni and Shia, to use al-Qaida as a convenient tool to target American forces, or even to target civilians of the other sect, the minute that dynamic changes, then their need for al-Qaida changes. That is a fundamental sort of reality that has escaped a large part of this debate.

Al-Qaida is not able to survive, in my judgment, in the long run because of this nationalism, as well as fundamental commitment by each of those people to their own regions and interests that are indigenous to Iraq itself. I think foreign jihadists are going to have a hard time in the long run under those circumstances. Moreover, to talk about the strength of al-Qaida right now as the threat to the United States in Iraq is to ignore the National Intelligence Estimate that has recently been read—some of the public accounts—in the news media. Those of us who have had briefings, and some of us who have spent time pursuing this issue, understand that al-Qaida is reconstituting. They are as strong today as they were on 9/11. That is the latest estimate.

That fact totally contradicts the main message of the President and his administration—that we have to be over there to fight them over there so we don't have to fight them here. The ''here'' is broadening all around the world. If that were true, then what is going on with the Secretary of Homeland Security when he tells us that his gut is telling him that we are likely to have another attack now. It seems to me the chatter we are hearing reflected in the reports from the intelligence briefings we are getting is the same kind of chatter I heard from George Tenet in July of 2001, when he told us in room 407 that he was absolutely confident there was going to be an attack, they just could not tell us where. I might add that in the face of that confidence about the attack and the lack of ability to tell us where, the President took the longest vacation in history, and there were no briefings and nothing happened until September, when the attack of 9/11 took place. It is a matter of record, when we measure what the administration is saying today, what will happen and the challenge to us; you have to measure it against the record. This is not an administration that has been correct, conceivably, about anything, but certainly about almost everything with respect to Iraq.

So with each step that has been made, whether it was the early steps made by Paul Bremer, or subsequent steps made with respect to the disbursement of funds, or the promises of a transition to democracy, and so forth, not one expectation has been met. Not one basic political transformation that is essential to resolving this has taken place. We are in the fifth year, 5 years into it, and the administration says wait another 6 weeks until September before you do this because then we will know what we don't know after 5 years; we will know what we don't know after Senator after Senator has made trips to Iraq and spoken privately with generals, colonels, majors, all the way down the ranks into the noncommissioned officers and those going out on patrols; we have heard from them.

Let me say one thing quickly about what is not happening there. This is also profoundly about those troops. There is no question on either side of the aisle about the respect we have for the quality of the service that American troops are providing our country—no question at all. These are the best trained, most capable and dedicated people I have ever seen. One of my interns is serving over there now. He was an intern a couple years ago. We get regular e-mails from him. He writes us about the losses in his unit. He writes us about the patrols he is going out on. He sends us photographs. We sort of feel in our office like family with his unit. He is First Cavalry, and we are proud of his service and of the service of all of those men and women. They are—most of them—dedicated to the mission. There is not a lot of griping that we hear, and there is a tremendous pride of service. It is wonderful to see.

The bottom line is they deserve missions that make sense. They deserve an overall policy that is equal to the sacrifice and the commitment they show on a daily basis.

I am not a Vietnam veteran who believes everything that happened or comes out of that particular period is governing for what happens now, obviously. But there are certain lessons. If you don't learn lessons of history, as we have read and know, you are doomed to repeat the mistakes you make. Secretary Colin Powell, who was very influential in my own decision to give the President authority to have this big stick of the potential use of force, told me at length in a conversation that I had prior to voting how he thought it was important to apply the lessons of Vietnam to what we may or may not do in Iraq. That was part of the Powell doctrine about the use of overwhelming force and the commitment to know that you are going to do for the troops what the troops have been willing to do for you and their country, and that you are going to go through the diplomatic process and build up the kind of support we never had in the course of the war he served in and I and others served in.

I particularly remember the difficulties we faced on the ground in Vietnam, trying to distinguish between friend and foe, going into a village in the night and seeing people with ID cards that looked the same as everybody else's, and names that were misspelled, and our lists didn't work and they were misspelled. You tried to figure out who was who. It was chaotic. So it is in Iraq, where they go out and they have an interpreter, and you try to interpret, which is difficult anyway, and there is a huge cultural gulf, an enormous difficulty within the tribal

context and cultural context to try to penetrate and figure things out. Our troops are doing an amazing job with the mission itself, but we are struggling with that.

This mission is as flawed as the mission was years ago. You send troops out to find IEDs—the hard way. You are driving down a road and you go through a community and, kaboom, there is an explosion. You get your wounded out and you turn around and you look at each other and say what did we accomplish? What did we get out of that? Did we secure any territory? Did we in fact make the community more secure? The greater likelihood is that the people who were hiding in some house, or the people who blew up that IED are sitting there congratulating themselves, saying we took out another 6 or 10 soldiers, and the headlines are there and that is what they want. Every time we go out and do that, we add to the fragility of the community and the chaos, in the sense of the entire stake. We all know that military mission is not going to reduce the long-term violence, which is being driven by the political stakes that both sides—or all sides, as there are a bunch of entities vying for power here—but all of them are playing us off against those interests. That is what is going on here.

So how many times do we have to listen to generals, particularly, but also to even the President, or the Vice President, or the Secretary of State, or our colleagues say to us there is no military solution? If there is no military solution, then what are the troops accomplishing in these proactive forays out into the community where they ''show the flag'' and show a presence? For a moment, the insurgents may melt into the background but, believe me, the minute those guys have disappeared—and there are not enough of them in Iraq, and there won't be, because we understand the dynamics, to secure all of the communities—the minute they disappear, the currency of daily life in the indigenous community takes over. That is the nature of the beast. That is what an insurgent guerilla-type effort is about, which is why the initial flaw of never committing enough troops to guarantee you can do the job remains so critical to where we are today.

Now, the fact is that the young men and women who are being sent out on those missions have no more hope today than they did yesterday, or the week before, or a year ago. They won't have any more hope in September than they do right now when we are here on the floor with the potential of this vote. They have no more potential of resolving the fundamentals of what is causing those IEDs to be exploded. The fact is that IEDs are being exploded for one most significant reason, which we need to focus on in the context of this debate: because there are factions within the Sunni and Shia who are vying for power. As long as you have this open-ended presence of Americans, we remain the target and they remain committed to use us to foster the insecurity and fear that allows them to continue to maneuver among each other. Unless you change that dynamic, what happens here by continuing this policy, which is what our colleagues on the other side are prepared to do—at least through September, which raises a significant issue that in a moment I will come back to—but if you continue it, you are guaranteeing that those young men and women will continue to go out in the same posture they are going out today, without any resolution whatsoever of the fundamental political issues.

Now, I don't think that is very smart. It is plain not smart. Most Americans today get that. I heard the Senator from Minnesota and others come to the floor and say: What is driving this? Why now? Why are we doing this now, having this debate when we know that in September someone is going to make a report?

Well, I think the reverse is the question: Why are you waiting until September when you know what is happening today and you know the dynamic hasn't changed? Why do you send those troops out day after day on a mission you know cannot accomplish the goal and put them at risk without a mission that is achievable? Why do you sit here and say that somehow in September there is going to be a report that will change the dynamic, when we know not one benchmark has yet been met and you are talking about 6 weeks from now and we are losing 100 troops a month? What do you say to those families of the 100 who may be lost over the course of the next month: Gee, we were waiting for a report, even though we knew basically what the report would say. I don't think there is a colleague on the other side who doesn't hope the White House is going to start trying to pull back some troops in September. We have talked to generals and we have had Senators over there in the last weeks, and they have been told in certain regions they believe some troops can come home. So we are going to sit here and wait for a policy that will continue to put young soldiers at risk for a mission that is not going to change the fundamental dynamics.

Let me speak to that for a moment, the question of changing the fundamental dynamics in this mission. The escalation of troops in Iraq was supposed to be the precursor to the willingness of the Iraqi politicians to have the ''cover of security'' to be able to make certain kinds of decisions. I have to tell you that I think that thinking is fundamentally flawed. I think it is the other way around. I think if you want the people in your country to believe there is going to be some security, the political leadership has to stand up and make decisions that indicate there is a willingness to put the fundamental stakes in place that help create that security.

When we know we don't have enough troops there to secure every community, and you know there is this power struggle going on between these factions, you are not going to change those fundamentals by putting in a few troops here and a few there, melting down certain pockets of resistance that move, as they have, from Baghdad to Diyala, or Kirkuk, or to some other community, and you simply move the violence and the terror continues.

The politics has to change. There has been no indication whatsoever of the ability or willingness of Prime Minister Maliki, or the others who make up this Government, to make those fundamental decisions. What are we talking about? We are talking about an oil law. Is it that hard to sit down and decide how the revenues of the oil will be divided—by population, by community, by presence, by need? It hasn't happened. We have been promised month after month, oh, it is just around the corner, just about to happen. And it doesn't happen.

I have sat with some folks over there who have indicated to me that it is, in fact, the open-endedness of the presence of the United States that relieves the pressure. I have even heard that from some of our top U.S. diplomats who have been charged with the effort to negotiate, and they happily and gladly use the pressure of the Congress as a stick to try to leverage some of the transition we want.

But frankly, I have also heard them say that when the President and the administration stand up and say: We are there, don't worry about us, we are going to keep on doing this, they just back off because they don't think they have to listen to the Congress and they know they have this open-ended ability to play their game. It is that simple. That is what we are trying to change.

When I hear my colleagues on the other side of the aisle run through this list of red herrings, of straw men, it disappoints me, frankly, because we ought to have the real debate.

I have heard colleagues over there come with a map and say: You have Saudi Arabia here and Lebanon here, Israel here, and you have all of these interests and Iran. Iran is growing in its influence. Well, Iran has loved our presence in Iraq. Iran has grown in its influence because of what we have been doing in Iraq. We have empowered Iran. In fact, Iran doesn't want an Iraq that is completely disintegrated for a lot of different reasons. There are fundamental and profound differences between Iran and Iraq in the end, not the least of which is that Iran is Persian and Iraq is Arab. That Arab/Persian line existed long before the United States went there. Believe me, when we are not there, it will continue to exist and play out in influence with respect to the region.

You hear people say: This precipitous withdrawal. ''Precipitous'' is the favorite word of the other side. First, it is not a withdrawal; it is a redeployment.

Yes, some troops come home, absolutely, as they ought to, because there are limits to what American troops are able to do in the middle of a civil war. I ask my colleagues, go read the authorization we sent those troops to Iraq with. There isn't one mention of what is going on there today. There isn't even one mention that is active today. The authority we gave the President to use to send the troops there was related to Saddam Hussein, to weapons of mass destruction, to a whole series of things, none of which are applicable—not al-Qaida, incidentally. This is a war which has completely morphed into what it is today, without congressional authorization. But for the fact that the troops are there, the Congress wouldn't send them there for what they are doing today. Just because you are there is the last reason to be sending young Americans out to continue to put their lives in harm's way.

We hear this issue of precipitous. I guarantee you, in September, the President is going to start redeploying some troops. And well into next year, we all know we can't sustain the current level of deployment. Everybody knows that. Talk to the military; talk to the Pentagon. We can't sustain it. There is a looming, huge reality standing over the Senate which is the reality of the deployment schedule itself, that at the current levels of our Armed Forces, at the current rate of deployment, we are not able to sustain the numbers we have there well into next year without busting the Armed Forces completely. That doesn't seem to enter the debate, according to the other side.

This isn't sustainable beyond next year. We don't even move most of the troops out until beyond that period of time. So there is a complete logic to the date that has been chosen. It is not arbitrary. It was not picked out of the air, and no poll has set what is happening here. In fact, if you followed the polls, you wouldn't be in Iraq at all. That is not what we are suggesting.

We acknowledge that there are interests. Yes, there are interests in the region. Yes, there are interests we have with respect to our ally Israel. Yes, there are interests with respect to Lebanon. Yes, if we just up and walked away, al-Qaida would use that. But that is not what this debate is about or ought to be about. What we are talking about is, how do you best take the sacrifice and commitment of our troops and honor it with a policy that in fact can achieve what we want to achieve in the region?

It is the judgment of many of us, including some Republicans, that we have reached a point where you best achieve what we need to try to achieve in Iraq by this fundamental change in what our troops are there to do. What we are doing is changing the mission from a mission where we are proactively going out into the community, into homes, proactively engaged in doing what the Iraqis ought to, after 5 years, be doing for themselves.

The Prime Minister of Iraq himself has said that they are prepared to take over the security. The Prime Minister has said they don't need us there in the same way we are. The people of Iraq don't want us there in the numbers that we are there today. In fact, I think one of the things we ought to vote on in this authorization is whether there should be a plebiscite in Iraq. Let's ask the Iraqis in an open vote whether they want the United States to be there in the way we are there today. Let's do that. I am confident of what the outcome would be.

The fact is, we are talking about how you get from here to there, which is where we all want to be, with a sufficient level of stability so that Iran cannot have increasing influence the way it does, that Iraqis will be able to stop going down this spiraling downward course of violence which is consuming their society.

Most of the middle class of Iraq has now already moved out of Iraq. Much of the middle class is in Syria, Jordan, other communities. What has happened is, the very core that we relied on to achieve what we wanted to, because of the violence and because of the misjudgments, isn't there anymore. That even complicates matters more.

I heard the Senator from Minnesota say the other day that this is not an open-ended commitment that we have today. I don't know how it is not open-ended unless, of course, he knows that General Petraeus is going to recommend that we bring some troops back in September because in the absence of that, it is open-ended. There is nothing that says to the Iraqis: Something is going to happen if you don't do X, Y, or Z.

Last year, we heard Ambassador Khalilzad and then General Casey and General Abizaid say the Iraqis have about 6 months, and if they don't do the following things in the next 6 months, it is going to be really difficult. Guess what, Mr. President. We are a year beyond that now. We are 6 months beyond the 6 months. What happened? Nothing.

Mr. INHOFE. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. KERRY. For what purpose?

Mr. INHOFE. For a question.

Mr. KERRY. I am happy to yield for a question.

Mr. INHOFE. I understood that the junior Senator from Massachusetts referred to the NIE. I would like to ask a question because my interpretation was totally different. The NIE that was released yesterday states that worldwide counterterrorism efforts over the past 5 years have constrained the ability of al-Qaida to attack the homeland and have led terrorist groups to perceive the United States as a harder target to strike than on 9/11. It is a significant judgment that shows that our counterterrorism efforts have been working. It also notes that al-Qaida leadership continues to plot high-impact attacks, and the safe haven it enjoys along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border has likely increased its capabilities to attack the United States. This doesn't mean, as some erroneously reported last week, that al-Qaida is as strong as it was pre-9/11. It does mean that al-Qaida may be strong enough to carry out an attack on the United States.

The question I would ask, reading in context from the NIE, is, Do you agree with this interpretation?

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I agree with all but the last judgment that was made by the Senator. Any appropriate apolitical reading—and I am going over to read the full NIE, but I have read the public accounts of it and I have talked to some people about it. I would agree that, of course, we have done some hard work. Of course, it is more difficult to penetrate our country. Absolutely, one would hope. My God, after all the money we have spent, after the reorganization of Homeland Security, after what we have done at airports alone, let alone some of the efforts of the FBI and others with respect to foreign cooperation, of course, we have hardened. I don't question that.

Have we done even as much as I and others want to do? The answer is no. We have a lot of undone work with respect to chemical plants and nuclear facilities and ports and communities. Frankly, I would have had every bit of our baggage x-rayed and inspected. We put passengers through this incredible rigmarole, but you can put a piece of baggage on an airplane that hasn't gone through it. That is absurd. Not to mention our ports and the question of port security. We had a vote here not so long ago to guarantee that we upgrade our port security even more so that the containers that come in by the millions are more secure. There is a lot we can do still.

But, yes, we have hardened. I agree with that. Are we a tougher target today vis-a-vis al-Qaida than we were on September 11? Yes, we are a tougher target than we were on September 11. But that doesn't refute at all what has happened with respect to al-Qaida.

Al-Qaida was on the run. We had 1,000 al-Qaida in the mountains of Tora Bora within months after invading Afghanistan, which I voted for and supported and completely believed was the right thing to do—go in and take them down. But I will tell you, I have heard from four star generals that we ran a risk-averse policy with respect to the effort to go after al-Qaida in Afghanistan. When we had them surrounded in the mountains of Tora Bora, we didn't pull the trigger on the 10th Mountain Division or the 1st Marines or on the 101st Airborne, all of which were in the locality. We didn't use them. We outsourced the job going after the biggest criminal in American history. We outsourced the job to Afghan warlords who 1 week earlier had been on the other side fighting against us.

What happened, we all know. Al-Qaida escaped, went into the northwest

Pakistan territories where they have been reorganizing now for 4 years. What that intelligence report does tell us is that they are reconstituted, and they are exporting their lessons learned in Iraq to Afghanistan now, which has become far more fragile, far more of a challenge, and they are exporting it to Europe. If you talk to the authorities in Europe—Germany, in particular, but some other countries—there is an increase. That is where the center of al-Qaida is today, according to many people in the intelligence community. It is growing. That threat is a threat not just to the United States but a threat globally.

I continue to say—and I think the NIE is saying this to us—that al-Qaida as an entity is as strong today as it was on September 11. After almost $600 billion and over 4,000 lives and all of the turmoil we have created in Iraq because we are supposedly fighting them over there so we don't have to fight them here, there is no way to escape the fact, the reality that al-Qaida is in a better position to do whatever it wants to do, wherever it may be, including trying to attack us, notwithstanding our hardening.

It is a lot tougher to get into the United States today. It depends on where you come from. There are a lot fewer people from Middle Eastern and other Islamic connected countries who are getting visas to come into the United States. It is a lot tougher today. It should be; we understand that. The reality is that al-Qaida is a threat.

But let's come back to Iraq, which is the key. Al-Qaida wasn't in Iraq. The focus of this war was in Afghanistan and in other places. We shifted it to Iraq. We have put far more resources and far more personnel into Iraq, and Afghanistan is getting worse. I have talked to people who spend every day of their lives focused on defense and security issues who are unbelievably concerned about what is happening in Afghanistan as opposed to concern about what is happening to Iraq in terms of the threat to the United States.

I come back to the point I was making a moment ago, and that is that this remains open-ended fundamentally with respect to the demands on the Iraqis to live up to their obligations, whether they are the provincial elections or the constitutional challenges or the reconciliation process.

I met with Prime Minister Maliki earlier in the year. We talked about the reconciliation process. He sat there and said: Yes, we are going to meet tomorrow and the next day, and we are very confident about what is going to happen with the reconciliation. We are working at it.

I think the meeting was postponed. I think they held it a little later. They got together. Nothing happened. There has been no reconciliation. Everybody understands that we haven't been going forward with that.

The question before the Senate, the real question is, Are we going to be able to vote on something that is as critical as this without the parliamentary intercession? Let's let the chips fall where they may. That is the way we have approached the Defense authorization bill historically.

The other question behind that is the question of how do we best protect American interests in Iraq. There is a difference of opinion there. Many of us have come to believe that it is by setting a date for legitimate transformation of responsibility, that people's behavior will change. I have seen that historically. Essentially, to whatever degree one was able to try to give the Vietnamese an opportunity to be able to survive, it was because we transferred authority and responsibility. I remember that as long as the Americans were carrying the full weight out there doing whatever, nobody else felt they had to do any lifting.

These politicians in Iraq are not going to make fully sort of preservational choices until they are faced with the reality that they have to. As long as the U.S. security blanket is there, it protects them from actually having to come to grips with those choices. It empowers them to be able to play out whatever power struggle is going on with respect to one sect versus another, one region against another. So they can sit there and say: Well, within the next months, these guys are going to get wiped out, and my interests will be different than they are today. We believe that you have to change those perceptions of interest and you have to change them now.

In addition, there is nothing in this amendment that deprives the President or the Congress or the country of the ability to protect our interests in the region. Those interests, incidentally, we believe very deeply are being injured by the current policy. We are creating more terrorists. The CIA has told us that. We have even had reports that al-Qaida—the Osama bin Laden-al Zawahiri al-Qaida based in northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan—is using what is happening in Iraq as a recruitment tool, as a fundraising tool. It has become a magnet for jihadists. The way you deal with that is to be smarter than we are being today, which is diffuse the American presence, have surrogates legitimately doing what we are in the same interest. We ought to be demanding more of the surrounding communities but, frankly, they have lost confidence both in Maliki and this administration. The ability to do that is now much harder than it was.

We in this amendment do not withdraw all the troops from Iraq. Some people don't like this amendment because of that. There are some in the country who think it should just be done tomorrow. That is not what happens here. There is nothing precipitous about it at all. It begins a process that most people in the Senate know is probably going to begin in September, but it begins it with a clarity that begins to change the dynamics on the ground so you begin to best leverage the political transformation that needs to take place.

It does so in a way that leaves the President the discretion to be able to have troops necessary to complete the training of Iraqis. It leaves the President the discretion to have troops necessary to continue to prosecute al-Qaida. And it leaves the President the discretion to be able to have the troops necessary to protect American facilities and forces.

Five years—going into the sixth year—of this war, that is a recipe for transforming America's presence there, for transforming Iraqi responsibility, and for achieving the political settlement that is absolutely unachievable as long as there is simply the kind of military commitment that has been on the table to now. To date, the administration has not shown anybody what their route is, what their path is, for the kind of political settlement that seems to escape them every time they make the promise.

The fact is that the way the troops—I feel this as strongly as I feel anything. I remember personally, when I thought a policy was not working very well, how we wished that people were responding to the realities of what was going on on the ground, and that we wanted people in Washington to be more thoughtful and knowledgeable about what the dynamics were on the ground.

I think the same is true of our troops over there, who are committed to achieving what they can, but who also—and I have talked to many of them—feel as though they are trying to put a square peg in a round hole, that they do not have the right tools and the right dynamic to be able to accomplish what needs to be done.

So I say to my colleagues if you know what you are doing is not working, if you know what you are doing is counterproductive, if you know what you are doing is, in fact, working against your ability to most effectively prosecute the war on terror, if you know what you are doing is creating casualties out of missions that do not accomplish your ultimate goal—which is providing the security that allows the transformation of the politics; and there is no indication the politics are about to follow—if you know, in fact, you have strengthened one of the primary entities you are concerned about in the region—Iran—if you know you have lost ground with respect to Hamas and Hezbollah—because you have been focused elsewhere and not leveraging what needs to be done there—if you know so many interests of your country are being set back, you ought to change your policy.

You do not just change it on the military front. In the face of the advice of our own generals that there is no military solution, you have to change it on the political and diplomatic front. This amendment has a very significant,

leveraged, diplomatic approach, where it requires a very significant effort, where it has been lacking. And believe me, I have gone over there enough and talked to enough people to understand the degree to which it is lacking. It is critical we leverage that kind of behavior.

So I hope we are going to—in the debate, we ought to have a real debate. I have heard colleagues on the other side talk about a recipe for defeat. If we continue down the road we are going now, we are setting ourselves up to empower al-Qaida even more. If we continue down the road we are going now—without the political resolution, without legitimate leverage in the region that is more reasonable, and without the transfer of legitimate responsibility and accountability to the Iraqis—then we are going to have more American soldier casualties, we are going to stay in the same position we are in today, and a month from now, 2 months from now, 6 months from now, the judgments we are going to be called on to make will be exactly the same as they are today, only worse, because more time will have been spent, because opportunities will have been wasted, and because the opposition will have been empowered even further.

That is what the choice is for all of us here. I hope we are going to have sort of a real debate. It is legitimate you might differ over whether a particular move is going to accomplish what you set out to do, but please do not debate something that is not on the floor.

This is not a precipitous withdrawal. It does not abandon our interests. It addresses our interests in a different way. It redeploys our troops. It keeps a significant presence, not just there but in the region.

We have troops in Bahrain. We have troops in the gulf. We have troops in other parts of that region, in Kuwait. The fact is, America has the ability to protect its interests vis-a-vis Iran. None of us wants to see chaos in the long term, but there is chaos that is growing on a daily basis, worse and worse, as a consequence of our presence. If we have not learned that lesson by now, then we have learned precious little at all.

I hope we will have the real debate we deserve as we go forward.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PRYOR). The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I am extremely interested in the comments of the distinguished junior Senator from Massachusetts. I do not agree with much of what he said, and maybe I can comment about some of the disagreements as I make my remarks this morning. I will begin by saying that on Iraq, absquatulation is not a policy.

Today we face a growing movement for the political abandonment of the will to success in the biggest conflict we face in the whole 21st century. There are handfuls of people in pink wandering the hallways here, and the party in the majority claims a growing groundswell to abandon the fight in the midst of the battle.

These are perilous times, and the political class of this country is divided among those who desperately want to raise the white flag, those who are fleeing to the tall grasses, and a beleaguered administration, beleaguered in part—and let us be honest at a time when generosity would be misplaced—by many of its own spectacular mistakes.

I hear from constituents who are worried—very worried—about the war in Iraq. But Utahns are stalwart in character. Not all of them support the President's policy, and not all of them support me, to be sure. But I think I am being honest to suggest that the vast majority of my constituents are as worried by the prospects of a U.S. unilateral withdrawal as they are by the challenges we face in the middle of a battle whose end many of my colleagues no longer have the patience to imagine, pursue, or achieve.

Such abandonment is not an option for our forces in Iraq.

I gave a speech on this floor several months ago where I said I was not going to concede to the Democrats' strategy of unilateral withdrawal. I pointed out the irony that the Democrats' legitimate criticism of this administration's policy—that the Bush administration went into Iraq unprepared for the consequences, and without imagining the requirements of the day after we toppled Saddam—was, in fact, being repeated by the Democrats who now advocate a withdrawal without preparing for the consequences, and with no consideration of what will happen in Iraq, the region, and the world after we decamp. I find this bitterly ironic.

While I agree with many of the criticisms of this administration's early failures in the Iraq war, I will not stand quietly against the irony—indeed, the hypocrisy—of suggestions that it is OK to abandon a war without considering the consequences, but damnable to begin one in the same manner.

In the months since I spoke on this floor, where I gave my qualified support for the surge, I have listened carefully to the debate on and off the floor. I have talked to my colleagues, to administration officials, to constituents and friends, here and abroad. I have read the intelligence on the prospects for Iraq and the currents in the region. I have traveled to Iraq, and I have traveled in the region.

I am a member of the Intelligence Committee, perhaps with the longest tenure in the history of the Senate on the Intelligence Committee, and I do not find things to be as my colleagues on the other side assert.

Nowhere have I found a silver lining to these clouds of conflict. But nowhere have I heard anyone say the clouds are less dark on the horizon.

The three major problems I am most concerned about—the al-Qaida problem, the Iran problem, and the moral and practical costs of abandoning the moderate Iraqis—have not been addressed in any substantive way in any of the policy prescriptions I have studied. If the majority wants to decamp, they need to propose a policy context that makes the United States safer on the day after, not more in peril.

There is an al-Qaida problem.

In May, I went to Ramadi. I was briefed on our base by General Gaskin, and then we suited up to go for a walk in the town center. He was with us, and walked with us in that town center. That is correct, we had to suit up in armor for a walk downtown. This was no Sunday stroll for ice cream. But two facts were obvious: One, 6 months before we strolled through those downtown streets, Ramadi was al-Qaida's capital in Anbar Province and Iraq. On that day, 2 months ago, it was the local Sunnis' capital again. And, two, the local Iraqis I saw and met in Ramadi were happy to see us there. Had we walked down those same streets 2 months ago, we would have been killed.

However you want to criticize the administration for its past errors, we now have a workable counterinsurgency plan in operation. It is working in Anbar, and al-Qaida is on the defensive.

Are they moving out to other places? We are. Are we following them, using the counterinsurgency tactics we have finally mastered? We are. Are we going to abandon the field we have learned to dominate? You tell me. And we will abandon that field in this very Chamber if we keep following what is being spoken to on the other side.

Here is what I learned about our successful counterinsurgency campaign from General Gaskin. Al-Qaida declared Ramadi the capital city of the Islamic State of Iraq. There were no police in Ramadi last year. Al-Qaida in Iraq, or AQI, as we refer to it, had destroyed all the police in the city. Starting in mid-February, the coalition cleared the downtown in about 6 weeks. There were approximately 15,000 to 20,000 members of al-Qaida in Anbar initially. Now, about half of them are dead. Others are still trying to discredit the Government of Iraq and discredit the occupation. They represent us as occupiers, infidels, if you will. They advance their goals with brutal methods. All of their financing comes from criminal enterprises. Al-Qaida is very cellular, decentralized, but resilient and regenerative. They are self-sufficient, funding themselves through criminal activities—murder, intimidation, the black market.

We have finally learned to deal with the Sunni tribes. It took us too long to understand the tribes, but al-Qaida did not understand the tribal culture either. Al-Qaida's intimidation activities and murder of families—including young boys—enraged the local tribes and tribal leaders. The tribes' response was their realization that the expanded coalition presence was a chance to get al-Qaida out of their lives, and they

came to a mutual understanding with coalition forces, sending 1,200 of their boys for enlistment in the security forces in 1 day.

That was a turnaround. I was there with Senator SMITH approximately a year before then. There was no chance at all in that province. But because of the counterinsurgency, we have made tremendous strides, and they are completely ignored by some here in this Chamber.

But the local population in Ramadi and al-Anbar has helped find two-thirds of the IEDs in this area. We have promoted the development of a neighborhood watch system there. Once you clear, you must leave a security presence with coalition support. The locals will not give you intel if you do not leave a permanent presence to provide security. In the words of General Gaskin: We are asking the Iraqis to gain capacity while they are at war. This is very unusual, and it is very difficult.

In counterinsurgency, the most important thing is how well you protect the population, and what the level of violence is. We are making progress in al-Anbar. Are we going to abandon this progress? As General Gaskin put it: It's like someone tells you the ship that you're on is on fire. You jump off, but halfway down you discover that it wasn't on fire after all. You still have to deal with your decision to jump: Either swim or drown.

As I have said, I am not in favor of jumping ship, but for those who are, the question is: What are we going to do? Swim or drown?

Last month, two analysts for the Radio Free Iraq service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty released a compelling report entitled ''Iraqi Insurgency Media: The War of Images and Ideas.''

In addition to cataloging the impressive degree to which the Iraqi Sunni insurgency is using the Internet to purvey a constant stream of images, propaganda, songs, and other images that glorify the fight against the coalition, this report makes clear that this barrage of insurgent media is feeding the global extremist network.

According to the report:

> The Iraqi insurgent media network is a boon to global jihadist media, which can use materials produced by the insurgency to reinforce their message.

The images of our precipitous withdrawal will be broadcast endlessly, to inspire and incite extremists throughout the world.

In fact, if you talk to the analysts who monitor insurgent media, you learn that there are two prevalent themes today. The insurgents, including al-Qaida, are very media savvy, and they are avid consumers of Western and American media. They watch our floor debates. It is a common theme for them today to declare that we will withdraw. In our withdrawal, they see victory.

If we abandon the counterinsurgency gains we have made, al-Qaida will not only declare global victory and vindication, they will attempt to reclaim the territory in Iraq. And don't think anything otherwise.

Nowhere have I seen policy prescriptions from the other side or anywhere else, for that matter, other than the counterinsurgency and the work that is going on right now to address this problem.

We cannot fight al-Qaida from across the border. And to suggest we can protect all our interests by being in the little country of Kuwait is absurd. We cannot fight al-Qaida and ignore Baghdad. And we cannot walk away from this fight with al-Qaida.

For those who want to withdraw without a policy prescription, all I can say is, you may no longer be interested in al-Qaida in Iraq, but al-Qaida is interested in the United States, and always has been.

Let's talk about the Iran problem. My colleague from Massachusetts mentioned this as though it is not a problem. I am sure he did not mean that. If you watch the Sunni insurgency media, you also determine an even more prominent theme. They assume, based on watching our media, that we will abandon the cause. And they declare an even bigger threat is Iran. Nowhere have I read of a compelling policy prescription to answer the question of how we will deal with Iran in the aftermath of a withdrawal. Iran is competing with the United States in the region. We are getting unclassified briefs from Multi-National Force in Iraq officers identifying the Iranian agents' role in supporting militias and funding explosively-formed penetrators EFPs, if you will—networks, which target the coalition.

Iran is playing a dangerous game, not because they solicit an armed reaction from us—which they calculate will not occur—but they are carefully stoking sectarian and anticoalition conflict, while taking advantage of the relative security our military presence provides.

What is our policy toward Iran should we decide to follow the prescription to abandon the fight in Iraq? All I have read is a hopeful repetition of the desire for a diplomatic solution. I always hope for a diplomatic solution. That is always a nice weasel way of hoping we can get out of these problems. I also hope to balance the budget, and I hope to cure AIDS. We are not making much headway in those, either.

This will not happen based on hope alone, however.

Those who think we can split from Iraq in the middle of the conflict and deal with Iran with a Tehran tea party are not just hopeful, they are delusional. Iran is a totalitarian regime in desperate economic circumstances and desperate economic condition. There have been riots over gas-rationing in a nation awash—or should I say rich—in oil.

The population has suffered two generations of economic decline—in a nation rich in oil. The rich Persian culture has suffered the spectacular mismanagement of a corrupt and despotic regime.

Just several days ago, the Open Source Center provided an analysis of Iran's treatment of its labor unions. I quote:

> The abduction of the head of Tehran's transport workers' union is the latest sign of the antagonism shown President Ahmadinejad's government toward trade unions and other civil society institutions. On April 11 it shut down the Iranian Labor News Agency, which often reported on labor discontent arising from Iran's economic failures as well as on student unrest and human rights abuses. Mahumd Osanlu, head of the Workers' Syndicate of the Tehran and Suburban Bus Company, has not been heard from since he was beaten and abducted on July 10 by plainclothesmen, presumably from the government.

Do I need to remind my colleagues that Ahmadinejad ran on a platform of helping the lower classes? This is the face of a corrupt and failing regime that is causing havoc all over the Middle East. Just ask the people in Lebanon, if you want to, but you can also ask the people in Iraq.

We are spending about $100 billion a year providing various degrees of stability through most of Iraq, stability on Iran's border. If we leave, there will be great instability. How will Iran react? My friend from Massachusetts seems to think they are not going to do one little thing. Once we leave, everything is going to stabilize and it is all going to be just wonderful. I don't think he quite went that far, but he basically said Iran is not going to do much. But do we have a policy in place that will seek to advance our goals of containing the Iranian threat, or is the policy of withdrawal hinging simply on the desperate desire for diplomacy with despots?

There are moral and practical costs of abandoning the moderates in Iraq. I disagree with the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts. There are plenty of moderates. There are plenty of the middle class in Iraq. Large areas of Iraq are not in turmoil. Large areas of Iraq are, but there are plenty of people living there who want this country to work. Eighty percent of them voted for freedom and voted for a representative form of government.

What are the consequences for the moderates of Iraq if we withdraw? There are, in fact, many moderates, many Iraqis intermarried between faiths, many Iraqis who are urban professionals, many Iraqi women are educated, in contrast to what the al-Qaida people and the Taliban people would do to women. All of these are attributes of the moderate masses who are today intimidated by the insurgents, by gangsters and terrorists, and who are currently failed by Iraqi politicians.

Nonetheless, they are there in significant numbers. They will suffer immensely in the chaos that will follow our withdrawal.

If we believe that a principal key to addressing the sources of discontent

that fuels violent extremism in the Muslim world was the empowerment of the moderate classes seeking modern civil society, our abandonment of the cause in Iraq will do more than fuel the ferocious violence of al-Qaida, the deadly competition fomented by Iran; it will seal our ability to appeal to the moderate Muslim elements throughout the world, to build civic culture in autocratic societies. Our natural allies in these societies—the young and the educated, the professional, the women seeking to escape the oppression of the veil—will not respond to our entreaties because they will have seen that the United States does not continue to stand with its allies. They will see the images of our withdrawal. They will see the self-satisfied propaganda of the insurgents and al-Qaida, and they will be afraid to be with us.

I fear they will see images of the slaughter of innocents.

They will go back into the shadows, and the shadows of autocracy or, even worse, Islamic fascism will grow. We will have squandered not just the good will of our natural allies—those who want to modernize into peaceful and productive societies—but we will have squandered the faith of hundreds of millions throughout the world who will see no reason to stand by or with us. Whom will we blame for the slaughter of moderates, and whom will we turn to the next time we seek allies in the Middle East?

Should those who advocate withdrawal today succeed in their ill-conceived attempt to run away from reality, reality will not let us escape. Without a policy to fight al-Qaida in Iraq, to compete with an unstable and adventurous Iran, and to prevent the slaughter of Iraqi innocents on a scale much greater than we see today, a withdrawal will be calamitous.

The consequences on our ability to conduct foreign policy, to win the war on terror, and to advance our values of democracy and peace will be immense.

After the capitulation driven by congressional Democrats that led to our abandonment of Vietnam in the 1970s, the Soviets became emboldened and advanced throughout what was known then as the Third World—in Angola, Central America, and Afghanistan. We regained our footing in a decade, and we won the Cold War because we found our will. Without a strategy to accompany the policy of withdrawal, the consequences—an emboldened al-Qaida, aggressive Iran, and intimidated, harassed, and slaughtered Iraqi moderates—will haunt us much longer than after our Vietnam withdrawal. After all, the Vietnamese did not threaten our country. They did not threaten our mainland. These people have, and these people continue to threaten our mainland. These people continue to say, as was said just a week ago, that they are going to cause havoc over here.

I am 73 years old, and I fear that should we concede to the powerful call for withdrawal without a sound policy, the harm to this Nation will last longer than I have years to live.

The senior Senator from Arizona, Mr. MCCAIN, whom I hold in high esteem, quoted General Petraeus earlier, saying that of all the resources General Petraeus could have, the one he wanted most was time. The one he wanted most was time. This is a very important point, and I commend the distinguished Senator from Arizona for making it.

Many people today believe that whatever the outcome this month, we have set a deadline for September. I say: Any progress achieved by September will be incremental, at best. Counterinsurgencies can be won, but they will not be won on a congressional election cycle. We should not be so arrogant as to presume we can make them fit into such an absurd construct. Let us be honest and admit that if we want to sustain the fight in Iraq, we should give it much longer than a September deadline. Perhaps in a year, perhaps in two, we can see a success, but for this, we need more than time. We need will. That is what I see evaporating around all of us here in the Senate.

The majority is waving the flag of withdrawal. There is no accompanying policy to shape the way the geopolitical environment will be affected. Our enemies will be emboldened, our competitors encouraged, and our friends throughout the region will be like me: discouraged.

Mr. President, the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts has said we are not talking withdrawal; we are talking a redeployment. Who is he kidding? We are going to leave a small contingency there to do exactly what Secretary Rumsfeld was doing, with an emboldened al-Qaida? Come on. I think they are ignoring the fact that the al-Qaida people have said they are going to establish a worldwide caliphate and impose their will on everybody—especially us.

One thing I would just like to say is they have piled into Iraq. They were there before, in spite of what the distinguished Senator has said. Maybe not in as great numbers; of course not, but they have piled into Iraq knowing that if they defeat us there and we turn tail and run for the high grasses, they will have accomplished something they didn't even dream they could accomplish 5 years ago.

This is not a simple war. This is not a war against another nation. It is not a war where people on the other side wear uniforms. It is a war where they commit terror all over the world. It is a war where they have threatened us. It a war where they kill innocent human beings. It is a war where they don't think anything of sending their young people strapped with bombs to blow themselves up, to maim and kill innocent civilians.

If we do what our friends on the other side want to do, our enemies will be emboldened, our competitors encouraged, and our friends throughout the world will lose an awful lot of faith and confidence in the United States of America.

Mr. President, absquatulation is not a policy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Good morning. Not long ago, a woman who lives in Pawtucket, RI, wrote me:

> I care about the human spirit, which I think is deeply wounded by our occupation in Iraq. I have three friends serving this country because they believe it is their duty. I believe it is your duty to bring them home. I beg you for an end to this war.

She is not just a lone voice from one State. All over this country, Americans call for an end to this war. At the grocery store, around the kitchen table, and in places of worship, Americans are sharing their frustration and outrage at a President who refuses to listen, refuses to admit mistakes and misjudgments, and stubbornly refuses to change course.

The amendment sponsored by my distinguished senior Senator, JACK REED of Rhode Island, and the honorable chairman of the Armed Services Committee, CARL LEVIN of Michigan, would require a redeployment of American troops to begin within 120 days of enactment. It sets a reasonable, responsible goal: that the redeployment be completed by April 30 of next year—2008.

Let us be clear: the Levin-Reed amendment offers a new direction in Iraq.

A vote for the Levin-Reed amendment is a vote to support our troops and their families who are bearing the burden of repeated deployments, long separation, and sometimes debilitating injury, and they bear it with courage, fortitude, and honor. This measure supports them by bringing the troops home safely and with honor.

A vote for the Levin-Reed amendment is a vote that will help give our military the time and the resources to rebuild and recover from the strain on our troops and equipment.

A vote for the Levin-Reed amendment opens strategic doors to renew diplomacy in the Middle East and throughout the world and to begin restoring America's standing, prestige, and good will in the global community.

More and more of our colleagues in this body recognize the need for this new direction. Many of those who supported the war in the past have now said they can no longer support President Bush in his failed and misguided course in Iraq. But I say to my friends, when the issue before us is our single most important matter of foreign policy and national security, words alone are not enough.

When our Nation's course has been as misdirected and mismanaged as it has been, words alone are not enough.

When, in the face of this policy's failure and the resulting chaos in Iraq,

corrective action is called for, words are not enough.

And when the opportunity for that correction is within our reach, within our grasp, if only we would seize it, mere words are not enough.

This is a day when we are called upon to act. The question before us is simple: Are you in favor of bringing our troops home? That is a serious question, and it demands serious, reasoned, and thoughtful debate.

I was recently struck by words spoken in this Chamber by Senator RICHARD LUGAR of Indiana. Senator LUGAR's words imparted a thoughtfulness that too long has been missing from this debate. Too often, this administration communicates not with reason but with slogans and sound bites: ''Stay the course.'' ''Support the troops.'' ''Global war on terror.'' ''Cut and run.'' ''Precipitous withdrawal.'' I say to anyone watching this debate: When you hear those words coming from this Chamber, I hope an alarm bell goes off in your head, a signal that thinking and reason have ended and sloganeering has begun. You deserve better.

In May of 2003, President Bush landed on the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* and said this:

> Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.

In the background, of course, was the banner that read: ''Mission Accomplished.''

Then, over a year ago, in June 2006, President Bush announced Operation Together Forward, a ''joint effort to restore security and rule of law to high-risk areas in the capital city'' of Baghdad.

Then, this January, the President said he would send tens of thousands more troops there, part of a surge to try yet again to secure Iraq's capital.

The months since President Bush's surge have been among the deadliest of the war. Nearly 600 U.S. soldiers have died since the announcement of the surge, and over 3,500 have been wounded. Last month, more than 100 American servicemembers died in Iraq. The month before that, more than 100 American troops lost their lives. The month before that, April of this year, over 100 American deaths. Between February 10 and May 7 of this year, the Pentagon reports U.S. forces sustained an average of 25 casualties each day—more than during that time in the previous year.

Alasdair Campbell, the U.K.'s outgoing Defense Attache at its Baghdad Embassy, said in May:

> The evidence does not suggest that the surge is actually working, if reduction in casualties is a criterion.

The Pentagon's survey found that, on average, more than 100 Iraqi civilians were killed or wounded each day between February and May—nearly double the daily total from the same period 1 year ago.

The number of unidentified murdered bodies found in Baghdad soared 70 percent during the month of May—726, compared to 411 in April. At least 21 unidentified murdered bodies were found in Baghdad just this past weekend. The displacement of Iraqi civilians has continued throughout the spring—90,000 Iraqis per month in March, April, and May of 2007, according to the Brookings monthly Iraq Index. The average weekly number of attacks across Iraq surpassed 1,000, compared to about 600 weekly attacks for the same period 1 year ago. More than 75 percent of the attacks were aimed at U.S. forces.

In an interview with the Washington Post in June, retired general Barry McCaffrey said:

> Why would we think that a temporary presence of 30,000 additional combat troops in a giant city would change the dynamics of a bitter civil war?

In a survey taken in February and March of this year, 53 percent of Iraqis viewed their security environment as ''bad or very bad,'' and even in that environment, 78 percent of Iraqis, in an ABC News study, do not support having American or coalition forces in their country. Only 18 percent have confidence in U.S. and coalition troops, the BBC has reported, and 51 percent approve of attacking our forces.

David Kilcullen, General Petraeus's top counterinsurgency adviser, said last month:

> We haven't turned the tide. We haven't turned the corner. There isn't light at the end of the tunnel.

We will not turn the tide, we will not turn the corner, and there will be no light at the end of the tunnel until this administration makes it clear that our intent is to withdraw our forces rapidly and responsibly.

The other side argues that to dispute this President's judgment is to fail to support the troops, even though that very judgment has catastrophically failed the troops and our country.

I traveled to Iraq in March, in my capacity as a new member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, to get a first-hand look. I met brave Rhode Islanders in Fallujah and at a medical center where Rhode Islanders are helping provide care to our wounded soldiers. They, like all our troops in Iraq, are serving our Nation with dedication, courage, and honor. Our troops are working so hard and accomplishing so much, but this administration has not given them the support they need—not in the field of battle, not when they return home, and, most importantly, not with wisdom to match their bravery.

As I traveled around Rhode Island in the last few years I met mothers who felt they had to buy body armor for their sons who were being shipped to Iraq because they could not trust this administration to provide it.

Just this week, USA Today reported extensively on the Pentagon's failure to address the Marines' request for Mine Resistant Ambush Protection—or MRAP—vehicles.

In February, a series of articles in the Washington Post highlighted shortfalls in the care and treatment of our wounded warriors at the Walter Reed Army hospital. The Nation's shock and dismay reflected the American people's support, respect, and gratitude for the men and women who put on our Nation's uniform. They deserve the best, not shoddy medical equipment, rundown facilities, and bureaucratic snafus.

This administration says we need to support the troops. I agree. We can support the troops by ensuring that they have the equipment, resources, and protection they need—and by caring for them when they return home. We can also support them with wise strategies arising from honest debate.

The President says Iraq is part of a vast ''global war on terror'' and that remaining mired in a conflict there is critical to our national security. But the war in Iraq has made us less, not more, secure. The way to reverse this trend is to redeploy our troops out of Iraq.

After our country has expended over $450 billion and lost more than 3,600 American lives, according to the unclassified key judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate released yesterday, al-Qaida and other Islamist terrorist groups remain undiminished in their intent to attack the United States and continue to adapt and improve their capabilities.

While the Bush administration wallows in Iraq, al-Qaida has protected sanctuary along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, again according to the unclassified key judgments of the NIE.

National Intelligence Director Mike McConnell told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he believes a successful attack by al-Qaida would most likely be planned and come out of the group's locations in Pakistan, not Iraq. Al-Qaida, the perpetrators of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, remains a significant threat to our country and our national security, and 4 years of war in Iraq has not changed that fact.

President Bush and his diehard allies say that what we and the American people support is cut-and-run or a precipitous withdrawal.

The Levin-Reed amendment requires that we begin redeploying American troops from Iraq 4 months after the measure is enacted—not 4 days, not 4 weeks, but 4 months. Surely, with the greatest military in the world, we have the capacity to plan in 4 months to begin a redeployment of our troops. In fact, I would be surprised and concerned if our military were not already planning for such a contingency.

Then, the Levin-Reed amendment sets a date for redeployment of April 30, 2008. If this amendment became law tomorrow, that would give our military and this administration more than 9 months to plan and implement our troops' redeployment—a redeployment that leaves a military presence for force protection, training, and

counterterrorism in Iraq. Is that truly a precipitous withdrawal? It is not. Those who say it is are not being straightforward with the Senate and with the American people.

Let me say this, because it is one of the elements of this issue which President Bush has completely and willfully overlooked: The time it will take for us to redeploy should not be idle or wasted time; it must be a time of great energy and effort, because it is our time of opportunity to begin the tough process of diplomacy that can help stabilize the Middle East and restore America's standing and prestige around the world.

It is a window of time in which we must aggressively engage the region and the world community in the ongoing work to rebuild Iraq and restore stability there, in which we can confound the insurgents who foment civil war from within Iraq and the global jihadists who import violence from without it. It is a window in which Iraq's political leaders can be motivated to work for cooperation, unity, and real progress.

In a recent op-ed in the Washington Post, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger described the reality that the cauldron of Iraq may overflow and engulf the region. He goes on to say that:

> The continuation of Iraq's current crisis presents all of Iraq's neighbors with mounting problems. . . . Saudi Arabia and Jordan dread Shiite domination of Iraq, especially if the Baghdad regime threatens to be a satellite of Iran. The various Gulf sheikdoms, the largest of which is Kuwait, find themselves in an even more threatened position. Their interest is to help calm the Iraq turmoil and avert Iranian domination of the region.

Then he says that:

> Given a wise and determined American diplomacy, even Iran may be brought to conclude that the risks of continued turmoil outweigh the temptations before it.

But make no mistake, as long as we occupy Iraq, the broader international engagement we need will remain elusive. With the announcement of a U.S. redeployment, Iraq's neighbors must face the prospect that the Iraq cauldron may overflow, and they will, therefore, be obliged to take a more helpful—in the case of Saudi Arabia—or a more tempered—in the case of Iran—role in the area's future. They will have no other practical choice because their own national interests will now be squarely on the line.

As ADM William J. Fallon has said:

> I see an awful lot of sitting and watching by countries in the neighborhood. It is high time that changed.

Well, it is high time that changed, but our mediate and buffering military presence prevents that from changing.

A redeployment will also deprive the insurgents of a strong recruiting tool—the al-Qaida narrative that the United States has imperial designs over Muslim lands, which resonates strongly in the Middle East due to their own colonial experiences with the British and the Ottomans.

If we make it clear that our troops are coming home—and, critically important, that we are not leaving permanent bases behind—the insurgents and terror networks will lose this defining argument.

The Bush administration and its supporters noted that the Sunni sheiks of Anbar Province have recently turned against al-Qaida in Iraq. When I met with Marine commanders in Fallujah during my trip to Iraq in March, they told me the same thing—and what an important and exciting development that was.

The marine general briefing us made clear that these Sunni sheiks turned against al-Qaida in the realization that the United States would not be in Iraq forever, thanks to the political debate this Congress has insisted on since the November election. It was the prospect of our redeployment that moved them to action.

Once all factions in Iraq must face the naked consequences of their actions, we should hope, and expect, to see similar moments of strategic clarity emerge.

How are they doing without that pressure? Last week, we saw a report from the White House that was deeply troubling. The report said that it has become significantly harder for Iraqi leaders to make the difficult compromises necessary to foster reconciliation.

In particular, the administration has focused on four objectives: provincial elections, deBaathification, constitutional reform, and the hydrocarbons law. These are the exact same issues U.S. and Iraqi military leaders stressed to us during our trip in March. Without progress in these areas, I was told by our generals, our military tactics would not succeed in accomplishing the ultimate goal.

It would be putting it mildly to say I was not reassured by the signals I received from our meetings with Iraqi officials. There was a severe disconnect between the urgency of our generals about this legislation and the absence of equivalent urgency, or even energy, on the part of Iraqi officials. One American soldier I met put it in plain, homespun terms:

> If your parents are willing to pay for the movies so you don't have to use your own money, or if you can get your big sister to do your homework for you, who wants to give that up?

Well, Mr. President, it is time. To quote the report:

> 1, the government of Iraq has not made satisfactory progress toward enacting and implementing legislation on de-Baathification reform. This is among the most divisive political issues for Iraq and compromise will be extremely difficult.
>
> 2, the current status [of efforts to enact hydrocarbon legislation] is unsatisfactory. The government of Iraq has not met its self-imposed goal of May 31 for submitting the framework hydrocarbon revenue-sharing laws.
>
> 3, the government of Iraq has not made satisfactory progress toward establishing a provincial election law.
>
> 4, the government of Iraq has not made satisfactory progress toward establishing a date for provincial elections. Legislation required for setting the date has not been enacted.
>
> 5, the government of Iraq has not made satisfactory progress toward establishing provincial council authorities.

So how does the administration respond to the list of unsatisfactory progress on their key elements? Let's turn again to the White House report:

De-Baathification:

> This does not, however, necessitate a revision to the current plan and strategy.

Hydrocarbon legislation:

> This does not, however, necessitate a revision to our current plan and strategy.

Provincial elections.

> However, at this time, this does not necessitate a revision to our current plan and strategy.

It is clear that the Iraqis have not yet made that progress. Yet this President and this administration refuse to take the one step that could truly galvanize real change in Iraq—announcing a redeployment of American forces. They must look into the abyss. We must announce that we will redeploy our troops. This is a necessary step.

A redeployment of our troops creates the potential to change the overarching dynamic for the better, freeing us to focus more effectively on strategies to counter al-Qaida and stabilize the region.

This is a critical step, and thoughtful, reasoned political and diplomatic leadership will be essential to take advantage of the new dynamic a redeployment offers.

This is a positive step, to improve our posture and advance our strategic interests.

I know my Republican colleagues wish to couch this change of course in terms of failure and abandonment. Whether this is just for rhetorical advantage, or whether they just cannot see redeployment as a calibrated part of a new and more promising regional strategy, I do not know. Let me say this, though. This is not a test of resolve. We have an enormously complex problem, a problem we have tried to solve by military force alone. Despite heroic efforts by our military, that strategy has failed—catastrophically. It did not fail because anything was lacking in our troops, it failed because the strategy was wrong—wrong at its inception, wrong in its execution, and wrong now.

We in the Senate must challenge the administration to summon the political courage and the moral courage to face the fact that the strategy was wrong and needs to change. It is never easy to admit mistakes, but when the lives of our troops and the strategic position of our country are at stake, they have to do what is right, not what is politically comfortable or fits the rhetoric. This should not be too much to ask of a President of the United States.

If, as so many believe, we are on a continuing collision course with the

facts, with the lessons of history; if our strategy is, in fact, ill-advised; if we indeed are creating and maintaining a poisonous dynamic in the region for ourselves, can we not at least consider that redeployment—specifically, the credible threat of redeployment—can open new doors for resolving the civil conflicts over which we are now the unwelcome police?

The measure now before the Senate sets forth a thoughtful, responsible path to redeploy our troops out of Iraq. It provides our military commanders with the time and resources they need to redeploy our troops safely. It will focus Iraq's political leaders on making progress, where, to put it mildly, thus far insufficient progress has been made on measures critical to their nation's future and our success. And it will galvanize the international community and the region in the practical and self-interested pursuit—or acceptance—of a more stable, more secure Iraq.

The Levin-Reed amendment is the new direction Americans have called for. It is the change of course we desperately need. In a few hours, this long debate, this long night, will draw to a close. I urge my colleagues to let us vote up or down, yes or no, on the new direction the Levin-Reed amendment embodies.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado is recognized.

Mr. ALLARD. Simply put, we need to avoid micromanaging the war from the floor of the Senate. We need to let our military leaders perform their duties and give them time for our new way forward in Iraq to be successful. We now have before us the Levin-Reed amendment, which sets a timeline for us to begin withdrawal from Iraq. We cannot afford to set a hard deadline to begin to walk away from Iraq. The cost of failure is too great to our future long-term national security. It is in America's security interest 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.

I will continue to vote against any legislation that sets arbitrary deadlines and thresholds in Iraq, and I plead with my colleagues to do the same.

Let me remind our 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, and Beirut, in the 1980s, and Somalia in the 1990s. Leaving Iraq in the current situation would only result in emboldening terrorists around the world. Bin Laden himself is on record, after these previous withdrawals, criticizing our lack of will and questioning our commitment to fight these zealots. We have to learn from our mistakes in the past.

I refer to a quote in the Iraq Study Group's final report on page 37 and 38:

> A premature American departure from Iraq would almost certainly produce greater sectarian violence and further deterioration of conditions.

It goes on to say:

> The near-term results would be a significant power vacuum, greater human suffering, regional destabilization, and a threat to the global economy. Al-Qaeda would depict our withdrawal as a historic victory. If we leave and Iraq descends into chaos, the long-range consequences could eventually require the United States to return.

Of course, I remain upset that more progress has not been made on the political and domestic security front within Iraq, but that reality doesn't diminish the fact that al-Qaida is training, operating, and carrying out their mission in Iraq right now. They are clearly still a threat and are still determined to accomplish their goals of attacking us and our allies around the world. What is most unfortunate about this debate is that clearly the majority party in the Senate has already prejudged the work our commander in Iraq, GEN David Petraeus, is trying to carry out. As we all know, in September a complete review of Iraq policy, including a detailed assessment of the surge, will be presented. I look forward to that assessment. I look forward to making the appropriate decisions based on that report. It would be disingenuous to discontinue the plans our military leaders have planned and are putting into place simply for political gain.

I quote General Petraeus, commander of the multinational force in Iraq. He said:

> If I could have only one [thing] at this point in Iraq, it would be more time. I can think of few commanders in history who wouldn't have wanted more troops, more time, or more unity among their partners; however, if I could only have one [thing] at this point in Iraq, it would be more time. This is an exceedingly tough endeavor that faces countless challenges. None of us, Iraqi or American, are anything but impatient and frustrated at where we are. But there are no shortcuts. Success in an endeavor like this is the result of steady, unremitting pressure over the long haul. It's a test of wills, demanding patience, determination and stamina from all involved.

I think we ought to give him his one wish.

This is a similar situation we were in only months ago. Many in this body wanted to reject the strategy General Petraeus proposed in Iraq, even before he had been given the full opportunity to perform his mission. I still cannot comprehend why my colleagues would agree to a new bipartisan strategy in Iraq but only months later not be willing to support our self-imposed guidelines.

On July 12, the President issued a report as required by the fiscal year 2007 supplemental appropriations bill, assessing the progress of the sovereign Government of Iraq in achieving the benchmarks detailed in the bill. The report told us 8 of the 18 benchmarks detailed in that bill received satisfactory remarks. While we are certainly disappointed that more benchmarks were not achieved, it is important to highlight the successes being made and how the Iraqi Government is performing, as their success will ultimately allow us to responsibly reduce our troop levels.

The benchmarks that have reached success so far are as follows: The Government of Iraq has made satisfactory progress toward forming a constitutional review committee and then completing the constitutional review. The Government of Iraq has made satisfactory progress toward enacting and implementing legislation on procedures to form semi-autonomous regions. The Government of Iraq has made satisfactory progress toward establishing supporting political, media, economic, and services committees in support of the Baghdad security plan. The Government of Iraq has made satisfactory progress toward providing three trained and ready Iraqi brigades to support Baghdad operations. The Government of Iraq has made satisfactory progress in ensuring the Baghdad security plan does not provide a safe haven for any outlaws, regardless of their sectarian or political affiliations. The Government of Iraq, with substantial coalition assistance, has made satisfactory progress, once again, toward establishing the planned joint security stations in Iraq. The Government of Iraq has made satisfactory progress toward ensuring that the rights of minority political parties in the Iraqi legislature are protected. And finally, the Iraqi Government is making satisfactory progress in allocating funds to ministries and provinces for reconstruction projects.

General Odierno, on the surge progress, says:

> The increased presence is having an effect, and it will continue to be felt in the weeks to come. We still have not reached . . . the end of our surge. Every day we are making progress.

That is from LTG Ray Odierno, U.S. Army Commander of the multinational corps in Iraq. He goes on to list some specific examples. I don't need to list all those specific examples, but a full page in fine print where he points to successes in Iraq. What is most unfortunate during this debate is that the Democratic majority has put in jeopardy the passage of the Defense authorization legislation, something that simply has not happened in decades. By pushing for a failed Iraq policy amendment to the Defense authorization bill, the majority are willing to trash legislation that is vital to our men and women in the Armed Forces. The managers of the bill, Chairman CARL LEVIN and Ranking Member JOHN MCCAIN, should be commended for their good work on this comprehensive and vital legislation. The authorization bill provides our men and women in combat zones with the resources and equipment they need to complete their missions. It also provides for our troops at home by ensuring they receive appropriate medical care upon their return and the training needed prior to deployment.

Finally, the bill provides for the health and well-being of our Armed Forces and the tools they need to defeat terrorism and defend our Nation from future attacks. An important component of this bill is the increased commitment to the quality of life for our service men and women. The authorization includes $135 billion for military personnel, authorizing payment of combat-related compensation to servicemembers medically retired for a combat-related disability and lowering the age at which members of the Reserves may draw from their retirement. This bill further provides our men and women with quality health care by adjusting $1.9 billion for TRICARE benefits and directing the Department of Defense to study and develop a plan addressing the findings of the Mental Health Assessment Commission.

This bill also gives our troops the necessary protection to combat the threats they are facing right now, particularly to counter insurgent improvised explosive devices—commonly known as IEDs—threats which remain the No. 1 killer of American troops. This bill includes $4 billion to the individual services and special operations command for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles. It also fully funds the President's request of $4.5 billion for the Joint Improvised Explosive Devices Defeat Office for blast injury research and the procurement of IED jammers.

Unfortunately, this legislation is threatened by the insistence of the majority leader on having this protracted and unnecessary debate. There is no doubt that we face extremely difficult challenges in Iraq. We have not made enough progress. The citizens of Iraq must be willing to fight for their own freedom. But we should not cut General Petraeus's time short in implementing his plan that this body overwhelmingly approved of only a few months ago.

I have a quote or two I wish to share and remind the body about what the Democrats, the opposite party, have said. The Democrats' dismissal of General Petraeus's report is part of a pattern. The Baghdad security plan was declared a failure 2 months before U.S. reinforcements arrived in Iraq. Senator REID from Nevada is quoted as saying ''This war is lost'' and that ''the surge is not accomplishing anything.'' Senator LEVIN said, ''It's a failure.'' But the surge only began in mid-June, 2 months after the Democrats first declared it a failure.

General Petraeus said:

> The surge has really just . . . begun.

Hours ago I heard the minority whip talk about how many on this side have acknowledged mistakes that have been made during the Iraq war, but how we won't vote to pull our troops out right away. I have been one of those Members of the Republican caucus who has said publicly that mistakes have been made. I will point out that the Commander in Chief has stated the same thing. That said, regardless of the errors that have been made, it does not mean the mission or the policy is any less important. In fact, I am trying to think of a conflict in which we have been involved that we can't point to some mistakes. I am very aware that the longer we stay in Iraq, the more it will cost the United States, both in money but, more importantly, in the lives of American men and women. However, I won't support the Levin-Reed amendment because I believe it is based on the assumption that by leaving Iraq prematurely, Americans will be safer.

The terrorists have made it abundantly clear that Iraq is central to the war against the civilized world. They are committed to fighting there and will not stop unless we defeat them. If we have to fight, it is preferable not to fight on our own soil. So let's hurry and have the cloture vote on the Levin-Reed amendment so we can defeat it. I ask my colleagues to reject this amendment and let us return to the important debate on Defense authorization to ensure our troops have the adequate support here at home and abroad.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHUMER). The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I come here to the floor this morning to speak about the strategy that we are moving forward with in Iraq. I also come here to say the debate over the last several days, including overnight, has been a very important debate and one we do need to have. Our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan deserve the debate that is taking place here in the Senate.

As the sun rises today across America, it is midafternoon in Baghdad, in Iraq. There the temperatures are close to 100 degrees as we speak. In Iraq today we know there are almost 160,000 men and women in uniform who are serving there, doing the duty they have been called to do on behalf of a grateful nation. So it is for them, for the 160,000 troops we have in Iraq today, for the 1.4 million veterans of both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, that we in the Senate should have a debate about our way forward in Iraq.

I, therefore, say to my colleagues who have come to the floor as the night has gone on and have said things such as this is all about cut and run, this is about surrender, this is a political stunt, that they are wrong. With all due respect, those kinds of labels are not helpful as we deal with what is a fundamental American issue, the issue of war and peace and the way forward for all of us here in this country and the way forward for our Armed Forces. Those kinds of labels, those kinds of attacks are not worthy of the reason the American people sent us all here to this body to try to define and devise the best policies for America, the best of policies that will make America strong, the best of policies that will restore America's standing in the world, the best of policies that will honor and recognize that contribution of the greatest generation of America, the generation of World War II. That kind of labeling is not worthy of trying to bring us together in a manner and a way that will help us find stability in Iraq, in the Middle East, bring our troops home, and achieve the goals I believe at the end many of us would agree upon in the Senate.

I do not believe the long debate over all of last night has been at all a lost cause. It is important for those of us, the 100 Members of the Senate, who represent the 300 million people of America to come to the floor and give voice to the future of the most fundamental national security issue of our time. The most fundamental national security issue of our time is how we deal with the issue of terrorism, how we deal with creating stability in the Middle East and, ultimately, how we bring our troops home out of harm's way. This debate on those fundamental issues is one that is worth having. Those who would demean, who would take away, who would detract from the importance of this question by trying to use labels—such as ''surrender'' or ''precipitous withdrawal,'' ''cut and run''—do not do a service to the country in advancing a policy that is worthy of the sacrifice so many have made.

I hope as we move forward, not only in today's debate and in the vote that will take place later on this morning, as well as when we deal with this issue in July and perhaps into the August recess, perhaps into September, perhaps into October, that we will be able to find a common way forward.

I am reminded, as I was listening to some of the labeling that was going on here last night, of a campaign that took place in Georgia in 2002, where a great American by the name of Max Cleland, who had given so much of his life, his blood, and his limbs for the freedom of America in Vietnam, was used as a political pawn in that election of 2002 by people here in Washington and other places who dared put the label on him as unpatriotic. This man, who gave so much to his country, who was willing to give the very last ounce of devotion and courage in his life to do the ultimate sacrifice, was labeled as unpatriotic. So the labeling we see taking place here in this debate on the Senate floor through the night and through the rest of the day smacks of that same kind of labeling that is unworthy of our purpose in the Senate.

I hope as we move forward, we can find a way of working together to address the reality and the difficulty of the issues we face. Our troops know the importance of this debate. The 1.4 million veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and their families know the importance of this debate. There is probably not a Member of this Chamber today who has not spent many

hours, both in Iraq, as well as with our troops back home, and in Afghanistan talking to them about the reality on the ground, what it is that they see, how it is conditions are unfolding, and how it is that they believe we ought to move forward with a policy that is worthy of their bravery.

The solemnity of this debate should not be lost on America, as the sun rises over this country. The solemnity of this debate should not be lost, particularly when we think about the men and women who have given their lives already in this cause in Iraq.

As of today, just from my State of Colorado, at the top of the Rocky Mountains—my State of Colorado—we have had 51 members of Colorado's population killed in Iraq. We have had 443 who have been wounded in Iraq. U.S. casualties in Iraq today are 3,618—3,618 Americans have given their lives in Iraq.

So the solemnity of this debate should be one that should honor those who have given their lives in the effort in Iraq, as they have done the duty commanded by the Commander in Chief.

Beyond those who have given their lives and the sacrifice their families have made to this effort, we also must remember the solemnity of this time and this moment when we think about the 26,806 Members of our armed services who have been wounded in Iraq. Many of us have spent time at Walter Reed or spent time with veterans back home where we see what has happened to the lives of those who have lost their limbs, who have had traumatic brain injuries.

Eighteen percent of those who have gone from Fort Carson, CO, have returned with a traumatic brain injury. It is for those people that we must make sure we have a solemn debate devoid of the politics, devoid of the politics that we see taking place with the labeling that is occurring here today.

There is no doubt that as we look at what has happened in now what is almost a 5-year war in Iraq, there is a legion of mistakes that have been made. My friends on the other side of the aisle will concede there have been major mistakes made, that in the early years of the war effort there were mistakes made on intelligence, mistakes made on the information that was provided to the Congress, multiple mistakes in terms of looking at the way forward and simply not being able to find it.

I believe when the President landed on the naval carrier and said the mission had been accomplished, in his heart and in his mind he did believe the mission had been accomplished. He did believe the mission had been accomplished because the government of Saddam Hussein had been toppled. Our brave men and women—some 300,000 men and women strong—had gone in and had taken the Iraqi Republican Army down and had toppled Saddam Hussein. So when the President said ''mission accomplished,'' now 4 years plus ago, I think he believed that was in fact the case.

But it was also an absolute failure to be able to look ahead at the reality of the complexity and the political conditions that existed in Iraq at the time. I believe those who testified before the Congress in those days and said it would cost less than $50 billion to undertake this effort—I believe they were telling the American people what they thought was the case. But, sadly, they were very mistaken because we now knock on the door of having invested not $50 billion, not $100 billion, not $200 billion, not $300 billion, not $400 billion, but we are over the $500 billion mark. How could we as America be 12 times off the mark—12 times off the mark—in terms of what this war would cost the American taxpayer? How could we be so far off the mark, perhaps 100 times off the mark in terms of the number of men and women who would be killed in Iraq? No one ever anticipated 4½ years ago that there would be over 3,600 Americans who would be killed in Iraq.

So there has been a legion of mistakes that have been made. History will look at those mistakes. History will look at those mistakes and reach its own judgment.

Let me say, we should learn from those mistakes, as we move forward. In my view, that is what the Iraq Study Group did. That was a commission, in fact, that was created by legislative action of this Senate and the House of Representatives and signed by the President. It was a kind of template for which I believe we should strive to find a way of re-creating here in terms of their tenure and their approach to this fundamental issue of war and peace.

President John Kennedy said, at one point:

> So let us not be blind to our differences, but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved.

Let me say that again. He said: ''let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved.''

We have differences here on the floor of the Senate this morning, as the sun rises across America. We have had differences over the last 4½ years with respect to this war and the direction of this war. But I hope we find it among ourselves, Democrats and Republicans, to find a way forward together. I think if we do that, we will reach the vision and the aspiration that was articulated by President Kennedy when we find ourselves in the position where we have these fundamental differences among us.

I want to spend a few minutes on what I think is a good way forward for all of us. The Iraq Study Group—again, made up of 10 of the most prestigious Americans, people who have earned every right to be called the statesmen of America—came up with a number of recommendations and a number of findings. But at the beginning of the report, it is important for us to remember that in December of 2006—now some 7 months ago—the Iraq Study Group said:

> The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating.

''Grave and deteriorating.''

> There is no path that can guarantee success, but the prospects can be improved.

It is with that thought in mind that many months ago I began to work, especially with Lee Hamilton, and with former Secretary James Baker, to craft legislation to implement the Iraq Study Group recommendations. Those recommendations that are set forth in the amendment which we have filed, which is cosponsored by 14 of our colleagues, is a way forward that establishes a new direction in Iraq. It does some things which are perhaps from the point of view of some not enough; but in the point of view of others, I think they are very important things for us to do, because for the first time as part of United States policy what we say is: No. 1, we will move forward to transition the mission from combat to training and support. We will do a mission change—a mission change—from combat to training and support. So our combat mission will be something we will transition out of Iraq.

They also say, and we include in the legislation, that as part of national policy we set forth a goal that this transition can, in fact, be completed by the early part of 2008. That is some 9 months from where we stand today.

In addition, what this legislation does, as a matter of United States law, is for the first time it sends a clear, unequivocal signal to the people of Iraq and to the Iraqi Government that these billions of dollars we are spending, and the huge amount of military support and effort we are putting into Iraq is going to come to an end, that our efforts are conditioned upon the Iraqi people and the Iraqi Government making substantial progress toward making their Government work and providing security on the ground.

Thirdly, what the legislation does, as a matter of our policy in the Senate, is set forth the major diplomatic offensive that is ultimately necessary to bring about a peace in the very complex and difficult situation we face not only in Iraq but also throughout the Middle East. I do hope we have at some point an opportunity to vote on that amendment.

Finally, with respect to the Iraq Study Group, I heard a couple of criticisms about our legislation. One of those criticisms is that it is outdated. I would say it was not a snapshot. Those recommendations—that were put forth in December by a group that spent about $1 million in putting together that report, and spent countless days and weeks and months in coming up with the only coherent set of bipartisan recommendations on the way forward—those recommendations are as valid today as they were back in December.

Congressman LEE HAMILTON wrote a letter on July 9 addressed to me, and for others who are working on the bill with me. What his letter said, in conclusion, is that our legislation ''outlines the best chance of salvaging a measure of stability in Iraq and the region. It provides a bipartisan way forward on a problem that cannot be solved unless we come together to address this singular national issue.''

I am hopeful we will be able to find that way forward.

Let me conclude then by saying this: Some people have said our efforts here in the last several days, including the all-night session—sleepless here in Washington, DC; watching the night come, watching the sunrise here in Washington, DC—has been a political stunt. It is not a political stunt when the voices of 100 Senators, or at least some of those Senators, are heard on this floor debating how we ought to move forward on the most fundamental issue of national security of our time.

It is for that reason that I commend the majority leader and I commend those who have called on us to make sure we put the spotlight on such an important issue. I commend them for their courage, and I am hopeful that as our country and our Senate moves forward in trying to deal with what is a seemingly intractable issue perhaps we can think back to the Scriptures, we can think back to the Book of Matthew, and remember what was said where He said: Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are the peacemakers.

It is the peacemakers ultimately who will help us chart a new and different direction forward in Iraq that will help us achieve the success I believe 100 Members of this Senate want; and I believe that is to bring our troops safely home, and to create the best conditions to salvage a measure of stability in Iraq and in the Middle East.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, first of all, let me say to the previous speaker, the junior Senator from Colorado, I reviewed what he and Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER have put together, and I think of a lot of the options out there, that is one that is fairly reasonable. But I disagree with the offensive nature that people have taken with some of the terms, such as ''resolution of surrender'' and ''cut and run.'' In reality, I believe that is what we are talking about.

A couple things were said. First of all, it happens in the case of former Senator Max Cleland, he was one of my closest friends. We actually were in a Bible study together. We were together every week, spending quality time and intimate time together. Never once did anyone question his patriotism.

Max Cleland—I heard the story from him, what happened to him in Vietnam. Then I also saw the campaign that came up. Yes, they talked about votes, how perhaps his votes were different than the person who was opposing him who was serving in the House at that time. Never once was his patriotism questioned.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, will the Senator from Oklahoma yield for a question?

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I will yield to the Senator from Colorado.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, through the Chair to my good friend from Oklahoma, I enjoy our work together on many multiple fronts, but with respect to former Senator Cleland, I did see the pain from the attacks that were made against him in Georgia. With respect to what you refer to, my friend from Oklahoma, concerning, quote, ''the surrender resolution,'' in my view, from what I have heard from my colleagues here as we have entered this debate, it appears what we are talking about is a way for an orderly disengagement from Iraq.

Mr. INHOFE. Yes. I understand.

Mr. President, reclaiming my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. SALAZAR. My question——

Mr. INHOFE. I am glad to yield for a question, but we already heard this speech in terms of the interpretation of the vote we will have at 11 o'clock. We have an honest difference of opinion, I say to my good friend, the junior Senator from Colorado. He has expressed his opinion, and I want to express mine.

Mr. SALAZAR. May I ask a question? Will the Senator from Oklahoma yield for a simple question?

Mr. INHOFE. For one question. Go ahead.

Mr. SALAZAR. It is my understanding that even under the Levin-Reed amendment there would be a significant troop presence that would remain over the long term in Iraq for the limited missions that are defined in that legislation. Is that not correct?

Mr. INHOFE. That is correct.

Let me reclaim my time and expand on that a little bit.

There is still a continued troop presence in Bosnia, in Kosovo, and other places. There always is a troop presence. And after this is over—depending on what the outcome is—I would assume there will always be a troop presence there regardless of how we vote on any resolution today.

Now, let me say a couple other things that were stated on the floor. I was sitting here at about at 5:15 or 5:30 this morning, when statements were made by the junior Senator from Massachusetts as to our troops who have been involved with IEDs, who have lost their lives, and that nothing changed after that, nothing was accomplished after that. That is another way of saying they have died in vain.

Let me tell you, I have been in the AOR of Iraq, not always in Iraq, but this AOR, 14 times. I probably have talked to more troops, gotten a better feel as to what people are about over there than any other Member. I think to even suggest that someone has died in vain is totally outrageous.

Now, one of the things that has been stated over and over again that I do agree with by the opposition over there is we have a problem with our equipment. We have a problem with the funding of the military.

Let me suggest to you, in America, this is the only democracy where if people at home want to know how their Member of Congress—from the House or the Senate—is voting on issues, they can find out. I suggest to you that the worst way to find out how someone is voting on issues is to ask them. You do not want to do that.

But if you are concerned, for an example, as to how we are voting on a tax issue—if you are for tax increases, you do not ask the guy, you do not say, Senator SALAZAR, are you for tax increases? No, you do not want to do that. But you can look at the ratings. We have ratings on every conceivable subject. The National Taxpayers Union will tell how each Member votes in terms of tax increases.

Are you conservative or liberal? Well, I suggest to you the ACLU loves the liberals. The ACU loves the conservatives. I am proud of my rating. It happens to be No. 1 out of 100 Senators. So people will know. They do not have to ask me.

If you are concerned about how a Senator is voting in terms of supporting small business, the National Federation of Independent Business rates all Democrats, Republicans, House and Senate, on those issues.

If you are concerned—this is what I am getting around to now—if you are concerned about who is supporting the military, there are groups that do that. The Center for Security Policy, for example, says the average Democrat supports the military 17 percent of the time, the average Republican 79 percent of the time.

Now, if you question that, let me show you the chart I have in the Chamber.

For Democrats to stand on this floor and talk about the problems of the strained military, the problems of overdeployment, the problems we are having, look at what has happened. I do not think there was a month that went by back during the 1990s, during the Clinton administration—when they were cutting the military, cutting our force strength, cutting money out of our military—when there wasn't this euphoric statement: Oh, the Cold War is over, so we do not need a military anymore. That actually was floating around these Chambers. So what happened during the 1990s?

If you take what the benchmark was in 1993, fiscal year 1993—that would be this black line shown on the chart—and do nothing but consider inflation, then this goes up here. In other words, if we get nothing except maintaining what we had in 1993, this would be the black line.

President Clinton's budget request came in at this red line. You see the

difference between the red line and the black line: $412 billion less than just maintaining the status quo.

Now, it was during that time that I was making statements on the floor: We have very serious problems in terms of our modernization program. We are going to have to do something about this. I was so proud of GEN John Jumper, and this is before he was the chief. He stood up as, I believe, a lieutenant general at that time and he made this statement. He said: Our potential adversaries have equipment that is better than ours. He was talking about strike fighters. He was talking about China having bought, I believe it was 240 of the SU–30, SU–35 series that the Russians were making and saying that they are actually better in many respects than our F–15s and F–16s.

Back in the 1990s, we were cutting back on the modernization program. We were not moving forward with the modernization and going toward the F–22s and the F–35s and the future combat system and things we are doing today. This is what happened, and our troop strength went down, our ships went down from 600 to 300. It is the downsizing that we have been paying for. Now what happens? This President came in, and 9/11 took place in 2001. When this happened, all of a sudden we are faced with a situation where we had a downsized military. We had to start reembarking on our modernization program. But all of this we had to be paying for.

We have had amendment after amendment that says we are going to have to do something about our deployments. Yes. Our deployments are unreasonable at this time, but it is because we went through this cycle back in the 1990s. I think it is very important that people understand where we came from and how we got in this position we are in today.

Now, a lot of things have been lost in this debate. I think the other side—the Democrats, the liberals—would like to have us believe that this is just the United States. They have completely forgotten or disregarded the global nature of this problem, this war which is out there. It is global. Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, the United States, France, Morocco, Turkey, Spain, Indonesia, Great Britain, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Philippines, Algeria, Yemen, and Tunisia are just a partial list of the countries which have had terrorist attacks.

The National Counterterrorism Center reported that approximately 14,000 terrorist attacks occurred in various countries during 2006. Now, they say that half of those were in Afghanistan and Iraq. That means 7,000 terrorist attacks happened all over the world outside of Iraq and Afghanistan. We remember just in the last 30 days the terrorist attacks. A car bomb exploded outside Somalia's Prime Minister's residence, killing six people. These are all in the last 30 days. A bomb exploded in front of a crowded tea shop in Thailand, killing a woman and wounding 28; an explosion outside the Ambassador Hotel in Nairobi, killing a man and injuring 37 others. A bomb exploded outside a clothing shop in Istanbul and more in Peru and other places. So it has happened all over. The suicide bombers drove an SUV into the Glasgow Airport, injuring six people, just 2 weeks ago. A suicide bomber drove into a convoy of Spanish tourists, killing nine people. That was just last week. This is the global nature of this war.

What has this President been doing after 9/11? People don't realize what has happened and the results, the very positive results of these things that took place. We passed the PATRIOT Act, which broke down the walls between Federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, created the Department of Homeland Security, created a position of Director of National Intelligence, created the National Counterterrorism Center, and worked with all of the intelligence systems.

My predecessor—when I came over from the House to the Senate—was David Boren, Senator David Boren, who is now the president of Oklahoma University. After I was elected, he said he wanted to talk to me about a problem which he had been unsuccessful in resolving. You might remember that he was the chairman at that time of the Senate Intelligence Committee. He said: We have a problem, a serious crisis in our intelligence system. He said: We have, the NSCA and the CIA and the DIA and all of these people, but they are not talking to each other.

It is a crisis we started approaching, and it wasn't until this came along—the efforts of this President—that we got our intelligence act together to a much greater degree. What kind of results are we having? Well, the President made a statement, and I think it is worth repeating: The terrorists only have to be right once; we have to be right 100 percent of the time.

Have we avoided, because of all of these efforts the President has made, a disaster here in this country? I really believe we have. We captured an al-Qaida operative named Ali Saleh al-Marri in the United States who was targeting water reservoirs, the New York Stock Exchange, and the U.S. military academies. We broke up two other post-9/11 aviation plots, one targeting the Library Towers in Los Angeles and the other targeting the east coast. Four men were indicted for an alleged plot to attack the John F. Kennedy International Airport by blowing up the jet fuel supply. We disrupted a plot by a group of al-Qaida-inspired extremists to kill American soldiers at Fort Dix. We have worked with the Brits and other countries. Together, we successfully broke up a plot in the U.K. to blow up passenger airlines going to America which could have rivaled the tragedy of 9/11. Of course, we know what happened down in Piccadilly Circus in the theater area, the plot, the terrorist plot that was planned there that we stopped.

So I guess what I am saying is we know these things were going on. There is no way to say for sure that thousands of Americans are alive today because of the efforts of this administration, but I believe it, and everything I have mentioned here is all documented in terms of plots against this country that perhaps we would not have been able to defend ourselves against prior to that time.

It does bother me when we talk about how this isn't a surrender resolution, this isn't a cut-and-run resolution. Sure, it is. We see al-Qaida—they see the victory in Iraq as a religious and strategic imperative, something they have to do. This is not something which is optional for them; they have to do it. In fact, Osama bin Laden called the struggle in Iraq a war of destiny. This is Osama bin Laden. That is how he characterized it. It reminded me, when I heard that, of one of the great speeches of all time. It was given by Ronald Reagan way back before he was even Governor of California. It was called ''A Rendezvous With Destiny,'' using the same words—the characterization of Osama bin Laden when he talked about the ''war of destiny'' that is taking place. ''A Rendezvous With Destiny.'' I have often said it should be required reading for all schoolkids.

Every time I see the Senator from Florida, the junior Senator from Florida, Mr. MARTINEZ, I think about his trip from Cuba over to this country, and it reminds me of the speech Ronald Reagan made when he said ''a rendezvous with destiny.'' He talked about the Cuban who had escaped from Cuba, and as his small craft floated up on the shores of Florida, a woman was there, and this Cuban started talking about the atrocities of Communist Cuba and of Castro and the problems that were over there, and she said: I guess we in this country don't know how lucky we are. And he said: How lucky you are? We are the ones who are lucky because we had a place to escape to. What he was saying is that we have been this beacon of freedom in this country for so many years.

I can remember—and the occupant of the chair was there at the same time I was, in the other body, back during the war in Nicaragua. At that time, the Communists were trying to take over. One of the great things Ronald Reagan did was to kill communism in Central America at that time, and that endured for some 20 years afterward. But at that time, in Nicaragua, I was going down there quite often because we were watching Daniel Ortega and we were watching the Sandinistas and we knew what was happening down there. So we would go down to see these brave people who were fighting for their freedoms.

I can remember going to a hospital tent in Honduras, just across the border from Nicaragua. I went down there several times. I would just look and

marvel at these young kids. Keep in mind, at that time, those who were defending their freedom against communism were young people because all the older ones had been killed already. They had a hospital tent. I remember the hospital tent was about half the size of this Chamber. All the way around the peripheral of this hospital tent were beds. In the middle was an operating table with no shield or anything up, and they were operating on these young kids as they came back and getting them ready to go back into battle to fight for their freedom against communism in Nicaragua.

I remember going around the room and talking to these individuals in their language and saying: You know, I admire you so much. You are just fighting against impossible odds. How can you keep driving yourself to go back? I remember getting the answers as I went around the room.

I came to a little girl. Her name was Maria Elana Gonzalez. She was a little bitty girl. She might have been 90 pounds. It was her third trip to the hospital tent. She wouldn't be going back into battle because that morning they had amputated her right leg and the blood was oozing through her bandage. She looked up at me after I had asked that question and she said: Es porque han tomado los campos, han tomado las casas, han tomado todo de lo que tenemos. Pero, de veras, ustedes en los Estados Unidos entienden. Porque tuvieron que luchar por su libertad, por lo mismo que estamos luchando ahora.

What she said was: How can you ask that question? We are fighting because they have taken our farms, they have taken our houses, they have taken all that we have. But surely you in the United States understand this because you had to fight against the same odds for your freedom.

That little girl couldn't read or write. She didn't know her history. She didn't know if our Revolutionary War was 10 years ago or 200 years ago. But she knew we were the beacon of freedom, the beacon of freedom. I wonder what is happening to that beacon of freedom.

We are looking at this war now, the serious nature of this war.

Winston Churchill said—and I quoted this several times on this floor, but I think it is worth repeating. He said:

> Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy. Always remember, however sure you are that you could easily win, that there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance.

That was just as true in World War II as it is today.

So we are facing an enemy today that is adaptive. He is willing to do anything. You can't negotiate with him. It is not a country. In a way, it is more dangerous. We compare this war and certainly some of the terrorists who are running the other side with Hitler and with Stalin. Those things in some ways were not as dangerous because they were more predictable. This is not predictable. You can't defeat a country and say the war is over because it is not over. As I mentioned, this is global, the attacks that are taking place. Any plan to leave Iraq before we have had a chance to understand the outcome of the troop surge does two things: It tells the enemy that they have been successful and their methods worked, and secondly, it gives them the patience to wait us out.

One of the things I learned in my many trips over there is the culture of the people is different. They don't think of today and tomorrow or next week; they think of long periods of time. Oh, we are not going to be there 2 years from now? Oh, fine. We will just go into hibernation. We will wait for 2 years. Everything is going to be fine. We will just wait until that happens. You can't win by—they can only win by attacking our resolve.

When we talk about the resolve, I wonder about that beacon of freedom, when that little girl in the hospital tent looked at America. What has happened to it since that time? You look at our resolve that has been lost in Somalia. It wasn't until they dragged the naked bodies of our troops through the streets of Mogadishu that finally we didn't have the stomach for it, and so that beacon of freedom went out. We saw it in Vietnam, in Lebanon, in the Khobar Towers.

I recognize, and everyone recognizes, there have been mistakes in this thing. The President recognized this in his speech on January 10. He said a lot of things that I think were very profound observations at that time that I will address in just a minute. But when you look at the consequences of a premeditated withdrawal, when the enemy knows what we are going to be doing in the future—one of the great generals of our time is General Maples. He was actually the commanding general down in Fort Sill in Oklahoma at one time. He is now the DIA Director. He said:

> Continued Coalition presence is the primary counter to a breakdown in central authority. Such a breakdown would have grave consequences for the people of Iraq, stability in the region, and the United States strategic interests.

John Negroponte and General Hayden both agree with that.

It is not too late to avoid this. I don't think it is time to start cutting our losses and just hope that all this goes away. If we can assist the Iraqis and reach that point of sustainable self-governance, then we can bring defeat to our enemies and stability to the region. We all want this. All those who have not personally seen the changes, the visible changes that are taking place in Iraq, seen the girls who can now get an education and seen that they can now have weddings in the streets without the fear of having troops come in there and kidnap all the girls and rape them and bury them alive—people have forgotten already how bad things were at that time in Iraq.

So I just have to say this: Regretfully, I have been sitting here since 5 o'clock trying to get on the floor, and now we are running out of time. But I would say this, and I think it is something which is very significant; that is, the President, in his speech on January 10, talked about the necessity for victory in Iraq, but he used a term that nobody heard and nobody remembered and nobody listened to, and it is called from the bottom up. A ''bottom-up victory'' is what he wanted. This President is talking about it with the people.

Let me tell you what has happened. On my last trip—keep in mind, I have made some 14 trips to the AOR, and the last trip was after the surge was announced. We saw a number of things. First of all, it didn't go unnoticed by the people over there that there are some resolutions like the one we will considering at 11 o'clock today, and consequently that got their attention. I think some good came from that. But that, along with David Petraeus going over there as commander in chief, along with the surge, has really had some results. For the first time over there, I saw changes.

A few minutes ago, one of our Republicans was talking about the change in Ramadi. It was the senior Senator from Utah. In Ramadi, if you remember a year ago, that was getting ready—or, as we say in Oklahoma, that was fixing to be the terrorist capital of the world. It is now secure. In Fallujah—this is just less than a month ago, in Fallujah—it is secure, and it is secure by our security force—by the Iraqi security force and not by ours. In other words, they are taking care of their own over there. The joint security stations where our troops, instead of coming back to the Green Zone, will stay over there and bed down with the Iraqi security forces, develop intimate relationships with them, and learn to love each other—this is what is happening right now.

I was mistaken. All these years, we have been talking about Maliki and all the political leaders. I am beginning to think really that the successes that are taking place and the bottom-up success right now after the surge are actually coming from the religious leaders. We monitor—and we do this as a matter of course—all of the mosque ceremonies. I think they meet once a week like most churches do, and up until December, 85 percent of the messages that were by the clerics and by the imams in the mosques were anti-American. They started dropping off until in April of this year, there wasn't one anti-American message. The results are there. As a result of that, we are having many of the citizens, just on their own, as the Senator from Utah mentioned—because he was there a short time after I was there, and he said they are doing things now that they haven't done before.

Just as we have, in Tulsa, OK, and in all of our cities in Oklahoma and here

in Washington, DC, a Neighborhood Watch Program where the neighbors volunteer to go out and watch, this is happening in Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi, all throughout Iraq right now.

These are people who are going out and risking their lives with spray cans, spray-painting circles around undetonated IEDs, and it is being done successfully. I think there is a level of panic setting in on those individuals who have gone over there and seen that the surge appears to be working.

I don't think we should be cutting and running at this stage. We have a huge investment there. We have taken out a ruthless leader, one who would rival Hitler in the atrocities he has committed. Now that we have an opportunity to do that—to have a different form of government in the Middle East—and people who say it wasn't Iraq all this time, sure, it was Iraq. There were training centers in Iraq training people to do different things. In the town of Salman Pak, they were training terrorists how to fly airplanes into targets. Did they train the 9/11 terrorists? There is no way of knowing that. Nonetheless, the training camps are not there anymore. We have had successes.

I know people want to talk about the failures, but I will say to you this is a very critical vote. If we vote at 11 o'clock today to leave before the job is done, that would be a crisis and a slap in the face for our troops over there fighting so bravely for our freedom back here. I am a product of the draft of many years ago, and I believed you would never be able to have an all-volunteer force and have it with the quality we had in the draft. I realize now that I was wrong all those years ago, that we have the finest young people in the world in our military. They understand what the mission is. They understand the threat facing them. The first thing they asked me is: Why is it the American people don't understand, or the media? They don't ask that question now because they have the benefit of having talk radio. They have FOX instead of depending on CNN International, and they realize the American people are by their side.

So this is critical. Is it worth staying up all night for? I think it is. I look forward to defeating the effort of the Levin-Reed amendment taking place at 11 o'clock today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota is recognized.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Oklahoma for acknowledging there is something that is worth staying up all night for, that this is a debate we must continue to have. But this is also a vote we must have. The American people and our troops deserve nothing less than an up-or-down vote.

I disagree with the Senator from Oklahoma when he said we would be somehow hurting our troops by not staying the course. I think we need to change the course. I think this idea that we somehow dishonor our troops by having a free and open debate about this is wrong. I think it is wrong to say we dishonor our troops when we talk about a change in course in Iraq, because I think it is what they deserve. We need a smart way to get our soldiers out of harm's way and transition to the Iraqi Government. This is about getting this policy right for our troops in the field, about giving them what they deserve: a simple majority vote. That is what we need today.

I hope all of my colleagues will recognize our current strategy in Iraq is not working, that a new strategy based on drawing down U.S. forces is necessary, and this strategy must be implemented now. After 4 years, over 3,600 American soldiers have been killed, over 25,000 have been wounded, and almost $450 billion has been spent. We cannot wait until next year, or until next month, or until September to change our strategy. After 4 years, we cannot wait for the Iraqi Government to demonstrate the progress before we begin bringing our soldiers home, and it has shown no indication of a commitment to compromise and reconciliation. After 4 years, we cannot ask our men and women in the field to continue to risk life and limb indefinitely in the pursuit of a policy that so many of our colleagues across the aisle have now admitted and have spoken out about and said this policy needs to be changed, that it is not working. Talk is talk. But now it is time to vote.

Our troops have done what they have been asked to do. They deposed an evil dictator. They guaranteed free elections in Iraq. We all know there can be no purely military solution in Iraq. This has been agreed to by so many military commanders, experts, and Members in this body that it doesn't need to be argued anymore. We recognize true stability in Iraq will only come with political compromise between their various ethic factions. Only Iraqis can reach that agreement. Given that, should our strategy not be transitioning to Iraqi authority now, not some undefined time in the future?

We must push the Iraqi Government to assume the duties it was elected to perform, to lead the process in negotiation and deal-making. Our openended commitment is impeding this process and inhibiting the will of the Iraqi people to stand up and take responsibility for their own country.

Nine months ago, the Iraq Study Group proposed a pragmatic change of course that focused on political and economic initiatives, intense regional, and international diplomacy that would tie all nations with an interest in Iraq together, and beginning the phased redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq. Since the issuance of the Iraq Study Group report, some conditions on the ground have remained the same, and a number have gotten worse. In the last 3 months, more U.S. troops were killed than in any other 3-month period during the entire war.

I urge my colleagues to set aside differences, to forget about past agreements or voting records, and focus on what is best for our troops in the field going forward. We owe it to these brave men and women in the field to get this policy right. I believe the best thing we can do for our troops, our national interest, and for the Iraqis is to adopt the new strategy proposed by my colleagues Senators LEVIN and REED that would begin bringing our troops home, removing the bulk of our combat forces by the spring of next year. We know this cannot be done overnight, and the troops will be remaining to train the police and guard our embassies, and for special forces. We also know it is time to send a message to this Iraqi Government that it is time for them to govern.

Keeping over 160,000 U.S. soldiers in Iraq is simply not the answer. We need to start bringing them home. In March, I visited Baghdad and Fallujah and saw firsthand the bravery and commitment of our troops. I had a number of meetings set up with Minnesota troops. Of the 22,000 troops who were sent over as part of this surge, 3,000 were from Minnesota. In fact, they are the longest serving Guard unit right now in Iraq and Afghanistan. A number of them are now coming home. We rejoice in Minnesota for the ones coming home to their families. But we know that, sadly, they are being replaced by other soldiers from across this country. I remember one of the Congressmen who had gone to Iraq shortly after I did. He came back and talked, as a House Member, about how it reminded him of—going through the market,—a farmer's market in Indiana.

Well, that is not my memory from Iraq. What I remember, first, is our troops and how they didn't complain about the heat, or about their extensions, or about their equipment. They only asked me two things: What the State high school hockey tournament scores were, and then they asked if I would call their moms and dads and husbands and wives when I got home. I did that. I talked to about 50 moms. I have to tell you they told me different stories. They told me about children who were waiting for their dad to come home, that they thought they were going to come home in January, and they were waiting month after month. They told me about how scared they were every time they turned on the TV. They told me about how proud they were of their child but that they wanted him to come home.

My starkest memory of that trip was not some farmer's market in Indiana; my memory was standing on the tarmac of the Baghdad airport where nine Duluth firefighters called me over to stand with them. First, I didn't know what it was. They were there to do their duty. They were saluting in front of a firetruck while six caskets draped in the American flag were loaded onto a plane. They didn't know what

fallen soldiers were in those caskets. They didn't know who they were. They just knew it was their duty to salute and they knew the lives of the families of these fallen soldiers would never be the same.

There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about the Minnesota soldiers I met over there. They never complained. They did their jobs. They deposed an evil dictator and guaranteed free elections. Now it is time to bring them home. One thing that struck us in our State is that this is a different kind of war. Up to 40 percent of the troops fighting in Iraq are members of the National Guard and Reserves. In many respects, the war has involved a different kind of soldier. In Vietnam, the average age of an American soldier was 19 years old. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the average age of an active-duty soldier is 27. The average age of National Guard members is 33. Three-fourths of all soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan have families of their own, and fully one-half of those who have been killed have left families behind. Almost 22 percent of the Guard and Reserve members have had multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. For 4 years, these citizen soldiers have gone above and beyond the call of duty as this war has lasted longer—our involvement has lasted longer than our involvement in World War II. These citizen soldiers have made extraordinary sacrifices.

As we see our Guard and Reserve come home in Minnesota, the longest serving unit in this war, we know many have come back injured and maimed. I think I heard it is a thousand in this war across this country who have lost a limb, and 20-some thousand have been injured. Having served and sacrificed for 16 months, these men and women earned their rest and their right to live their lives in peace. But we keep sending them back and we keep sending them back.

All across my State, I have heard a strong and clear message from Minnesotans: Change the course in Iraq. Push for the strategy and solution that will bring our troops home and transition to Iraqi governance.

They want to see a surge in diplomacy, not a surge in troops. It is a message that was echoed all over this country last fall, from Montana to Minnesota, from Pennsylvania to Virginia. The people of Minnesota, like their fellow citizens around the country, recognize what is at stake in Iraq. As I have traveled around our State, I have spoken with many families who have paid a personal price in this war. I think of Clairmont Anderson, who would drive hundreds of miles to attend public events. Every time anybody even brought up the war, he would start to cry. It is because his son Stewart, an Army Reserve major, was killed in a helicopter crash in Iraq. I think of Kathleen Waseka from St. Paul, MN. In January, her son James Waseka, Jr., was killed while patrolling on foot in an area near Fallujah. He was assigned with the Minnesota Army National Guard First Brigade, the same unit that was extended under the President's escalation. Sergeant Waseka was the third member of his unit to die within a 6-week period. I also think of Becky Lurie of Kerrick, MN, near Duluth. She is the mother of 12 and a former State senator. Her son Matt was killed when the Army helicopter he was piloting went down north of Baghdad. I watched this Gold Star mother—a woman who has adopted 8 children—comfort her grandchildren, hold her shaking husband, and stand tall for hours in a high school gym in Findley, MN, where hundreds of people came together to gather for her son's memorial service. Clairmont Anderson, Kathleen Waseka, and Becky Lurie are parents whose children made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country. They are among the many Minnesotans who have told me, without apology, that they want to see a change of course in Iraq. They pray that others will not experience their pain.

Although I opposed this war from the beginning, I recognize many did support it. But many years later, we are now dealing with a dramatically different situation. What we now know about the events and facts leading up to the war has changed dramatically. The conditions inside Iraq have changed dramatically. Our role there has changed dramatically. We need an up-or-down vote today. If we don't have a regular up-or-down vote, as the American people have asked for, we are not going to get the change of course the bipartisan Iraq Study Group recommended, the change of course that Iraq needs to halt its civil war, or the change of course our military forces deserve.

As of Thanksgiving, as I said, this war has lasted longer than World War II. Have we not asked our men and women to sacrifice enough?

Recently, at the funeral for a fallen soldier, I heard a local priest say our leaders have an obligation to do right by our children when we send them to war. This particular soldier was very tall and very strong. As the priest talked about him, he talked about the fact that even though this young man was over 6 feet tall, he was still our child. He said our children may be over 6 feet tall when we send them to war, but they are still our children. If the kids we are sending to Iraq are 6 feet tall, he said, then our leaders must be 8 feet tall. I add that if these soldiers are willing to stand up and risk their lives for our country, those of us in Congress must be brave enough to stand up and ask the tough questions and push for the tougher solutions and not be afraid to have an up-or-down vote on a change of strategy in Iraq. Clairmont Anderson, Kathleen Waseka, and Becky Lurie are standing tall. The parents with whom I met, whose kids were supposed to come home back in January, have been waiting and waiting for that telephone call, and waiting and waiting for those letters. They have been standing tall all these months.

The members of the Minnesota National Guard whose deployment ceremony I attended a few months ago in Duluth stood tall. The teenage brother and sister I met there who saw their dad and their mom deployed to Iraq at the same time stood tall. The injured soldiers in the VA hospital in Minnesota, recovering from traumatic brain injuries, and in their wheelchairs, with their strength and their spirit are standing tall.

I say to my friends across the aisle, by having an honest and open debate about the war as we have done tonight, we in Congress can stand tall, but we can only stand tall when we allow for a fair and honest vote about the strategy in Iraq. Our Constitution says Congress should be a responsible check and balance on Presidential power. Congressional oversight of our Iraq policy is long overdue. On behalf of the public, Members of this body have a responsibility to exercise our own constitutional power in a fairminded, bipartisan way, to insist on accountability and to demand a change of course. Ultimately, the best way to help our soldiers and their families is not only to give them the respect and the benefits and the help they deserve, but also to get this policy right.

I hope my friends across the aisle will see the merits of this debate and allow for an up-or-down vote on the Levin-Reed amendment. Our troops and our families deserve nothing less.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina is recognized.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, to our new colleague from Minnesota, I say she expressed herself very well. This is a debate where nobody expects to change votes or minds in the short term. But it is a chance to express why you believe what you do about Iraq and how we go forward in that regard. It is always good to showcase our differences.

All of us in the body need to ask one question: Why is the Congress at such a low approval rating with the American people? What is it about what we are doing up here that is giving the public a bad taste about the way Congress works? That is a question I don't know how to answer completely. But I have a feeling that most Americans see Congress interacting with each other as if we are talking past each other and not many problems are being solved. We are trying to show the other side as being worse than we are.

It seems to me we are trying to construct a whole session of Congress around exposing other people's weaknesses and solving very few problems. Every now and then, you will step out in the middle, and the Senator from New York, the Presiding Officer—we have done some things I am very proud of, so there is hope. There are efforts

going on here in other areas to try to bring the Congress together and do some things that are important.

About Iraq, the reason no one is going to change their mind is that we just have a basic philosophical difference about how we go forward. Let me tell you what drives me more than anything else about the short term and the long term. The one thing we failed to do after the fall of Baghdad is plan for the worst-case scenario. One of the problems we have had is that we always assumed the best and never planned for the worst. We have gone down this road many times. The mistakes early on have come back to haunt us. We never had enough troops. The security situation got out of hand. We underestimated how hard it would be to build a democracy out of the ashes after dictatorship, and those early mistakes have cost. But in every war, you make mistakes.

What I am trying to do is talk about where we are now and where we are going to go. Acknowledging the early mistakes, we have paid a price. Let's not repeat them in another form. The old strategy after the fall of Baghdad was to focus on training, to keep the American military footprint as low as possible, empower the Iraqi military and army to take over their country and go fight al-Qaida and other extremist groups in firefights and come back behind walls. After 3½ years of engaging in that strategy, al-Qaida got stronger. We lost control of different provinces in Iraq to al-Qaida. Extremism grew, and we had no political reconciliation.

For 3 years—2 years, anyway; 2½ at least—I, along with Senator MCCAIN and others, have been saying the old strategy wasn't working. I do defer to military commanders. We all should to a point. Every general and every politician should have their work product judged by results. It was clear to me that the old strategy was not producing the result to secure the country, bring about political reconciliation, and control extremism. As a matter of fact, the old strategy, which lasted for 3 years, resulted in losing ground to the enemy, a stronger al-Qaida, a more fractured Iraq, and we were going nowhere fast. So I, along with others, pushed for a new strategy. The new strategy wasn't withdrawal. It was quite the opposite—reinforce.

Since February of this year, we have been bringing new combat capability into Iraq. We have added troops to make up for the mistakes initially made right after the fall of Baghdad. What has that additional combat capability done in Iraq and what has it failed to do? I think it is undeniable that General Petraeus's new strategy has been enormously successful in certain areas of Iraq that had been previously lost to al-Qaida. To me, that is the most encouraging sign yet of progress in Iraq. What has not happened is a securing of the country as a whole, the destruction completely of al-Qaida, the chilling out of Iranian involvement, and political reconciliation.

The new strategy is just exactly that—new. Instead of being behind walls with a limited military footprint, General Petraeus has deployed American forces into communities that were previously held by al-Qaida in Anbar Province. We have taken the fight to the enemy, and we have been able to dislodge al-Qaida in provinces that they dominated under the old strategy.

But here is the good news: Beating al-Qaida is always going to happen when we engage them because we are so much better militarily than they are. But the people who lived under their control in Anbar for all these months broke from al-Qaida and aligned themselves with us.

The best evidence I have seen thus far of a new strategy working is that not only have we liberated Anbar Province, a place you couldn't go 6 months ago, if you were a Member of Congress, to be somewhere you can walk around now like Ramadi. In the year 2006, there were 1,000 people who volunteered to be policemen in Anbar Province for the whole year. As of now, in 2007, 12,000 Iraqis have volunteered to be part of the police force in Anbar. They are all from that area. Once the sheiks broke from al-Qaida and joined with the coalition forces, they made a call to the local community for the sons of Anbar to stand and fight, join the police. We will soon be able to reduce our combat presence in Anbar because the alliances we have formed with the local leadership, the addition of police, and the maturing of the Iraqi Army will allow Anbar to be held by the people of Iraq who live in Anbar. That was made possible only because we added combat capability at a time when it mattered.

The biggest reason Anbar flipped is because al-Qaida was brutal when they were in the place. The people in Anbar, the Sunni Arabs, had a taste of al-Qaida life, and they did not like it. Al-Qaida engaged in some of the most brutal acts imaginable against people under their control.

They killed family members of the leadership. They went after people whom they considered to be a threat. They imposed a way of life and living on the people of Anbar Province that was unacceptable. Literally, al-Qaida overplayed their hand. At the time they were overplaying their hand, literally comes over the hill American combat power in a new fashion, more of it reconfigured. It was a magic moment where we moved out behind the walls, created joint security stations. Iraqi police and soldiers would live with American soldiers in joint security stations. So in your neighborhood, now you will have a joint security station not far away where there will be American soldiers, Iraqi police, and army units living together that will be there to protect you and your family. These joint security stations have been a fundamental change in policy militarily.

Counterinsurgency is about going into the areas where the insurgents dominate, militarily dislodging them but changing the dynamic on the ground so it would be hard for them to come back. If we will continue to support those who have broken from al-Qaida and joined us, then we will have a stable situation in Anbar that we could never have achieved under the old strategy. Because people break away from al-Qaida, does that mean they embrace democracy—Sunni, Shia, and Kurd coexistence? No. But it is a start. It means they have rejected a way of life that has no place on the planet for people like us.

My good friend from New York, we have found many things that we can work on in common. But here is something else we have in common. A Democrat from New York and a Republican from South Carolina are viewed the same by our enemy, al-Qaida. They hate us both. If they could kill us both, they would because we have agreed that whatever differences we have, they could actually be a strength. When we get into a dispute, we go to the courthouse; we don't go out in the street and start killing each other. In America, religious differences are not only accepted and tolerated, they are viewed as a strength.

There are three conflicts going on in Iraq. One is among the sectarian population in Iraq, the Sunnis and Shias and somewhat the Kurds. That conflict can only be resolved by the Iraqi people embracing what they have in common, accepting their differences as a strength, and rejecting this desire to break away. I think that can happen because there are enough Sunni, Kurds and Shias willing to die to make that happen that I am still optimistic.

We had our own Civil War. It is hard to get different people from different backgrounds to live together, but we are an example that it can happen. But it comes sometimes at a great sacrifice. So the sectarian violence in Iraq will only be solved by having enough control of the security to keep tensions down and trying to build political reconciliation.

During immigration, I learned a lesson. People get mad when you do hard things. They can say pretty awful things about you. I learned a lot of cuss words that I never knew before. That is what happens in American politics when you try to embrace hard issues. People get mad. That is democracy. It is about expressing yourself. You just pay the price when you do that politically. But the price we pay is being called bad names. It may affect your election; it may not.

In Iraq, if you want to find the middle ground, they try to kill your family. Remember how hard it was on immigration when all those phone calls flooded your office trying to tell us: You better not do this; you better not do that. Imagine trying to sit down at a table in Iraq to find common ground with someone who represents a side that just maybe killed your family.

I would argue that political reconciliation in Iraq is hard because it is hard here. It is harder there because of the security environment which has broken down. We would be wise to provide better security. That is the way to get political reconciliation.

The key to solving sectarian conflicts in Iraq is better security, more diplomatic pressure, economic and political aid, and pressure to get the Iraqis to live as one with some amount of autonomy. The Sunnis, the Shias, and the Kurds are finally going to figure out that you will have a better life living together than if you try to break away because if the Shias try to dominate and create an Iranian style theocracy, the Sunni Arab nations are not going to sit on the sideline. If you are a Sunni trying to take power back by the use of a gun, they are not going to allow you to dominate the country by the force of arms, and you are not going to be able to split away from the rest of Iraq and live in peace because your neighbors are always going to consider you a threat.

If you are Kurd in the north and you think you can live up there peacefully and ignore what is happening in the south, you have another thing coming because turmoil in Iraq will make your life difficult. If you think you can break away from the rest of Iraq and have a Kurdish independent state without consequences from Turkey, you are kidding yourself.

Each group really will one day figure out we are better off in terms of our long-term interest to find some common ground here on how we can live together. That is going to happen, but we have to control the violence better and we have to push them harder.

The second fight involves al-Qaida. I was on this morning with Senator OBAMA on the ''Today'' show. He said something I believe is absolutely correct: Reasonable people can disagree. The one thing I hope reasonable people can agree is that al-Qaida is very unreasonable. If you could find some common ground with this crowd, please let me know. I have yet to find a way to reach out to al-Qaida without getting your arm taken off. They don't have a plan that we can buy into. I don't think they have an agenda that any of us, Republicans or Democrats, can say: Let's work on some middle ground.

Their agenda for the world is not totally different from Hitler's agenda for the world. It is a religious-based, driven conflict. They have taken a religious view of life that excludes moderate Muslims, Jews, Christians, and anybody who disagrees with them, and they feel compelled by God to topple all forms of moderation. People who do not practice Islam, in their view, are just as bad as we are. They have an agenda to make sure that those folks in the Middle East who reject their religion really pay a heavy price. One, they will be dominated, and if they don't change, they will be killed. Hitler had the same view: If you are racially different, if you don't live under the thumb of the Aryan race, you will be worked to death or killed. Al-Qaida is no different. They have a religious agenda they are trying to impose on the world.

Am I worried about al-Qaida sweeping the world and conquering Washington? No. Am I worried about al-Qaida taking over all of Iraq? No. Here is what I am worried about: If we let the country break apart and we have chaos in Iraq, they flourish, al-Qaida flourishes, because they go to places where lawlessness reigns, where they can intimidate people, and it allows them to move their agenda forward. Their agenda is pretty clear: Where moderation raises its dangerous head, lop it off.

The reason they have come to Iraq is because we went there; that is partly true. But the real reason they have come is they don't want the people in Iraq to change course. It is not about us changing course. We have changed course. The old strategy of sitting behind a wall and training and doing nothing else has been replaced by an aggressive strategy of going out in the neighborhoods, finding the enemy, suppressing the enemy, forming new alliances.

Let me tell you their strategy. They are very much on message. Where they find moderation, they are going to go after it. If they can be perceived as having won in Iraq, then what happens to the world at large? Are we safer? The answer is no. What they will do then, by destabilizing this attempt at democracy in Iraq, they will move the agenda to the Gulf Arab States, not because I say so but because they say so. One of the big threats they see in the Mideast is the Gulf Arab States engaging in the world through commerce and basically having a tolerant form of religion. The ultimate prize for al-Qaida is not only to create a caliphate in Baghdad that would dominate the region religiously, it is to destroy Israel. I am not making this up. I am just regurgitating what they say.

The surge—the biggest change I have seen in Iraq has come in Anbar where literally 12,000 people have joined the police in 2007 at this date versus 1,000 for the whole year 2006. The reason I am encouraged is that people again have broken away, and they have associated themselves with a different way of living. They didn't like al-Qaida. They are trying to start over again. We are giving them a chance to do so. The alliances in Anbar and Diyala that are being formed could be long lasting to provide security.

The third conflict is with Iran. We passed a resolution not long ago—I think it was last week—that was a damning indictment of Iran. That resolution had a long list of activity that we unanimously approved to be happening. That activity was the Iranian Government, through the Kuds force, was actively involved in the IED business, trying to provide materials to insurgents in Iraq to kill young Americans in the most effective way possible. We have captured two brothers who were responsible for kidnapping five Americans and executing them, and we have found from that capture that the resources to plan that attack came from Iran. It was a very sophisticated attack. They had vehicles they made up to be like American vehicles. They had American uniforms on. They went into a secure compound, got through the security checks, went in, and captured five Americans working with Iraqis that day, took them off. They were going to kidnap them, but it all went bad and they killed them. We found the two brothers in charge. They have Shia connections. They are tied to the Iranian regime. They were getting much of their support from the Kuds force in Iran, the Revolutionary Guard. That is another conflict.

The question for us is, If we said in July we are going to withdraw in May of 2008, if that were the statement to be made by the Senate by the end of this week, I ask one question: If you were an al-Qaida operative fighting in Iraq, your life has been pretty miserable lately because Petraeus is all over you. We are killing them, capturing them, putting them on the run in a way never known before. That is why Zawahiri last week issued a call for reinforcements, because he understands his force is under siege in Iraq and things are not going well because the local people are beginning to turn on them. So he told his al-Qaida brothers: Hang in there. The winds in Washington are blowing our way. Hang in there. Help is on the way.

I would argue as strongly as I know how that if the Senate did pass the Levin-Reed amendment, which says within 120 days from now we are going to be withdrawing, that every al-Qaida operative who feels under siege would have a tremendous boost in morale. It would be welcome news to al-Qaida in Iraq. The Senate has declared this war over militarily. We are beginning to leave. You would say: Thank God, because right now your life is miserable because of this new alliance we have formed and new combat power we put on the ground.

To those who have sided with us in Anbar and other places, if you read in the newspaper the end of this week that the U.S. Senate declares withdrawal to begin in 120 days, all troops are out by May of 2008, it would be, in my opinion, a heartbreaking event to read about because you would wonder: Now that I have chosen a new course and I have openly stood against al-Qaida and Iranian involvement, what is going to happen to me and my family?

My good friend from Iowa has a different view of what happened in Vietnam than I do. Just as sure as I am standing here, al-Qaida would be emboldened if they heard we are going to withdraw beginning in 120 days. They would believe they are back into the fight and if they could just hang in

there, this thing is going to turn around in their favor. For all those who broke with al-Qaida and joined us, their biggest fears are they are going to get killed. And they will.

What would Iran say? Iran would look at America anew. They would believe, I think rightly so, that their strategy of a proxy war produced dramatic results because what they have been able to achieve is that this experiment in tolerant democracy, with an Iraqi spin on it, failed.

Why is the Iranian Government trying to drive us out of Iraq? Why are they helping extremists of all kinds defeat American forces? Why are they trying to undermine the Maliki government? My belief is, they understand if a form of democracy emerges on their border in Iraq, it is this theocracy's worst nightmare. So they are doing what they are doing for a reason. That reason, to me, is pretty obvious. They do not want any democracy to emerge in their neighborhood because it is a threat to the way they do business.

The reason al-Qaida goes to Iraq is they do not want moderation to take off anywhere.

So I hope and literally pray we will give General Petraeus until September to keep doing what he is doing, and that in September we will look at the evidence presented to us about the successes and failures of the surge.

If you keep an open mind, here is what I think you find in July: The surge has created a change in dynamic on the ground in Iraq beneficial to us and detrimental to al-Qaida, and that is undeniable. Does that mean all the problems in Iraq are over? No. The surge has not produced political reconciliation we hoped for. I do believe if we begin to withdraw, political reconciliation that we hoped for is forever lost because people begin to make decisions based on when we leave and what is best for their family, not what is best for Iraq.

If we begin to leave now, in July—make a public announcement we are beginning to leave—al-Qaida gets bolstered beyond belief. If we stay where we are in terms of a new strategy being implemented aggressively, I think by September the al-Qaida footprint in Iraq will be greatly diminished, and those areas where they dominated will be easier to hold because the Iraqis have made a commitment to hold they never had before, and they will have the capacity to hold. If we will continue to allow this general and these new troops to do their job, al-Qaida is the biggest loser. Simultaneously, we are going to have to push the Maliki government to do things they need to do.

If we continue to show strength, Iran will change their policy. If we show weakness to Iran and al-Qaida, this war does not end, it gets bigger.

In conclusion, it is not about coming home. We all want them home as soon as possible. It is not about heartbreak. We all share it. I have had many parents come up to me who have lost children in Iraq or spouses and tell me: Please, do not let them die in vain. They believed they could win. They believed in what they are doing. Give the rest of them a chance to win. I have had people come up and say: I think my son or daughter, my husband or wife, died in vain. Don't let anyone else die.

Senators REED and LEVIN believe that by setting a date to withdraw now, it will put pressure on the Iraqis to do things they have not yet done. I understand that. They believe that without additional pressure, the Iraqis will use us as a crutch. Fundamentally, I disagree with that concept. I think if you say we are going to withdraw now, in 120 days, it does not pressure the Iraqi politicians to do things quicker. It ensures they will never get done. It takes an enemy that is on the run and breathes new life into them. It takes an enemy called Iran and makes them bolder.

The signal you are trying to send has more than one audience. If the Senate tries to send a signal in July that we are beginning to withdraw in 120 days, and we will be out by May of 2008, the signal will be received by this group al-Qaida: We can do this if we hang in there. And the signal will be received by those in Tehran: We are going to drive America out. We have turned the corner when it comes to destroying this new democracy in Iraq.

Every moderate force that broke from al-Qaida, which is trying to stand up to Iran will feel like: My God, what is going to happen to my family?

If we choose to allow the military to continue this successful operation, stand behind them without equivocation, listen to them in September about what to do, I think we can build a security environment never known before in Iraq, and I think our best hopes of securing that nation, so reconciliation will one day occur, are achieved.

It is not about your patriotism; it is not about feeling heartbroken for those who have lost their lives. It is about how do you fight this war with an enemy that knows no boundaries.

My last thought: There has been a formula that has existed since the beginning of time that works. When people rear their ugly head and start talking about their neighbor having no place on the planet, when people start using religion as a way to dominate their neighbor, an excuse to dominate their neighbor, when people openly talk about destroying a particular ethnic group, or a particular race, or a particular religion, when they start doing that in terms of words and deeds, the rest of us who disagree need to stand up.

In the 1930s, too many people sat on the sidelines, ignoring the dangers of their time. The dangers of their time were Adolph Hitler and people like him who had no place on the planet for people who they believed were ''racially inferior'' or different in terms of the way they wanted to live their lives.

This enemy is saying things about fellow human beings that not only should be rejected in words, should be rejected by action. The action I am looking for, when it comes to the al-Qaida agenda, is to destroy it, to use every military force we have to destroy it, to align ourselves with people who reject it, and see this thing through.

God bless.

Several Senators addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SALAZAR). The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, the Senator from Michigan and I wish to take a couple minutes while we make a unanimous consent request: that at least the majority leader's time will be from 10:50 to 11 a.m.; from 10:40 to 10:50 will be for the Republican leader; 10:30 to 10:40 will be for the chairman of the committee; and 10:20 to 10:30 will be allocated to me. I ask unanimous consent that be agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I think that is precisely what has been typed up, and that is our intent, that those last four 10-minute slots be allocated in the way the Senator from Arizona has proposed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, finally, could I point out, during the entire night we have been basically going back and forth on both sides of the issue. I think all Senators who sought recognition were able to speak sometime during the night. I hope we would be able to continue going back and forth, unless there is a lack of speakers on this side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, has that previous unanimous consent request been adopted?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. It has not yet been adopted.

Is there objection to the unanimous consent request?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON of Florida addressed the Chair.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I understand now the Senator from Florida is seeking recognition; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is correct.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that on this side, following the Senator from Florida, Senator BINGAMAN be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following Senator BINGAMAN, Senator LAUTENBERG be recognized on this side—just on this side.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I thank the chairman, and reserving the right to object, I would hope my colleagues would recognize that gives us an hour and 10 minutes until the unanimous consent agreement kicks in. I know there are additional speakers on both sides to take up that time. So I hope they would be economical with their views.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, could I advise my colleague from Michigan that I believe the Senator from New Jersey, Mr. LAUTENBERG, was here planning to speak before I spoke. So on the Democratic side it would be Senator NELSON, and then Senator LAUTENBERG, and then myself.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I thank Senator BINGAMAN for that. I was not aware of that. Let me revise the unanimous consent request. Before I do so, in light of what Senator MCCAIN has said, let me inquire of the Democrats—I say to Senator LAUTENBERG, if you could stay here for 1 minute. I am wondering if the Senator from Florida could give us an idea of the amount of time he needs.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Whatever is the pleasure of my chairman.

Mr. LEVIN. Should we say up to 10 minutes each?

Mr. MCCAIN. Given the number of speakers, if I could say, I think maybe 10 minutes maximum, and I would add to that unanimous consent request that Senator CRAIG and Senator CHAMBLISS be added on this side in rotation. I think up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Well, I wanted to do like so many, to speak much earlier. Six a.m. was the time I had reserved, and it was believed then that we would have two or three people to fill an hour. I would like 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, let me now revise the unanimous consent request in this way: that Senator NELSON be recognized for up to 10 minutes, that Senator LAUTENBERG be recognized for up to 15 minutes, that Senator BINGAMAN be recognized for up to 10 minutes on this side, with alternating to the other side.

I say to the Senator I think that would leave 35 minutes to be allocated on your side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, on this side, I ask unanimous consent to add to that unanimous consent request that 10 minutes each be allocated to Senators CRAIG, CHAMBLISS, and CORNYN. I think given the spillover, that probably will take up the remaining time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, as I had listened to some of the debate, I wondered: Do we not have the ability with a significant majority in the Senate to come together on the differences that have divided us over the course of this debate throughout the evening? I think we do, if we would take off our partisan hats, if we would take off our ideological hats.

It is clear where the American people are. It is a truth you cannot sustain a war unless you have the support of the American people.

This impression is not only seared into me as a result of the reading of history, but it was clearly the case when I had the privilege of wearing the uniform of the country as a lieutenant and as a captain. It was during the Vietnam era. That was clearly a time in which the people of the country were split. The big difference then and now, in the treatment of the troops, is that everybody in the country supports our troops, and every Senator does, and we are amazed at their bravery, and we stand up and repeat that over and over. That was not the case back in Vietnam. That was not the case, where returning troops, unbelievably, sometimes, were spit upon. But that is not the case now.

The question is, how do you keep a bad situation from getting worse? And the question is not whether we support the troops; we do. It is the question: What is the policy set by the Government of the United States that those troops ought to be carrying out? How do we bring some kind of success out of a very bad situation?

Now, the rhetoric has been hot, and it has been intense, and it has been polarizing. The Levin-Reed amendment has been characterized as though we are going to pick up and walk out of Iraq. That is not what the Levin-Reed amendment says. It says we are going to start a process of withdrawal, but troops are going to stay in Iraq to go after al-Qaida—which is clearly there now as a result of us having been there for the last 4 years—to go after al-Qaida, to provide force protection for the Americans who are there—which would also mean providing border protection—and to train the Iraqi Army. That is not a pack up and withdraw. The philosophy of the Levin-Reed amendment, which this Senator supports—and last Friday I gave the history of how I have come through all of these votes since that vote in the fall of 2002 to authorize the President to expend moneys for prosecuting a war—the question for us has been, how do we bring some success?

Now, in fact, we look at this as if Iraq is monolithic. It is not. It is many different things. It is a concentration of Kurds in the north, a concentration of Sunnis, and some mixture with Shiites, in the middle, and a concentration of Shiites in the south. We are having success with the surge in the western province of al-Anbar, but that is because it is primarily Sunni, and that is because the real enemy there is al-Qaida. Indeed, the surge of the Marines is having success, slowly but having success.

But remember, Iraq is many things and many faces. That is not the case in Baghdad because in Baghdad what you have is a sectarian warfare that has been going on for 1,327 years between Sunnis and Shiites that has, in effect, become a civil war.

When Senator COLEMAN and I were in Baghdad meeting with the foreign national security adviser, Dr. al-Rubaie, before Christmas, he said: This not a sectarian war. This is Baathists trying to take back over their control.

We could not believe he would make that statement when it was so obvious, and it has been so obvious, that it is Sunnis on Shiites and Shiites on Sunnis, and some Shiites on Shiites, and some Sunnis on Sunnis.

In the middle of that chaos of a civil war, a surge may have a temporary appearance, but at the end of the day, it is not going to work. A surge will work in Anbar.

So let's be clear that when people make extreme statements, what we are talking about is a very complicated situation.

Now, do we think we are going to continue to be full bore in Iraq in another 2 years, another 3 years? Do we really think the American people are going to put up with that? No. The Levin-Reed amendment, which this Senator supports—and it took me a long time to get here, Mr. President—is a recognition of the practicality on the ground: withdrawing ourselves from the middle of a crossfire of a civil war and, instead, consolidating our positions to train the Iraqi Army, to continue to go after al-Qaida, and to provide force protection.

So at the end of the day, we can all get together. You can probably have two-thirds of the Senate all coming together. One particular approach is we ought to be doing it around the Levin-Reed amendment, but it doesn't look as if we are going to. Later on down the road, the Presiding Officer, the Senator from Colorado, and I are cosponsors of another kind of amendment around which people could consolidate and unite. Sooner or later, we all are going to have to come together.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I ask that the Chair notify me when I have 1 minute left.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair will do so.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I begin today by saying that I oppose the Levin-Reed amendment, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. I oppose the

amendment for three important reasons: First of all, I believe the amendment unconstitutionally usurps the power of the Commander in Chief. Secondly, the amendment tells our enemies when they can take over in Iraq. Thirdly, the amendment is the wrong approach at the wrong time.

Also, I wish to focus on what we are missing by spending unnecessary time last night and today debating this amendment. We have had a Defense bill pending before the Senate now for a week and a half and have yet to discuss this bill in substance.

The bill which we have yet to make any real progress on does the following things for our men and women in uniform: First of all, it authorizes a 3.5-percent pay raise for our men and women in the armed forces. It authorizes additional tools for combating post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury and provides improved health care benefits for our injured warriors. It takes new steps to recognize the contributions of our Reserve Forces through increased retirement benefits and robust reintegration programs. It tightens our acquisition processes, our contracting policies, and increases benefits to our civilian personnel. It increases the amount of leave our military personnel can carry over, a provision which DOD strongly advocates as a way to increase the morale of our troops. It authorizes $4 billion for mine-resistant vehicles and critical MRAP vehicles that we need so desperately to protect our men and women. It authorizes $135 billion for allowances, bonuses, death benefits, and permanent change of station moves. It authorizes payment of over 25 types of bonuses and special pays aimed at encouraging enlistment, reenlistment, and continued service by Active-Duty as well as Reserve military personnel. It fully funds the President's budget request for the Army's future combat systems and adds $90 million for the Armed Robotic Vehicles. It authorizes $775.1 million for reactive armor.

I could go on for a long time cataloging the good things in this bill that we are not talking about. We are not focusing on them because of the time we have spent yesterday, last night, as well as today, focusing on this amendment, which we could have dealt with several days ago. This side of the aisle has been prepared to vote and we have been asking for that vote, yet that vote has not taken place.

I think it is important to keep in mind the people who are on the receiving end of the decisions we make and the votes we take in this body; that is, the American soldier, sailor, airman, and marine who is out there doing what we have asked them to do in service to our country.

I appreciate the comments last night of the Senator from Connecticut, Mr. LIEBERMAN, regarding my good friend, General Lynch, who commands the 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, GA, and Task Force Marne in Baghdad. General Lynch and his troops are in harm's way as we speak—right now—executing the duties and the responsibilities the American people have asked of them. General Lynch recently commented that the addition of thousands more surge troops in the recent weeks has enabled him to clear insurgents in 70 percent of his territory south of Baghdad. I would like to share a few of General Lynch's comments regarding his mission and the work in which his troops are involved.

Regarding the effects of ceasing the current strategy now in place, General Lynch has said the following:

> You'd find the enemy regaining ground, reestablishing sanctuary, building more roadside bombs, and the violence would escalate. It would be a mess.

Regarding the current mindset of the Iraqi people that he encounters, General Lynch has said:

> What they are worried about is our leaving, and our answer is: ''We're staying.''

Regarding our need to stay and keep doing what we are doing, General Lynch has said the following:

> We need these surge forces. They came in for a reason. They are being used for the reason they were sent to be used for.

These comments by General Lynch and the perspective he shares from Iraq is that it would be a mistake to give up on the President's strategy now. That is why I oppose the Levin- Reed amendment.

Months ago, some in the media declared Al Anbar Province lost. Ramadi was declared by AQI—al-Qaida in Iraq—as the capital of AQI. Today, it is clear that they were wrong and that the President's new strategy has effectively turned Al Anbar around.

I was in Al Anbar 2 months ago, and I have to say I was significantly impressed by the job General Gaskins and his folks are doing. We were able to take a convoy ride to the middle of downtown Ramadi. We were in a safe and secure setting for the first time in years, in that community. We saw children returning to schools. We saw markets open. We saw people walking on the streets for the first time in years. People now felt safe and secure because al-Qaida has now been cleared out of Ramadi and out of virtually every inch of Al Anbar Province. The surge is working in Al Anbar Province and in the self-declared capital of al-Qaida.

The last elements of the troop increase that the President proposed back in January became operational in Iraq on June 15. Let me quote retired Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Jack Keane, who has been critical in the right ways and positive as well as other ways about Iraq—a good man, a good soldier. Here is what he said:

> It is my judgment the security situation is making steady, deliberate progress and it will continue to make progress as we go on through the rest of the summer and into the fall. The thought of pulling out now or pulling out in a couple of months makes no sense militarily in terms of what we are trying to achieve, and that is providing security and stability for Iraq so that we can make some political progress.

If there is one strategy that does not make sense at this point either militarily or politically, it is signaling to the enemy, during a time when we are making early progress in establishing security and laying the grounds for reconciliation, that we are leaving and that they can have the country. This is an extremely ill-advised approach for which the United States, the Middle East, and especially the Iraqi people will pay dearly for decades to come.

I have never been more convinced that waiting for General Petraeus's report in September was more right than yesterday afternoon when two young Georgia veterans, Tripp Bellard and Ruben Maestre, visited my office. I wish every Member of this body could have heard the passion and the emotion and the strength in their voices. Their resolve was clear, yet they were humble and forceful at the same time. I say to my colleagues, these men implored me to speak out. They said that America needed unwavering leadership now more than ever. They could not have been more clear when they said that pulling out of Iraq now would mean chaos and would have implications for our troops and for the Nation that would be beyond horrific. These were men who had been deployed to Iraq more than once and not for a few months. These were men who have been on the ground and who fervently echoed what I have heard without exception on every single trip I have taken to Iraq, from my first trip several years ago to my last one just 2 months ago. I have heard it from privates, and I have heard it from generals—that we must not leave prematurely and that we must not act prematurely.

I wish to relate another anecdote about a conversation I had with a young female Army soldier. I had lunch with her in Ramadi. She is a Georgian with whom I had a very delightful conversation about a number of issues. But I asked her: Why in the world did you join the Army 3½ years ago in the face of the ongoing conflict in Iraq? She said: Senator, my life was not—I was not accomplishing in my life what I wanted to accomplish. I needed to head in a different direction. I felt like serving my country was something that I could do. She then said: Senator, I signed up in the face of Iraq knowing that I would go to Iraq. This is not my first trip to Iraq; it is my second tour of duty in Iraq. I know I am here for the right reason. I know the mission we have to accomplish. I am prepared to accomplish that mission because it is necessary and it is the right thing to do. As I visit with the people of Iraq here in the streets of Ramadi on a daily basis, I am reminded of what freedom is all about.

Boy, you talk about emotion. You talk about a great young American. Those folks are truly great Americans.

There is no better commentary on the status in Iraq than the men and

women who are on the ground, and they are all telling us loudly and clearly that now is not the time to leave, nor is it the time to judge the strategy. The right time to evaluate the strategy is September, and the right time to give our forces what they deserve, by passing the National Defense Authorization Act, is now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CARDIN). The Senator from New Jersey is recognized.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I am sure that what is taking place on the floor of the Senate must present a terribly confusing picture to the American people. It is hard to understand even being here, with colleagues shouting their support for the American troops while they inject that what they need is an injection of truth serum for the vote. Then it will be plain and simple to see where they are, those who are opposing a direct vote, an up-or-down, as we call it, to take place, and that will answer the question: Do you want our soldiers, airmen, seamen, and marines returned home, as the American people are demanding? I remind our friends that the obligation is to get our people back to their families as soon as possible.

Outside my office, I pay respect to America's lost soldiers, our casualties of war, in a display called the ''Faces of the Fallen.'' It gives a picture and some background of the soldiers who gave their lives in this ill-conceived and seemingly endless war in Iraq. Every day, families, friends, and visitors search through thousands of photos looking to see if there are people they know, while they try to comprehend the human cost of this war to parents, spouses, children, siblings, and friends across our country.

Four years and 4 months have passed since President Bush sent young American men and women to fight in a war based on faulty intelligence and incomplete information about an enemy and the scope of this ferocious conflict. Now 160,000 American men and women are mired in a civil war in Iraq, facing thousands of insurgents willing to die themselves while they try to kill any American they can find.

Mr. President, 3,613 brave American souls will never again sit at a family table, play with their children, or return to their jobs and their communities. Ninety-one of those men and women came from New Jersey. They set their boots on the ground in Iraq never expecting they would not put them back on American soil again. Now their faces and their stories live on only in our memories.

But the solemn story those numbers tell does not stop there. Nearly 27,000 troops have left combat with wounds to their body. More than 800 of them have lost limbs or sight or other senses. Many more have left with their minds totally impaired. More than 30,000 soldiers now live with post-traumatic stress disorder or brain injuries, robbing them of the ability to think clearly or perform tasks that once came easily. They put themselves in the line of fire and fought to give the President's policy a chance, but the policy has failed.

It was more than 3 years ago that the President, in military dress, staged on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, proudly declared ''mission accomplished.'' Mission accomplished? A declaration of victory in millions of American minds? How casual. How cruel. How inept. The President did this without hesitation or pause or the idea of the cost soldiers would come to endure in the future and the hellfire they would face. There were 139 American soldiers who had died by that date, by the day that ''mission accomplished'' was declared. Compare that with today's count, which stands above 3,600. Mr. President, 139 American soldiers then—''mission accomplished''—and now the death toll is over 3,600. ''Mission accomplished''—a show of grandeur, a curtain of disaster, misleading, and I don't know if the President really understood what was taking place in front of his eyes.

Today, the President continues to use statements that defy reality. Vice President CHENEY joined in. He said in those times, ''We will be greeted as liberators with sweets and treats,'' with not a hint of intelligence available before that. Today, the President continues to use statements that defy reality. We have to look back a little bit to see when Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld said this war could last 6 days, 6 weeks, perhaps, I doubt, 6 months. He said that in February of 2003, a month before the invasion. What were they thinking? It is hard to understand. They were getting intelligence. They had the best information available, and they didn't use it.

Just last week, the President said:

> The same folks that are bombing innocent people in Iraq were the ones who attacked us in America on September 11th.

This statement smacks of the same careless rhetoric we heard 4 years ago. The most frightening part about that statement is either President Bush actually believes what he is saying, doesn't bother to check, or is he deliberately distracting the American people?

The fact is that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida attacked us on 9/11 and Iraq had nothing to do with the tragedy of 9/11. The Defense Department's own inspector general confirmed this past February that the Saddam Hussein regime was not directly cooperating with al-Qaida before the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Has the President forgotten about Osama bin Laden, the man responsible for inflicting those wounds on the victims, their families, and this country? The war with al-Qaida and the hunt for Osama bin Laden began and continues outside of Iraq. Yet Osama bin Laden is still at large, and al-Qaida has become stronger as a result of President Bush's failed policies.

This administration took its eye off the ball. Instead of capturing or killing Osama bin Laden, we are stuck in the middle of a civil war in Iraq with ever-escalating American casualties. That is why some of us in this Congress believe deep in our minds and in our souls that this carnage must end and we have to fight to bring our troops home from Iraq. We are fighting with our colleagues on the other side of the aisle who are giving us reasons to continue with the surge and continue with the exposure in harm's way of our brave men and women.

Millions of Americans are begging us for a change of course. They are tired of having their sons and daughters coming home in flag-covered coffins—coffins that are hidden from the public eye by order of the Pentagon. They don't even let pictures be taken of those flag-draped coffins showing the honor that is bestowed upon the person in that coffin.

The American people want Congress to step in and start to bring our troops home in a responsible way. The amendment by Senators LEVIN and REED would do just that. It would begin to redeploy our troops out of Iraq within 120 days and remove all combat troops by the end of April of next year. Some American forces would remain to perform counterterrorism operations, protect U.S. personnel, and to train Iraqi forces.

This amendment reflects the will of the American people, and it is a responsible way to phase our troops out of the civil war in Iraq. But instead of having a vote to decide where a majority of the Congress stands, our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are standing in the way. They are resorting to process to keep us from having a vote so that the American people can see very clearly where we each stand on this issue. So we stayed here all night. That is not much of a sacrifice; that is not much when you consider our people in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Soon, every Senator will go on record, and their constituents will know whether they want to continue the President's failed policy or are they looking for a new, brighter day, a chance to bring our people back to their families?

Some of our colleagues on the other side have called for change. If you look at recent votes, seven of them had the courage to stand with the Democrats and say: Yes, we agree that this conflict has gone on long enough and we ought to start doing something to bring them home. But with the President dug in on staying the course, saying the right thing is not enough. Change will only come with a vote.

So I ask my colleagues to stand up and support the Levin-Reed amendment so we can begin to bring our men and women home. Let the American people hear our sincerity, and they will when they see procedural attempts to hide this vote and obstruct the return.

The slogan they are using is ''cut and run.'' The result would be ''stay and die.''

I yield the floor and the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I stand in front of a desk in which a former Idaho senator by the name of William E. Borah stood. He was renowned for a variety of things after the turn of the 19th into the 20th century. He was an outspoken isolationist and opposed Woodrow Wilson and led the battle to destroy the League of Nations. He was successful. We never joined the League of Nations. America came home from World War I, pulled up its bridges and it remained a relatively isolated island in a world until World War II.

We know times have changed. We also know that great debates about foreign policy have occurred on the floor of the Senate down through the centuries. We have had a very valuable debate over the last 24 hours in large part about foreign policy but in a surprising way about military tactics.

There is one role that we play here in the United States Senate and that role is a political role, it is not a military role. Not 535 generals. There are a few of us—I'm not one of those—who've had extensive military experience and who might have the kind of strategic knowledge necessary to make decisions that are general—that our generals could and are making on the field at this moment. But I am always suprised when we decide to become tacticians, when we decide to use the floor of the United States Senate as a command center, when we meet in secret rooms around the Capitol to decide how troop movements out to happen and what the rules of engagement ought to be. No, we shouldn't be playing that role. That's why when we confirmed General Petraeus unanimously in the Senate, we said to him very clearly, you go to Iraq in relation to a surge that is being implemented and you come back to us and give us your honest and fair assesement in September.

So why then the last 24 hours have we been deciding or trying to prejudge Petraeus, to jump in front of him acting like the general that he is and the general who is on the ground in Baghdad as we speak? It is raw politics. That's what it is all about. And that's what you have seen played out here in the last 24 hours. Now, I would be the first to tell you that good politics sometimes doesn't produce good policy, especially if you're reacting at the moment—if you are reacting at a snapshot of a polling data where the American people are reacting because they have been fed information instantly about something that may or may not be true in the broader perspective.

But that's what we're doing here, and that's what we do best. But let me suggest that sometimes good policy—so why then the last 24 hours have we been deciding or trying to prejudge Petraeus, to jump in front of him acting like the general that he is and the general who is on the ground in Baghdad as we speak? It is raw politics. That's what it is all about. And that's what you have seen played out here in the last 24 hours. Now, I would be the first to tell you that good politics sometimes doesn't produce good policy, especially if you're reacting at the moment—if you're reacting at a snapshot of a polling data where the American people are reacting because they have been fed information instantly about something that may or may not be true in the broader perspective.

But that is what we're doing here, and that is what we do best. But let me suggest that sometimes good policy—good politics does not in the long term produce good policy. It is with that point in mind that I hope that the Levin-Reed Amendment goes down that it doesn't gain the necessary votes to proceed to a final vote.

We ought to be focused on the content of the National Defense Authorization Act and all that it means to our country and to our veterans because of a variety of key amendments that have been placed in this very important document. And I think that America, if they've been watching C-SPAN for the last 24 hours have not heard one word or very few words about the embodiment of this bill and its value and what it will do to the long-term stability of our military and the care of our veterans.

I was once chair. I am now Ranking Member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and Senator AKAKA and I have put a very large and valuable amendment in there that deals with traumatic brain injury and the extension of eligibility of the eligibility of care as we work to create a seamless environment between men and women coming out of our armed services and becoming veterans and becoming eligible for the care that our Veterans Administration can provide for them. Mental health evaluations, trying to get ahead of traumatic brain injury that may not manifest itself for months and years after men and women come out of the armed services. Dental care for our returning service members and homeless programs and all other kinds of things are embodied in this very important legislation.

So, I say to my friends on the other side of the aisle, you have had your 24 hours of politics. Now I hope we can have a vote, move on, and get to the final passage of the Defense Authorization Act that is so important to our country in the short term and in the long term, and I would hope that this Senate shows some consistency in what we do, and that consistency would be to wait until September in what I think will be a fair and honest and factual evaluation by General Petraeus as to the situation, the current environment and the future in Iraq. And at that time, as a United States Senator representing the State of Idaho, I am prepared to make decisions that are different than those today as it relates to our involvement in Iraq, if the facts so demonstrate it.

General Petraeus has a lot of credibility, not only with this Congress but with the American people and the polls are showing that. While Americans are very frustrated over the war in Iraq, they don't want to cut and run at this moment, and that's what Levin-Reed is all about, cutting and running.

And what happens if we do that? What happens if we don't find a strategic way out? It is important that we put ourselves in perspective of the world that involves Iraq and its surrounding neighbors. You have heard a lot of rhetoric about the instability, about the role of Iran and certainly what's going on in the north here with the Kurdish population and what Turkey is doing, amassing troops along this border. You've heard about what's going on in Lebanon and certainly the traumatic reality that is happening there. Premature withdrawal from Iraq would risk, I believe, plunging this—that Nation into chaos which could spill over its borders into the gulf region that you see here.

Iran, which is a threat to vital U.S. interests and continues to provide lethal support to Shia militants who target and kill U.S. troops and innocent Iraqis, would exploit our premature departure to dominate and control much of Iraq. Here they are, a very large nation with very powerful forces and resources, just waiting for the opportunity to fulfill their historic Persian vision of the region.

Tehran's terrorist proxy to Hezbollah continues to foment in instability in Lebanon. They've already leapfrogged Iraq. They're over here, creating tremendous influence in that region. Hamas, another Iran proxy, continues to kill and maim innocent Israelis and Palestinians and is attempting to establish a jihadist state in the Gaza.

Here we are—another leapfrog over Iraq. Iraq is simply in the way of Iran. It's quite plain. It's quite simple. And it is very visual when you look at the map. And without some stability in Iran—in Iraq, the ability of it to control itself and its borders, the ability to govern itself, the reality of what could happen in the region is in fact dramatic consequences, a collapse, a major war within the region, not only a civil war within Iraq but the ability of Iran and Syria to exploit the situation that would occur there. Tehran would extend its destabilizing activities to another very important part of the region—Kuwait—and the oil-rich regions of eastern Saudi Arabia along this border here, one of the larger producing oilfields in the region and the kingdom could well fall. And those are the realities we face at this moment that I think few want to talk about. Let's talk about another consequence.

I will put the balance of my statement in the record. But the other consequence, Mr. President, that we've not

talked about is what happens when 54 percent of the world's oil supply goes to risk with a collapse of the region. And this is a reality check that we only talk about in hushed terms, because we don't like to talk about our dependency on a part of the world that is so unstable. With those thoughts, I yield the floor.

What happens to the world energy supply if Iran does gain more control in the Middle East? What are the realities of the consequences of an Iran that possibly could gain control over 54% of the world energy supply? They could place a choke hold over the Strait of Hormuz and possibly in sea lanes in the region, severely limiting the supply of oil to the world market. That is not just a reality that the United States must face, but a reality for the world. I have worked very hard with my colleagues to lessen the U.S. dependence on foreign oil. However, we are not yet capable of raising production in the United States because we have been blocked by the other side of the aisle from doing so. Therefore, a premature withdrawal from Iraq could have dire consequences with our economy and energy supply; but would also have the same effects on the world economy.

The facts are, Mr. President, that the war we are fighting in Iraq has serious and real national security implications and we cannot prejudge our best and brightest military commanders by playing politics with their duties and best judgement. We should not preempt General Petraeus's progress report coming in September and I hope that the Senate will go on record today as saying we are not a body of generals, we do not know best how to conduct a war and determine how many troops it will take to secure Iraq. I hope that my colleagues will join me in voting down Levin-Reed.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico is recognized.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, in October 2002, this Chamber gathered to consider one of the most serious decisions I have been involved in confronting in the 25 years I have been in the Senate. That was a decision on whether to grant President Bush authority to invade Iraq. At that time, nearly 5 years ago, I opposed the invasion of Iraq, believing that it was necessary to give the United Nations weapons inspectors the time they needed to determine whether Iraq did, in fact, possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. I believe that we needed to gather the facts and we needed to make an informed decision as to whether Iraq posed such a terrible and immediate threat to our country that regime change was warranted. As we all know now, the weapons of mass destruction were nowhere to be found.

Unfortunately, the weapons of mass destruction were not the only thing the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of Defense, and other members of the administration were wrong about when it came to beginning this war. They were also wrong in thinking that we could succeed in Iraq without substantial help from our allies. They were wrong to reject warnings that the invasion would fracture Iraq's delicate sectarian balance. They were wrong to dismiss legitimate questions about how we would rebuild Iraq's civil society. They were wrong to think that Iraq's neighbors, Iran and Saudi Arabia, in particular, would ignore their opportunity to fill a regional power vacuum after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. They were wrong to promise the American people, as Secretary Rumsfeld's assistant, Ken Adelman, did, that Iraq would be a ''cakewalk.''

My statement at that time, nearly 5 years ago, was the following:

> If war must be waged, other countries should be there with us sharing the costs and helping to restore stability in what will almost certainly be the tumultuous aftermath of military action.

Mr. President, ''tumultuous'' only begins to describe the calamity we face in Iraq today. Almost 5 years have passed since that October day. Five years is longer than it took Presidents Roosevelt and Truman to defeat the Axis Powers in World War II.

Today, Iraq is diverting the United States from other very important foreign policy matters. First, of course, it is diverting us from the fight against terrorist networks worldwide. Second, it is diverting us from responding to the rise of China as a world power. Third, it is diverting us from reducing our dependence upon fossil fuels and particularly lessening our dependence on foreign sources of energy. Fourth, it is diverting us from keeping our country economically competitive during this era of globalization.

Respect for America around the world has eroded dramatically as a result of this war. To many around the world, the symbol of our country today is no longer the Statue of Liberty; instead, it is Abu Ghraib.

President Bush and Vice President CHENEY often tell us that we are in Iraq to fight the terrorists who attacked us on September 11.

In his 2003 State of the Union speech, the President told us that Saddam ''aids and protects'' terrorists, including members of al-Qaida.

In 2004, the Vice President promised ''ample evidence confirming the link . . . between al-Qaida and the Iraqi intelligence services.''

In 2005, the President said:

> They are trying to shake our will in Iraq, just as they tried to shake our will on September 11.

In March, Vice President CHENEY said:

> Iraq's relevance to the war on terror simply could not be more plain. . . . As we get farther away from 9/11, I believe there is a temptation to forget the urgency of the task that came to us that day.

Just last week, as many speakers have reiterated, President Bush said:

> The same folks that are bombing innocent people in Iraq were the ones who attacked us in America on September 11th.

So the administration has been consistent in its formulation of this problem. The truth is, Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with 9/11. He did not support al-Qaida before September 11, and al-Qaida had no presence in Iraq prior to that date. Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator, but his regime posed little immediate threat to the United States or its allies. The Baath party, as a secular Arab nationalist movement, had no history of cooperation with al-Qaida or other Islamist movements.

The truth is that al-Qaida's offshoot, al-Qaida in Mesopotamia, is in Iraq today because of our decision to invade. As the Washington Post pointed out recently, al-Qaida in Mesopotamia is an Iraqi phenomenon. Its membership is largely Iraqi. It derives its primary financing indigenously from kidnappings and other criminal activities. And those terrorists and would-be terrorists who have come to Iraq from other countries would not have been there absent this conflict.

Al-Qaida in Mesopotamia thrives over Sunni grievances over our occupation of that country. Our continued occupation of that country is its best recruiting tool.

President Bush has treated terrorism as a monolith. As David Kilcullen, a counterterrorism analyst, has written, the President has lumped together all terrorism, all rogue states, all strategic competitors.

Lumping every dangerous terrorist movement together profoundly misconstrues the nature of terrorism and, in fact, encourages eclectic groups to collaborate. It places our Nation in greater jeopardy, not less jeopardy.

So the question today is, where do we go from here?

The fundamental problem in Iraq today is not a lack of U.S. troops; it is an absence of national reconciliation. The U.S. role in Iraq should not be to police an endless civil war. Rather, it should be to facilitate a settlement among the parties themselves.

The President has belatedly realized that we did not marshal enough troops to stabilize Iraq following our invasion in 2002. But today, merely adding troops is not the solution. The administration's ongoing troop surge is unlikely to prove effective absent a broader political settlement.

If current trends continue, our policy will be, de facto, one of siding with the Shia over the Sunnis. The Shia-led government knows this. It has, therefore, played for time by clinging to the status quo, by dragging its feet on national reconciliation. The Shia-led government has shown little sign that it appreciates the need for accommodation of national minorities. It has missed the most important milestones that have been identified by the Iraq Study Group and by this Congress.

The administration's own benchmark report released several days ago reports unsatisfactory progress on debaathification, on passage of an oil law, on holding provincial elections, on disarming militias. The Iraqi Constitutional Review Commission has failed to make adequate progress.

There has been progress on other benchmarks. I welcome that progress. But these were second-order issues compared to the challenge of national reconciliation. And the bloodshed continues.

Going forward we need to focus on two objectives.

First, we need to send the Iraqi ruling elite a crisp and credible signal that our commitment to maintaining forces in that country is not unconditional. Only by making this point loud and clear do we create the possibility that the Shia-led government will take the painful steps necessary toward national reconciliation.

The U.S. has a moral responsibility to do what it can to create a degree of political stability in Iraq. But I repeat the key phrase in that sentence, ''do what we can,'' for we can do no more.

Our commitment to Iraq is not open-ended. We cannot impose a political settlement without the cooperation of the political elites in the country. The Iraqis themselves must want a solution.

Second, we need to draw down U.S. troop presence in a responsible way. Too precipitous a withdrawal will undermine the credibility of America's commitment to facilitating a political settlement in the country. We need to provide a carrot by allowing for the continued presence of U.S. forces in a peacekeeping capacity if the Iraqi Government does bring about some measure of national reconciliation.

It is because of these two principles that I supported the first supplemental appropriation this spring. That legislation set a firm date for beginning withdrawal. That was the stick.

It set a date for completing withdrawal. This arrangement left open the possibility of leaving some U.S. peacekeepers in Iraq if, ultimately, the factions forged a political settlement. That was the carrot.

This approach remains sound today. And today, with these objectives, in mind, I would urge five steps that we must take in Iraq.

First, we need to announce a firm deadline to begin a drawdown of U.S. troops from Iraq.

The credible threat of a withdrawal, perhaps more than withdrawal itself, may convince the Iraqi ruling elite of the need to accommodate national minorities. The mere threat of a withdrawal says that our commitment to Iraq is not unconditional. It proclaims that we will not preserve the failed status quo.

I applaud my colleagues, such as Senator LEVIN, Senator REED and Senator FEINGOLD, for fighting for a firm deadline. They may disagree on the specifics of withdrawal.

But they do agree that if they do not continue to push for a firm timetable, the Bush administration will cling to that failed status quo.

The fact that the administration is even considering alternatives is a direct result of our decision to push for some change in direction by a specific date.

Second, we must form a multinational working group to discuss the way forward in Iraq.

It is crucial for Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey to be involved. They have historical and religious links to national minorities in Iraq. They have the most to lose by continued instability there. We cannot achieve any political settlement in Iraq without their active participation.

Third, this group—not the Iraqi Government—should convene a Dayton-style multinational conference to help Iraq's factions forge a political settlement.

Fourth, such a settlement would provide for a negotiated withdrawal of U.S. combat troops, as the Iraq Study Group prescribes. If appropriate, other U.S. troops could stay, ideally as part of a multinational or U.N. peacekeeping force.

Finally, we should implement the other recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, including using our good offices to mediate other conflicts in the Middle East, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. President Bush should begin by appointing a special envoy to the region, and I applaud his announcement yesterday of a resumption in aid to West Bank Palestinians.

I conclude my remarks by saluting the servicemen of my home State who have given their lives while answering our Nation's call to duty in Iraq.

I have asked the Pentagon for an accounting of all New Mexican service personnel who have died in Iraq to this date, and that is the accounting I will go through at this time.

While the people of New Mexico and of our entire Nation mourn their loss, we will always celebrate the lives they led and the sacrifices they made for our country.

Marine LCpl Christopher Adlesperger, 20, of Albuquerque, NM, attended the University of New Mexico before joining the Marine Corps in 2003. He was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for his actions in Fallujah on November 10, 2004.

SGT James Akin, 23, of Albuquerque, NM, is quoted by the Albuquerque Tribune as saying, ''Live life to serve, because you can. Dissent, because you can. Enjoy freedom, because you can. Remember always that the measure of our progress is not whether we can provide more for those who have plenty, but whether we can provide enough to those who have little.'' He is survived by his wife and his father.

SGT Matthew Apuan, 27, was a 1998 graduate of Mayfield High School in Las Cruces. He was on his second tour in Iraq when he died near Baghdad on February 18, 2007.

LCpl Aaron Austin, 21, a Lovington, NM, native, was killed in Fallujah, Iraq, on April 26, 2004. Austin proposed to his girlfriend over the phone from Iraq while on his second tour of duty.

PFC Henry Byrd III, 20, of Veguita, NM, graduated from Belen High School in 2004. Before enlisting, Byrd was a volunteer firefighter in his community.

CPL Lyle Cambridge, 23, of Shiprock, NM, and a member of the Navajo Nation, joined the Army in May of 2002. After his death in Baghdad on July 5, 2005, Lyle's sister said she couldn't remember ever seeing her brother mad. One of her fondest memories of her brother is that he bought his older sister a new Easter dress every year.

SP Roberto Causor, Jr., 21, was assigned to C Company, 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, in Fort Bragg, NC. He died on July 7, 2007. His parents reside in Rio Rancho, NM.

Marine LCpl Steven Chavez, 20, was born in Hondo, NM, and graduated from Hondo High School before entering the Marines. Chavez loved the outdoors and participated in track, basketball and football while at Hondo. Chavez was killed about a week before he was set to return home.

SPC Jeremy Christensen, 27, of Albuquerque, NM, was already a veteran of the Armed Forces on September 11, 2001. He decided his country needed him again and reenlisted. A coworker said the 27-year-old told him that he was ready to go to war and he wasn't scared.

CPL Joel Dahl, 21, of Los Lunas, NM, had searched for a family during his teen years in the foster care system. Dahl was excited to finally have a family of his own when he learned of his wife's pregnancy. Corporal Dahl was killed in Baghdad, Iraq, 5 days before the birth of his son.

1LT Jeremy Fresques, 26, was a 1997 graduate of Farmington High School. His wife Lindsay requested that people remember her husband as ''a strong Christian man, a good husband, and someone we can all be proud of.''

Marine LCpl Jonathan Grant, 23, was raised by his grandmother in Pojoaque, NM. Grant left behind a fiancee, a young daughter, and a young son.

SGT Tommy Gray, 34, of Roswell, NM, is remembered by his mother Joyce as having a passion for fishing and comic books. Sergeant Gray was in the Army for 15 years and is survived by his wife Rene.

Army LTC Marshall Gutierrez, 41, a native of Las Vegas, NM, died in Kuwait of non-combat related injuries on September 4, 2006. Gutierrez, a 1983 graduate of West Las Vegas High School and a 1987 graduate of New Mexico Highlands University, was assigned to the Area Support Group in Arijan, Kuwait.

Marine LCpl Shane Harris, 23, was always willing to do anything for anyone, according to his coworkers. The Las Vegas, NM, native was killed in combat in al-Anbar Province, Iraq, on September 3, 2006.

Marine LCpl Chad Hildebrandt, 22, of Springer, NM was killed conducting combat operations against enemy forces in al-Rutbah, Iraq, on October 17, 2005. Classmates described Hildebrandt as a role model to younger students.

SPC Alexander Jordan, 31, died on September 10, 2006, of injuries caused by enemy small-arms fire while he was conducting a mounted patrol in Baghdad. Jordan, whose father lives in Rio Rancho, attended Cibola High School in Albuquerque and the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell.

SPC Stephen Kowalczyk, 32, lived in Albuquerque, NM, while his father served in the Air Force. While there, he graduated from Highland High School and in 2004 decided to join the Army. He is survived by his mother, a brother and four sisters.

SGT Joel Lewis, 28, of Sandia Park, NM, was serving his first tour in Iraq when he was killed by an improvised explosive device during combat operations in Baqubah. Lewis was charismatic and loved the outdoors. He enjoyed hockey, skydiving and snowboarding.

SPC Christopher Merville, 26, of Albuquerque, NM, graduated from the University of New Mexico. He had an interest in Civil War history and toured civil war battlegrounds with his uncle.

SPC James Pirtle, 27, of La Mesa, NM, planned to return home in January of 2004 to I pick up where he left off with his wife, two stepsons, and a baby girl. His mother said of James, ''My son was my hero before he went in; now he is the world's hero.''

LCpl Christopher Ramos, 26, of Albuquerque, NM, was killed in al-Anbar Province. His wife Diana said that Chritopher was her best friend, a wonderful husband, and a great father.

PFC Mario Reyes, 19, of Las Cruces, NM, assigned to the 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fort Carson, Colorado was killed November 7, 2005, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his dismounted patrol in Baghdad.

Marine Sgt Moses Rocha, 33, helped make his friends stronger people just by being near them. The Roswell native was serving his second tour in Iraq when he was killed by militant fire. His is survived by his teenaged daughter.

SSG Joseph Rodriguez, 25, played football and Rugby as a teen in Las Cruces, NM. His mother remembers her son doing well in math classes at school, and he would always add up numbers for her in his head. He is survived by his wife Leslie, and their son Ethan.

PFC Ricky Salas, 22, called Roswell his home with his wife April, and their two young children. He was killed March 7, 2006, when the vehicle he was in was hit by an improvised explosive devise and overturned in Mosul, Iraq.

Marine LCpl Emilian Sanchez, 20, of Santa Ana Pueblo, was proud of his Native American heritage and carried eagle feathers with him to Iraq. He was killed during combat operations in al-Anbar Province, Iraq, on January 21, 2007.

Army SGT Leroy Segura, 23, of Clovis, NM, loved his grandmother's homemade tortillas and his mother's menudo. He helped his high school win the district cross country title in 2000.

SPC Clifford Spohn, 21, of Albuquerque, NM, graduated from Cibola High School in 2004 and joined the Army the following October. He leaves behind a wife and 4-year old daughter.

SPC Jeremy Stacey, 23, joined the Army in 2003 in Albuquerque, NM. Stacey died on July 5, 2007, and was posthumously promoted to the rank of corporal and awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. His mother resides in Los Lunas, NM.

Army Medic SGT Lee Todacheene, 29, was a proud member of the Navajo Nation. His father said that, ''He respected himself and everybody. He was generous and kind, and he loved his family above everything else.'' Todacheene is survived by his wife and his 11- and 12-year-old sons.

Army SGT Eric Vizcaino, 21, of Albuquerque, NM, left behind a young wife and 2-year-old daughter. His father asked his son to consider leaving the Army after his deployment, but Sergeant Vizcaino wanted to remain a soldier.

Marine LCpl Jeremy West, 20, was born in Albuquerque, NM, and served in both Afghanistan and Iraq. He was the grandson of Tim Kline, a former Albuquerque city councilor and Albuquerque Police Department police lieutenant.

Army SGT Marshall Westbrook, 43, a Farmington, NM, native and Army National Guard military police officer, is survived by his wife Jolene and their five children. He was described as a gentle giant by a close friend in his military police unit.

SPC Clifton Yazzie, 23, of Fruitland, NM, was killed January 20, 2006, during his second tour of duty when a roadside bomb exploded near his humvee in Al Huwijah, Iraq. Yazzie, a 2001 graduate of Kirtland Central High School, was a member of the 101 st Airborne Division. His loss is mourned by his wife, his two children, his parents, and the Navajo Nation.

Army CPL Jesse Zamora, 22, a native of Las Cruces, NM, was killed on February 3, 2006, during his second tour of duty when he was hit by a piece of shrapnel from a roadside bomb near his humvee in Beiji, Iraq. A 2002 graduate of Mayfield High School, his brother Tyrel was also serving in Iraq when he was killed. Zamora was awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze star during his second tour.

Army CPL Jose Zamora, 24, was looking forward to returning to his family and his wedding when he was killed in Iraq on August 6, 2006. He was raised in Sunland Park, NM.

Marine MAJ Douglas Zembiec, 34, of Albuquerque, NM, served in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Iraq and had been awarded the Bronze Star, a Purple Heart, a Navy Commendation with Gold Star and a Navy Achievement medal. A 1991 graduate of La Cueva High School, Zembiec was killed on May 11, 2007, during combat operations in Baghdad, Iraq. He is survived by his wife and his daughter.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise to express my disappointment in this all-night session and the attempt to call this PR stunt progress for our troops. It is clear that some in this Chamber are putting rhetoric before results. Our troops in Iraq continue to pay the price of political rhetoric in Washington, DC.

I believe my colleagues truly care about our troops and I share their desire to have all of our troops home as soon as possible. To endorse a strategy of withdrawing troops in 120 days after this bill passes, however, undermines those very troops. We make it even more difficult for them to achieve their mission. With today's rapid communication made possible by the Internet, cell phones, and other technologies, what we say here can almost instantaneously find its way around the world and straight to the camps of both friends and foes—and they are both watching. In fact, I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that the whole world is watching to see what we will decide to do.

Ambassador Ryan Crocker, our U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, has made some very interesting comments that I find valuable. He, like our military commanders in Iraq, is in the best position to give us in Washington a true assessment of the situation on the ground. Ambassador Crocker has stated that he could see the Iraqi Government achieve none of the debaathification benchmarks and yet have a situation of stability and progress. At the same time, we could see a situation where all benchmarks are achieved and yet have an unstable and unsecure nation.

In statements on this floor, I have discussed the goals of benchmarks for the Iraqi Government—and I continue to believe we should be setting those goals. We should be helping the Iraqi Government achieve them. But we cannot expect the Iraqi Government to exist in a vacuum where our American ideals of democracy will simply exist in 1 day, 1 month, or 1 year.

I have also recently read an article by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in the Washington Post. Dr. Kissinger wrote about the centuries-long struggles between the Sunni, Shiia, and Kurdish populations in Iraq. He, too, points out that it is unrealistic to expect these groups to, in a matter of a few years, forget hundreds of years of conflict and work together in our timeframe.

I will ask that three articles be printed in the RECORD.

The people of the United States and certainly the members of the Senate should continue to press for progress being made by the Iraqi Government. We should provide our troops and our civilian representatives on the ground in Iraq with the resources they need to assist the Iraqis in achieving a secure and stable state. We must not undermine their efforts in attempt to score political points.

An assessment of military actions will be released in September. When that assessment is made by those on the ground in Iraq, I will carefully evaluate what their determinations mean for the future of America's troops serving in Iraq.

I want to close by expressing my heartfelt thanks to all of the men and women serving in our U.S. Armed Forces. You are all true heroes. You have volunteered to defend our Nation, our freedom, and our way of life. For those of you deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world, I hope you know the difference you are making in the lives of the people around you. Your families, friends, and the people of America are safer because of the work you are doing.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the articles to which I referred be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Wall Street Journal, May 16, 2007]

WAS OSAMA RIGHT?

(By Bernard Lewis)

During the Cold War, two things came to be known and generally recognized in the Middle East concerning the two rival superpowers. If you did anything to annoy the Russians, punishment would be swift and dire. If you said or did anything against the Americans, not only would there be no punishment; there might even be some possibility of reward, as the usual anxious procession of diplomats and politicians, journalists and scholars and miscellaneous others came with their usual pleading inquiries: ''What have we done to offend you? What can we do to put it right?''

A few examples may suffice. During the troubles in Lebanon in the 1970s and '80s, there were many attacks on American installations and individuals—notably the attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, followed by a prompt withdrawal, and a whole series of kidnapping of Americans, both official and private, as well as of Europeans. There was only one attack on Soviet citizens, when one diplomat was killed and several others kidnapped. The Soviet response through their local agents was swift, and directed against the family of the leader of the kidnappers. The kidnapped Russians were promptly released, and after that there were no attacks on Soviet citizens or installations throughout the period of the Lebanese troubles.

These different responses evoked different treatment. While American policies, institutions and individuals were subject to unremitting criticism and sometimes deadly attack, the Soviets were immune. Their retention of the vast, largely Muslim, colonial empire accumulated by the tsars in Asia passed unnoticed, as did their propaganda and sometimes action against Muslim beliefs and institutions.

Most remarkable of all was the response of the Arab and other Muslim countries to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Washington's handling of the Tehran hostage crisis assured the Soviets that they had nothing to fear from the U.S. They already knew that they need not worry about the Arab and other Muslim governments. The Soviets already ruled—or misruled—half a dozen Muslim countries in Asia, without arousing any opposition or criticism. Initially, their decision and action to invade and conquer Afghanistan and install a puppet regime in Kabul went almost unresisted. After weeks of debate, the U.N. General Assembly finally was persuaded to pass a resolution ''strongly deploring the recent armed intervention in Afghanistan.'' The words ''condemn'' and ''aggression'' were not used, and the source of the ''intervention'' was not named. Even this anodyne resolution was too much for some of the Arab states. South Yemen voted no; Algeria and Syria abstained; Libya was absent; the non-voting PLO observer to the Assembly even made a speech defending the Soviets.

One might have expected that the recently established Organization of the Islamic Conference would take a tougher line. It did not. After a month of negotiation and manipulation, the Organization finally held a meeting in Pakistan to discuss the Afghan question. Two of the Arab states, South Yemen and Syria, boycotted the meeting. The representative of the PLO, a full member of this organization, was present, but abstained from voting on a resolution critical of the Soviet action; the Libyan delegate went further, and used this occasion to denounce the U.S.

The Muslim willingness to submit to Soviet authority, though widespread, was not unanimous. The Afghan people, who had successfully defied the British Empire in its prime, found a way to resist the Soviet invaders. An organization known as the Taliban (literally, ''the students'') began to organize resistance and even guerilla warfare against the Soviet occupiers and their puppets. For this, they were able to attract some support from the Muslim world—some grants of money, and growing numbers of volunteers to fight in the Holy War against the infidel conqueror. Notable among these was a group led by a Saudi of Yemeni origin called Osama bin Laden.

To accomplish their purpose, they did not disdain to turn to the U.S. for help, which they got. In the Muslim perception there has been, since the time of the Prophet, an ongoing struggle between the two world religions, Christendom and Islam, for the privilege and opportunity to bring salvation to the rest of humankind, removing whatever obstacles there might be in their path. For a long time, the main enemy was seen, with some plausibility, as being the West, and some Muslims were, naturally enough, willing to accept what help they could get against that enemy. This explains the widespread support in the Arab countries and in some other places first for the Third Reich and, after its collapse, for the Soviet Union. These were the main enemies of the West, and therefore natural allies.

Now the situation had changed. The more immediate, more dangerous enemy was the Soviet Union, already ruling a number of Muslim countries, and daily increasing its influence and presence in others. It was therefore natural to seek and accept American help. As Osama bin Laden explained, in this final phase of the millennial struggle, the world of the unbelievers was divided between two superpowers. The first task was to deal with the more deadly and more dangerous of the two, the Soviet Union. After that, dealing with the pampered and degenerate Americans would be easy.

We in the Western world see the defeat and collapse of the Soviet Union as a Western, more specifically an American, victory in the Cold War. For Osama bin Laden and his followers, it was a Muslim victory in a jihad, and, given the circumstances, this perception does not lack plausibility.

From the writings and the speeches of Osama bin Laden and his colleagues, it is clear that they expected this second task, dealing with America, would be comparatively simple and easy. This perception was certainly encouraged and so it seemed, confirmed by the American response to a whole series of attacks—on the World Trade Center in New York and on U.S. troops in Mogadishu in 1993, on the U.S. military office in Riyadh in 1995, on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, on the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen in 2000—all of which evoked only angry words, sometimes accompanied by the dispatch of expensive missiles to remote and uninhabited places.

Stage One of the jihad was to drive the infidels from the lands of Islam; Stage Two—to bring the war into the enemy camp, and the attacks of 9/11 were clearly intended to be the opening salvo of this stage. The response to 9/11, so completely out of accord with previous American practice, came as a shock, and it is noteworthy that there has been no successful attack on American soil since then. The U.S. actions in Afghanistan and in Iraq indicated that there had been a major change in the U.S., and that some revision of their assessment, and of the policies based on that assessment, was necessary.

More recent developments, and notably the public discourse inside the U.S., are persuading increasing numbers of Islamist radicals that their first assessment was correct after all, and that they need only to press a little harder to achieve final victory. It is not yet clear whether they are right or wrong in this view. If They are right, the consequences—both for Islam and for America—will be deep, wide and lasting.

[From the Wall Street Journal, July 12, 2007]

THE ''BENCHMARK'' EXCUSE

Ryan Crocker, the U.S. Ambassador in Iraq, is a 36-year career diplomat who has served under seven administrations in Iran, Syria, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Pakistan. He's no partisan gunslinger. So it's worth listening to his views as Congressional Democrats and a growing number of Republicans press for a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq on the excuse that the Iraqi government hasn't met a set of political ''benchmarks.''

''The longer I'm here, the more I'm persuaded that Iraq cannot be analyzed by these kinds of discrete benchmarks,'' Mr. Crocker told the New York Times's John Burns in an interview on Saturday, referring to pending Iraqi legislation on an oil-sharing agreement and a relaxation of de-Baathification laws. ''You could not achieve any of them, and still have a situation where arguably the country is moving in the right direction. And conversely, I think you could achieve them all and still not be heading towards stability, security and overall success in Iraq.''

Mr. Crocker's comments are a useful reminder of the irrelevance—and disingenuousness—of much Washington commentary on Iraq. For proponents of early withdrawal, the ''benchmarking'' issue has provided a handy excuse to make the Iraqi government rather than al Qaeda the main culprit in the violence engulfing their country. A forthcoming Administration report indicating lagging political progress is certain to be seized on by Congress as it takes up a defense spending bill and debates an amendment ordering troop withdrawals by the fall. A proposal to mandate extended times between deployments (and thus force withdrawal) failed narrowly in the Senate yesterday, though not before winning the support of seven Republicans.

Nobody claims the Iraqi government is a model of democratic perfection, or that Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is the second coming of Lincoln. We advised the White House not to lobby against his predecessor.

But Mr. Maliki's government is democratic and more inclusive than most reporting suggests, and it is fighting for its life against an enemy that uses car bombs and suicide bombers as its policy instruments. In an interview this week in the New York Post, General David Petraeus noted that while the performance of the Iraqi Army has been mixed, ''their losses in June were three times ours.'' To suggest that Iraqis aren't willing to fight for their freedom is an insult to their families.

General Petraeus also noted that ''the level of sectarian deaths in Baghdad in June was the lowest in about a year,'' evidence that in this key battlefield the surge is making progress. As a result, al Qaeda is being forced to pick its targets in more remote areas, as it did last week in the village of Amirli near Kirkuk, where more than 100 civilians were murdered. More U.S. troops and the revolt of Sunni tribal leaders against al Qaeda are the most hopeful indicators in many months that the insurgency can be defeated.

But that isn't going to happen under the timetable now contemplated by Congress. ''I can think of few commanders in history who wouldn't have wanted more troops, more time or more unity among their partners,'' General Petraeus told the Post. ''However, if I could only have one at this point in Iraq, it would be more time.''

It's also not going to happen if Congress insists on using troop withdrawals to punish Iraqis for their supposed political delinquency. The central issue is whether the Iraqis can make those decisions without having to fear assassination as the consequence of political compromise. The more insistent Congress becomes about troop withdrawals, the more unlikely political reconciliation in Iraq becomes.

That said, it's becoming increasingly clear that the issue of reconciliation has become a smokescreen for American politicians who care for their own political fortunes far more than they do about the future of Iraq or the consequences of Iraq's collapse for U.S. interests in the Middle East. Here again, they could stand to listen to Mr. Crocker.

''You can't build a whole policy on a fear of a negative, but, boy, you've really got to account for it,'' he said. ''In the States, it's like we're in the last half of the third reel of a three-reel movie, and all we have to do is decide we're done here. . . and we leave the theater and go on to something else. Whereas out here, you're just getting into the first reel of five reels, and ugly as the first reel has been, the other four and a half are going to be way, way worse.''

Mr. Crocker is referring, of course, to the possibility of far nastier violence if the U.S. departs before Iraqi security forces can maintain order. Some will denounce this as a parade of horribles designed to intimidate Congress, but we also recall some of the same people who predicted that a Communist triumph in Southeast Asia would yield only peace, not the ''boat people'' and genocide. Those Americans demanding a U.S. retreat in Iraq will be directly responsible for whatever happens next.

[From the Washington Post, July 10, 2007]

THE WAY BACK FROM IRAQ

(By Henry A. Kissinger)

The war in Iraq is approaching a kind of self-imposed climax. Public disenchantment is palpable. The expressions of concern by the widely admired Sen. Richard Lugar (R–Ind.) are a case in point. On the other hand, a democratic public eventually holds its leaders responsible for bringing about disasters, even if the decisions that caused the disaster reflected the public's preferences of the moment. And precipitate withdrawal would produce such a disaster. It would not end the war but shift it to other areas, such as Lebanon, Jordan or Saudi Arabia. The war between Iraqi factions would intensify. The demonstration of American impotence would embolden radical Islamism and further radicalize its disciples from Indonesia and India to the suburbs of European capitals. Whatever our domestic timetables, the collapse of the American effort in Iraq would be a geopolitical calamity.

We face a number of paradoxes. Military victory, in the sense of establishing a government capable of enforcing its writ throughout Iraq, is not possible in a time frame tolerated by the American political process. Yet no political solution is conceivable in isolation from the situation on the ground. What America and the world need is not unilateral withdrawal but a vision by the Bush administration of a sustainable political end to the conflict.

Traditionally, diplomacy strives to discover common goals and distill them into a workable compromise. What distinguishes the diplomacy on Iraq is that, in the end, it needs to distill a common approach from common fears. Each of the parties—the United States, the internal parties, Iraq's neighbors, the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—face the reality that if they pursue their preferred objectives, the cauldron of Iraq may overflow and engulf the region. The United States and most of Iraq's neighbors have powerful national interests in preventing the emergence of terrorist training areas in Iraq. None of Iraq's neighbors, not even Iran, is in a position to dominate the situation against the opposition of all other interested parties. Is it possible to build a sustainable outcome on such considerations?

The answer must be sought on three levels: internal, regional and international.

The internal parties—the Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds—have been subjected to insistent American appeals to achieve national reconciliation. But groups that have been conducting blood feuds with each other for centuries are, not surprisingly, struggling in their efforts to resolve their differences by constitutional means. They need the buttress of a diplomatic process that could provide international support for carrying out any internal agreements reached or to contain conflict if the internal parties cannot agree and Iraq breaks up.

Though much media attention focuses on which countries should be involved in the diplomacy, the real debate should start with the substance of what the diplomacy is meant to achieve.

The American goal should be an international agreement regarding the status of Iraq. It would test whether Iraq's neighbors as well as some more distant countries are prepared to translate general concepts into converging policies. It would provide a legal and political framework to resist violations. These are the meaningful benchmarks against which to test American withdrawals.

Such a diplomacy might prove feasible because the continuation of Iraq's current crisis presents all of Iraq's neighbors with mounting problems. The longer the war rages the more likely the breakup of the country into sectarian units. Turkey has repeatedly emphasized that it would resist such a breakup by force because of the radicalizing impact a Kurdish state could have a Turkey's large Kurdish population. But this would bring Turkey into unwanted conflict with the United States and open a Pandora's box of other interventions.

Saudi Arabia and Jordan dread Shiite domination of Iraq, especially if the Baghdad regime threatens to become a satellite of Iran. The various Gulf sheikdoms the largest of which is Kuwait, find themselves in an even more threatened position. Their interest is to help calm the Iraq turmoil and avert Iranian domination of the region.

Syria's attitudes are likely to be more ambivalent. Its ties to Iran represent both a claim to status and a looming vulnerability. It goes along with Iranian-dominated Hezbollah in Lebanon to reduce Western influence, but it fears confrontation with the United States and even more with Israel, should the region run out of control.

Given a wise and determined American diplomacy, even Iran might be brought to conclude that the risks of continued turmoil outweigh the temptations before it. To be sure, Iranian leaders may believe that the moment is uniquely favorable to realize millennial visions of a reincarnated Persian empire or a reversal of the Shiite-Sunni split under Shiite domination. On the other hand, if prudent leaders exist—which remains to be determined—they may conclude that they had better treat these advantages as a bargaining chip in a negotiation rather than risk them in a contest over domination of the region. However divided America may appear and however irresolute Europe, geopolitical realities are bound to assert themselves. The industrial countries cannot permit their access to the principal region of energy supply to be controlled by a country with Iran's revolutionary and taunting foreign policy. No American president will, in the end, acquiesce once the full consequences of Iranian domination of the region become apparent. Russia will have its own reasons, principally fear of the radicalization of its Islamic minority, to begin resisting Iranian and radical Islamist domination of the Gulf.

Combined with the international controversy over its nuclear weapons program, Iran's challenge could come to be perceived by its leaders as posing excessive risks. This is probably why Iran (and Syria) seem to be edging toward dialogue with the United States and why a genuine mutual interest may arise in such a dialogue.

Whether or whenever Iran reaches these conclusions, two conditions will have to be met: First, no serious diplomacy can be based on the premise that the United States is the supplicant. America and its allies must demonstrate a determination to vindicate their vital interests that Iran will find credible. Second, the United States will need to put forward a diplomatic position that acknowledges the legitimate security interests of an Iran that accepts the existing order in the Gulf rather than strives to overthrow it.

Such a negotiation must be initiated within a multilateral forum. A dramatic bilateral Iranian-U.S. negotiation would magnify all of the region's insecurities. If Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait—which have entrusted their security primarily to the United States—become convinced that an Iranian-U.S. condominium is looming, a race for Tehran's favor may bring about the disintegration of all resolve. America needs to resist the siren song of a U.S.-Iranian condominium. Within a multilateral framework, the United States will be able to conduct individual conversations with the key participants.

Its purpose should be to define the international status of the emerging Iraqi political structure into a series of reciprocal obligations. In such a scheme, the U.S.-led multinational force would be gradually transformed into an agent of that arrangement, also the lines of the Bosnian settlement in the Balkans or the Afghan structure. International forces would be established along Iraq's frontiers to block infiltration. Until this point is reached, U.S. forces should be deployed to have the greatest impact on the

issues of greatest concern to America—the creation of terrorist bases or the emergence of a terrorist regime—and in numbers appropriate to their mission.

A forum for diplomacy already exists in the foreign minister's conference that met recently at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, and that has agreed to reassemble in Istanbul at a date yet to be determined. It is in the United States' interest to turn the conference into a working enterprise under strong, if discreet, American leadership.

Such a diplomacy is the context for a reliable exit strategy. It would also provide a framework for the eventual participation of friendly countries with a big stake in the outcome. No nation is more seriously threatened by radicalized Islamism than India. Its large Muslim population might be tempted from the democratic path by the success of radical Islamists in the Middle East. Other countries with interests in a moderate outcome are Indonesia and Malaysia. They could be involved in a peacekeeping role once a regional agreement exists.

All this suggests a three-tiered international effort; an intensified negotiation among the Iraqi parties; a regional forum like the Sharm el-Sheikh conference to elaborate an international transition status for Iraq; and a broader conference to establish the peacekeeping and verification dimensions.

Neither the international system not American public opinion will accept as a permanent arrangement an American enclave maintained exclusively by American military power in so volatile a region. The concept outlined here seeks to establish a new international framework for Iraq. It is an outcome emerging from the political and military situation there and not from artificial deadlines.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I voted against the Cornyn amendment because it significantly misrepresents the NIE because it makes assumptions about what may happen in Iraq that are speculative, and because it represents the same failed mindset that has resulted in the current disaster in Iraq. While the dangers of Iraq becoming a failed state are real, this amendment seeks to justify the current massive and indefinite U.S. military presence in that country, which is an unacceptable distraction and diversion of resources from the fight against al-Qaida and its affiliates worldwide.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, yesterday the Senate voted on an amendment offered by Senator CORNYN, amendment No. 2100, that states, in part, that it is the Sense of the Senate that the ''Senate should not pass legislation that will undermine our military's ability to prevent a failed state in Iraq.'' I opposed that amendment, but my vote should not be viewed as a lack of concern for the consequences of a failed Iraqi state.

I agree that it is not in the interest of the United States for Iraq and the rest of the Middle East to devolve into total chaos, and no one in this body argues differently. However, I opposed the amendment because it suggests that the United States Senate will be bound to a policy of supporting an endless U.S. military involvement in Iraq. By implying that it is our military's responsibility to prevent a failed state in Iraq, the Cornyn amendment suggests that it is up to our service men and women, now and into the future, to undo the missteps of an ill-conceived adventure directed by a reckless President.

The amendment fails to define what exactly a ''failed state'' is, nor how the U.S. military should go about preventing one. Some may not have noticed, but Iraq is perilously close to a reasonable definition of ''failed state'' already. In the third annual ''failed state'' index, analysts for Foreign Policy magazine and the not-for-profit Fund for Peace said Iraq is now the second most unstable country in the world. Its standing deteriorated from last year's fourth place on a list of the 10 nations most vulnerable to violent internal conflict and worsening conditions.

Mr. President, I feel that we should be relentless in our efforts to bring Osama bin Laden to justice and to vanquish the al-Qaida terror network. This amendment, however, does not say anything new, and it does not imply a change in U.S. policy. What it does, however, is suggest that if the failing situation in Iraq does not improve, if the Iraqi government does not step up, if the sectarian violence that has persisted for over a millennia does not abate, the U.S. Senate should not take action that would allow us to modify the mission or withdraw forces—ever. That, Mr. President, is an extremely unwise and imprudent statement and an even more unwise policy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I wish to propound a unanimous consent request. I will take just a moment.

Mr. CORNYN. I yield for that purpose.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant majority leader is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that after the Senator from Texas speaks, I be given the time until 10:20 a.m., and that it be taken from Senator REID's time previously agreed to in the unanimous consent agreement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I do not intend to object, but merely point out that it is my understanding I have 15 minutes, from now until 10:20 a.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from Texas has been given 10 minutes.

Mr. CORNYN. I have no objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I am struck by the fact that during the course of this debate on the Levin-Reed amendment some Senators seem to take the attitude that our presence in Iraq is merely optional, that we can choose to do whatever we want to do without regard to the consequences. I think of those consequences, as 94 Senators indicated yesterday by their vote on the sense-of-the-Senate amendment that said we would do no act that would make it more likely that Iraq would end up in a failed state because the danger that poses to our national security. I don't believe our presence in Iraq is merely optional.

I do not agree with our colleagues who seem to say that, well, the only thing missing is enough pressure on the Iraqi political leadership to get their act together, and if they would do what the American Congress wants them to do on the timetable the American Congress thinks is appropriate, then we are going to pull the plug, we are going to leave Iraq, and leave Iraqis to themselves, as if the consequences of that action would be borne only by the Iraqis. In fact, I believe the consequences of that action would be disastrous to American national security, as well as to the region in the Middle East.

So I do not believe it is merely a matter of putting more pressure on the Iraqis. As a matter of fact, I marvel at the irony of Members of the Senate saying after decades of living under a brutal dictator and the literal genocide that had resulted from the murders he carried out and the suppression of the Shiite majority by the Sunni minority under the Baath party, that somehow this new democracy can spring to life as our democracy has after 231 years and solve these problems. Such as, why can't they pass a law that says we will share the oil revenue, while we have been unsuccessful in solving the insolvency of our Social Security system. They suggest there needs to be reconciliation overnight between the Shiites and Sunnis when it took us well over 100 years and a civil war in which 600,000 Americans died for the civil rights movement to take root and to overcome the scourge of slavery.

I think some of my colleagues are taking an unrealistic approach when it comes to how fast we expect this new democracy to take the political steps to solve some of these problems. And, of course, they cannot do it unless basic security is provided—security for them and security for us.

That is why it is important that we not listen to the armchair generals here in Washington, DC, with very little military experience in fighting and winning wars. It is one reason why we need to listen to the generals on the ground, people such as GEN David Petraeus and others who have stated very clearly what the consequences of failure will be to the United States.

I also marvel at the short memories of some of my colleagues who said we should not have gone into Iraq in the first place after 77 Senators in this body voted to authorize the President to do that. Do they forget the fact that Saddam Hussein defied, I think it was 16 or 17 United Nations resolutions to open up his country to weapons inspectors from the United Nations, and the concern, of course, post-9/11 that Saddam was developing chemical, nuclear, or biological weapons and that he

would share that technology with terrorists such as al-Qaida?

And the idea that al-Qaida has sprung up in Iraq overnight, not because of the conditions created under Saddam or postwar Iraq, but because of something we did, to me is an amazing allegation. So it is America that is to blame for al-Qaida being in Iraq. That, I suppose, is the allegation.

I am glad to see at least our colleagues do acknowledge that al-Qaida is in Iraq, and, of course, we are met today with the news that the top al-Qaida figure in Iraq was captured. Adding information from him indicates the group's foreign-based leadership wields considerable influence over the country of Iraq.

I don't see how colleagues can vote in favor of the Levin-Reed amendment, which calls for a rapid withdrawal of forces before the Iraqis are able to stabilize their own country and are able to defend themselves and at the same time vote for the amendment we voted on yesterday, which was adopted 94 to 3, saying we are not going to take any action which makes it more likely that Iraq will become a failed state because as the National Intelligence Estimate and the Iraq Study Group indicated, a failed state in Iraq means a free hand for al-Qaida. A free hand for al-Qaida in Iraq makes Iraq less safe, but it also makes America less safe because, as we all know, war is an interactive affair. We can quit fighting, but it doesn't mean our enemy will. Of course, were we to bring our troops home, as all of us want to do, the only question is whether we are going to do it based on an arbitrary timetable with the risk of a failed state or whether we are going to do it based on conditions on the ground and with the objective of leaving Iraq with the capability to govern and defend itself.

The question is, are we going to bring our troops home at a time and in such a manner as it increases the likelihood that Iraq will descend into a failed state with, of course, the opportunity for al-Qaida to regroup, to recruit, to train, and then export further terrorist attacks to the United States? This is the reality. Were we to leave Iraq before it has the capability to defend and govern itself, our enemies would simply follow us here.

It is almost as if some of our colleagues want to pull the covers over their head and pretend if they do so, if we ignore the threat, it will go away. Unfortunately, life is not that simple. Nor is the threat illusory, as some of our colleagues indicate.

So it is important that the Levin-Reed amendment be defeated, that we not set an arbitrary timetable to tie the hands of GEN David Petraeus with this new strategy that has recently been completed—that is, the surge of troops and the operational surge underway—and with the kind of success we have seen turning Anbar Province around, a place that previously no one could go because al-Qaida basically ruled the roost. Now we are starting to see some signs of success there and hopefully begin to let the counterinsurgency strategy that General Petraeus was sent over to execute, one that will allow our troops and the Iraqis to clear the threat, to then hold the area, and then to allow the political operatives in Iraq the space in which to do the important reconciliation that we all know is essential to the long-term success and stabilization of that country.

This is a historic vote we will be having in a few minutes, and I hope our colleagues will vote in the interest of American national security, will vote in the interest of doing nothing that would increase the likelihood of a failed state and providing al-Qaida an additional foothold and operating space within Iraq.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant majority leader is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, yesterday in Chicago, Eric Lill was laid to rest. Eric Lill grew up in the Bridgeport neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. He watched the White Sox. He ate Connie's pizza. On September 11, he was moved to enlist in the Army. He left in February of 2002 to serve, and in his second deployment in Iraq, he was killed by a roadside bomb.

On Sunday, SPC Eric Lill came home from Iraq in a flag-draped coffin. He was 28 years old. He leaves behind a 6-year-old son and a 4-year-old daughter.

Eric Lill's story is a story repeated thousands of times across America during the course of this war, 150 times in my home State of Illinois—stories of bravery and heroism. There are also 30,000 stories of injured Americans who have come home with amputations and traumatic brain injuries, some whose lives will never be the same. They are our patriots, our heroes, and we salute them.

Across the street from Eric Lill's house on the south side of Chicago is the home of his grandmother, Marlene Alvarado. Specialist Lill used to call his grandmother every Saturday from Iraq to tell her he was safe. This morning, Mrs. Alvarado looks out her front window over at her grandson's house still decorated with yellow ribbons.

During the course of this 4½-year war, a war that has lasted longer than World War II, there have been many yellow ribbons, there have been many flag-draped caskets, and there have been many broken Iraqi promises.

I listened to the speeches from the other side of the aisle pleading with us to be patient with the Iraqis; the time will come when they will lead their nation forward. I could give the Iraqis patience if it weren't patience paid for in the lives and blood of American servicemen. We have been patient for 4½ years. It is time for the Iraqis to stand and defend their own nation.

It is time for honesty, not bravado. It is time for realism, not fantasy. This war was born in deception. At the highest levels of our Government, it has been waged with incompetence and arrogance. Sadly, it is the most serious foreign policy mistake of our time. This war will not end if we depend on the insight or the humility of our President.

We, those of us who are Members of the Senate, must speak for the American people. We must speak for our war-weary soldiers, and we must bring this war to an end. At the end of this debate, there will be a vote on an amendment, the only amendment which will bring our soldiers home and end this war responsibly.

I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to join us in this bipartisan effort.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. For what purpose does the Senator from Illinois rise?

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 1 minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator is recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, we have had an extensive debate, obviously, on the floor of the Senate. I was scheduled originally to speak at 6 a.m. Because there was an enormous backlog, I have not had an opportunity to speak on this issue.

I rise this morning in strong support of the amendment offered by Senators LEVIN and REED. I am proud to join them as a cosponsor of this amendment.

We have heard from the administration and from many of our colleagues in this Chamber that we need to give the President's surge more time, that we need to wait to hear the report in September before we make a binding decision to redeploy our troops. Yet, we learned just last week that the Iraqi political leaders have not met a single benchmark that they had agreed to in January. Not one.

We do not need to wait for another report. We have seen the results of a failed policy in the form of multiple deployments, more sacrifice from our military families, and a deepening civil war in Iraq that has caught our troops in the middle.

It is long past time to turn the page in Iraq, where each day we see the consequences of fighting a war that should never have been authorized and should never have been waged. The single most important decision a President or Member of Congress can make is the decision to send our troops into harm's way.

It is that decision that determines the fate of our men and women in uniform, the course of nations, and the security of the American people. It is that decision that sets in motion consequences that cannot be undone.

Since this war began, 3,618 Americans have been killed—532 since the President ignored the will of the American people and launched his surge. Tens of thousands more have been wounded,

suffering terrible injuries seen and unseen.

Here is what else we know: We know that the surge is not working, that our mission in Iraq must be changed, and that this war must be brought to a responsible conclusion.

We know Iraq's leaders are not resolving their grievances. They are not stepping up to their security responsibilities. They are not improving the daily lives of Iraqis.

We know that the war in Iraq costs us $370 million a day and $10 billion each month. These are resources that could be spent to secure our ports and our borders, and to focus on a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan and the wider war on terrorism that is yet to be won.

We know that because of the war in Iraq, America is no safer than it was on 9/11. Al-Qaida has gained the best recruiting tool it could ask for. Tens of thousands of terrorists have been trained and radicalized in Iraq. And terrorism is up worldwide.

If America is attacked again, it will be in no small measure a consequence of our failure to destroy al-Qaida at its roots in Afghanistan and our failure to adequately secure the homeland. The decision to authorize and fight a misguided war in Iraq has created a new cadre of experienced terrorists bent on the destruction of the United States and our allies.

If there is still any question about whether Iraq has been a distraction from this critical war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, that should have been resolved yesterday with the release of the most recent national intelligence estimate. That report said that al-Qaida ''has protected or regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability, including: a safe haven in the Pakistan Federally Administered Tribal Areas, operational lieutenants, and its top leadership.''

And last week, a new threat assessment concluded that al-Qaida is as strong today as it was before 9/11.

Seeing yet another report like this, I can only repeat what I said nearly 5 years ago, during the runup to this war. We are fighting on the wrong battlefield. The terrorists who attacked us and who continue to plot against us are resurgent in the hills between Afghanistan and Pakistan. They should have been our focus then. They must be our focus now.

I opposed this war from the beginning, before the Congress voted to authorize the war in 2002. I said then that I could not support a war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics. I worried that it would lead to a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences.

I believed then—and I still believe now—that being a leader means that you'd better do what's right and leave the politics aside. Because there are no do-overs on an issue as important as war. You cannot undo the consequences of that decision.

In January, I introduced a plan that would have already started bringing our troops home and ending this war, with a goal of removing all combat brigades by March 31, 2008. Seventy-eight days ago, President Bush vetoed a bipartisan plan that passed both Houses of Congress that shared my goal of changing course and ending this war.

During those 78 days, 266 Americans have died, and the situation in Iraq has continued to deteriorate.

It is time to set a hard date to signal a new mission in Iraq and to begin to bring our troops home. It is time to ensure that we complete the change in mission and the drawdown of our forces, by the end of April 2008—a date that is consistent with the date in my plan back in January.

As we redeploy from Iraq—as I believe we must do—we have to redouble our efforts on all fronts in Afghanistan to ensure we do not lose ground there.

Certainly, we have had some success there over the last 5½ years, whether it is the five-fold increase in the number of Afghan boys and girls now attending schools or the free elections of a president and parliament.

Yet the remaining challenges in Afghanistan are enormous:

Opium production is expected to reach a record high this year, with revenues helping to fuel the Taliban and al-Qaida; the Taliban has increased its campaign of suicide attacks and roadside bombings in recent months; most troubling is this simple fact: The leaders of al-Qaida—Osama bin Laden and his lieutenant Ayman Al-Zawahiri, and the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, remain at large. They are now free to operate in a safe haven in northwest Pakistan.

That has to change.

First, the United States must increase reconstruction efforts, on both the civilian and military side. If we are serious about winning the war on terror, we must shift to greater investments in winning the hearts and minds of Afghans. The U.S. should allocate money in a way that allows more flexibility in our spending, permitting funding of local projects that benefit communities and promising local governments.

Second, the United States and NATO must turn around the security situation so that average Afghans regain their faith in the ability of their government and the international forces to ensure their security. Despite more than 5 years of an international military presence in their country, the sad reality is that most Afghans do not believe their government can guarantee their safety.

Taliban violence is on the rise, and is reaching into areas of the country, like the north, that had been relatively stable until a few months ago. Secretary Gates' commitment of an additional 3,200 American combat troops and the U.K. commitment of at least 1,000 new troops were positive steps. But we must also encourage other NATO allies to supply more troops and withdraw the caveats that prevent some NATO forces from assisting allies in the most dangerous parts of Afghanistan.

Third, the Afghan Government, with our help, must do more to respond to the needs of its people, starting by combating its culture of impunity and rampant corruption. The Afghan people will never trust their government unless it begins effectively to combat the lawlessness that has long plagued the Afghan countryside.

Fourth, in order to make headway against corruption, the United States and our allies must revamp our counternarcotics efforts. For too long, the United States and NATO have combated this issue with, at best, half measures, and we now face a situation where the drug trade is exacerbating instability with drug revenues funding the insurgency.

Finally, any possibility of long-term stability in Afghanistan depends on addressing cross-border issues with Pakistan and other neighbors.

Simply put, Pakistan is not doing enough to deal with al-Qaida and Taliban safe havens within its borders. In the past months, Pakistan has arrested or killed several high value targets, but its overall record remains poor. Any solution must take the fiercely independent tribal culture of the border region into account. And we should ensure that when we provide money to reimburse the Pakistani military for fighting al-Qaida and the Taliban along the Afghanistan border, the Pakistani military is meeting that commitment.

The central front in the war on terrorism is not in Iraq; it is in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As we change course in Iraq, we must correct course in South Asia. And it is long past time that we did so.

But to make that change, the American people need real leadership from this Chamber—not empty rhetoric.

We are engaged in important work in the Senate. If only the willingness to work toward solutions were commensurate with the importance of the topic we are undertaking, we might make some progress. I hope that our colleagues do not choose further obstruction over progress, delay over decision.

The only point I wish to add is all of us are patriots. The Senator who is managing for the minority at this point is a certified American hero. All of us want to see our troops come home safely. All of us want the best possible result in Iraq. The only thing I would say is, given that we have no good options at this point, that we have bad options and worse options, I think it is very important for us to take this debate seriously and to recognize that none of us are interested in dictating military strategy to the President but, rather, in setting a mission for the military, and that is what this debate is about.

Given the National Intelligence Estimate that has come out, I think it is

important for us to be prudent and consider what the best steps forward are now, and that is something I hope emerges from this debate. It is my belief the best thing to do now is to vote for Reed-Levin.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed for 60 seconds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. McCAIN. Reserving the right to object, and I will not object, may the Senator from Florida also have 1 minute and the vote be delayed by the appropriate time taken by the three speakers?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Delaware is recognized.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I will make a very detailed speech after this vote laying out why I think this vote is important.

We started down this road, and we have been banging away since the Biden-Hagel-Levin-Snowe resolution back in January, to the Biden-Levin position, and now the Reed-Levin amendment, all of which are essentially the same thing. I want to make it clear that this is simply a first step. We have to keep from careening off this highway and get out of the civil war, and then we have to be in a position where we come up with a political solution so that when we leave Iraq and we bring our children home, we don't just send our grandchildren back.

I thank my colleagues for giving me this time, and as I said, when the vote is over and there is more time, I will, as passionately as I can, try to clarify what I think the situation is that we find ourselves in in Iraq and what our overall policy—not just the Levin-Reed amendment but what else we must be doing.

I thank the Chair, and I thank my colleague for his generosity, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida is recognized.

Mr. MARTINEZ. Mr. President, I thank the leader for the time allotted, and I wish to take this time to say that I do oppose the Levin-Reed amendment. I believe it is very important for the Nation at this point in time to not change course until September when we have had an opportunity to not hear from people in this Chamber but when we have an opportunity to hear from the general on the ground, General Petraeus, when he comes back and reports to us on the conditions in Iraq and what his recommendations might be.

I think this is too important. The danger to our Nation as a result of Iran's very aggressive tendencies, as well as al-Qaida's continued presence in Iraq, makes it essential that this mission not be terminated prematurely and certainly not until the time we have had the generals on the ground give us their assessment of this latest strategy, which we approved and put in place in order for us to see some progress forward.

There are signs of progress on the ground. I am encouraged by some of those things I hear in spite of the noise that doesn't allow it to break through. The fact is, it does appear things are improving somewhat on the ground. At the end of the day, the proper time for us to make a judgment is September and not now.

The amendment before us, the Levin/Reed amendment, would mandate the Bush administration begin reducing the number of troops in Iraq within 120 days and maintain only a ''limited presence'' by April.

In 120 days, can we physically reduce our troops that quickly in a safe manner? What about our equipment? Can that be done in 120 days?

The issue clearly is not our shared desire to see our troops come home safely and at the earliest time within the needs of our Nation's security. All of us want our troops home. The question is, what is the correct policy for our country in Iraq? Last week we received an interim report on the status of the situation in Iraq. To be sure, it was a mixed report—showing just half of the benchmarks being met. But let's look at that report in its proper context.

There are those who would inflate this report's significance beyond its intended purpose and use it to prod a hasty end to the war. I think those efforts are misguided. This was not a report on the impact or effectiveness of the surge. It was a status report of where Iraq stands currently on its path to peace, stability, sovereignty, and democracy. And here are the areas where there has been satisfactory progress in Iraq:

The Iraqi Government has formed a Constitutional Review Committee and they have implemented procedures to form semi-autonomous regions.

They have established support committees for the Baghdad Security Plan and they have provided three trained Iraqi brigades to support Baghdad operations.

They are insuring Baghdad is not a safe haven for outlaws, regardless of their sectarian or political affiliation.

They have established all planned joint security stations in neighborhoods across Baghdad.

They are ensuring the protection of minority political parties and they are spending $10 billion Iraqi revenues on reconstruction projects.

These are the areas where there has been satisfactory progress. But more progress remains to be seen.

They have yet to solve the issues related to debaathification reform. They have yet to implement an equitable distribution system for oil revenues.

The Iraqis have only just begun to enact new election laws. They have yet to ensure that Iraqi Security Forces, ISF, are providing even-handed enforcement of the law—and on that point, we are holding the ISF to an appropriately high standard. The problem is that there has been a tendency for some police to gravitate back to the old habits of sectarianism. Our presence is having a positive impact on ensuring that doesn't occur. And the interim report also notes there are areas where it is too early to assess progress.

So there is the status report. Take it for what it is. It is a snapshot in time about the condition of the Iraqi government and where they are on this path to stability and democratic rule. If we are going to measure progress, it is good to know how much is being made. This is that report.

To those who want to inflate it as an indicator of the effectiveness of the surge, I would say to my colleagues that the surge has only fully been in place for the last 3 weeks.

The question is what should happen between now and September when General Petraeus will report to the President. At that time the surge, now in its third week, will have had 12 weeks. That will provide a better gauge of where we are. But even then it will be a very short time. We know more time is necessary.

I am confident that by September, we will have a good assessment from GEN David Petraeus. He will know what progress the surge is making—what progress is attainable—and whether it is having the desired impact toward our common goals.

And yet despite the fact that the surge for stability is less than a month in place, despite the fact that Iraq has become a battleground where al-Qaida is doing everything they can to fight the West, here we are today, again, debating precipitous withdrawal.

The senior senator from Michigan says of his amendment, ''Beginning a phased redeployment this year will add incentives for the Iraqis to make the hard compromises necessary to bring their country together and secure it.'' I disagree.

Beginning a phased redeployment will add to the security problems. It will add to the instability. It will add to the sectarian violence and the killing. It will destroy any chance of pushing that country toward the place where we all hope it will be. It may even put our forces at risk in a defeated dangerous and humiliating defeat.

I ask those supporting this withdrawal to consider the consequences. Consider what would occur if we left Iraq right now in a 120-day timeframe dictated by politics and polls and politicians in Washington, not generals on the ground. Is this a sound strategy for our military? Can this be accomplished?

Leaving now would leave a security void in Iraq. The vacuum created would be filled by al-Qaida and Iran. The Kurds would be threatened by Turkey.

Al-Qaida would have a training ground free from the threat of military

encroachment. Sectarian fighting would create even greater loss of Iraqi lives.

We have to be cognizant of the consequences of a precipitous troop reduction and withdrawal. If we leave Iraq now—will we have to return at a later date?

We will be back fighting a larger enemy, a strengthened enemy, a more brutal enemy, an even more determined enemy emboldened by our defeat.

Our leaving Iraq right now will strengthen our enemies; namely, al-Qaida. Don't take my word for it; take the words of our military leaders on the ground.

MG Rick Lynch is quoted in recent news reports saying that American withdrawal would ''clear the way for the enemy to come back.'' He says troop pullout would ''create an environment where the enemy would come back and fill the void.''

General Lynch added that in the field, Iraqi citizens often ask two questions. The first is whether the U.S. is staying. The second is how can we help. Iraqis, tired of having their villages attacked, their homes destroyed by the so-called insurgents—are looking to America. But they want to know that we will be there if they make a commitment.

I appreciate those clear words from one of our military commanders on the ground. Would it be a good idea to consult them first? No one cares more about our troops than the officers who lead them. I rather take his view than that of a politician.

Come September we are set to receive an update from General Petraeus on the status of operations after the surge has been in place long enough for us to tell whether or not we are making the progress that needs to be made. At that point let us reassess. Are our goals attainable?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from Arizona is recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, we have nearly finished this little exhibition, which was staged, I assume, for the benefit of a briefly amused press corps and in deference to political activists who oppose the war who have come to expect from Congress such gestures, empty though they may be, as proof that the majority in the Senate has heard their demands for action to end the war in Iraq.

The outcome of this debate, the vote we are about to take, has never been in doubt to a single Member of this body and, to state the obvious, nothing we have done for the last 24 hours will have changed any facts on the ground in Iraq or made the outcome of the war any more or less important to the security of our country. The stakes in this war remain as high today as they were yesterday. The consequences of an American defeat are just as great, the cost of success just as dear. No battle will have been won or lost, no enemy captured or killed, no ground will have been taken or surrendered, no soldier will have survived or been wounded, died, or come home because we spent an entire night delivering our poll-tested message points, spinning our sound bites, arguing with each other, and substituting our amateur theatrics for statesmanship. All we have achieved is remarkably similar newspaper accounts of our inflated sense of the drama of this display and our own temporary physical fatigue. Tomorrow, the press will move on to other things and we will be better rested. But nothing else has changed.

In Iraq, the American soldiers—marines, sailors, and airmen—are still fighting bravely and tenaciously in battles that are as dangerous, difficult, and consequential as the great battles of our Armed Forces' storied past. Our enemies will still be intent on defeating us and using our defeat to encourage their followers in the jihad they wage against us, a war which will become a greater threat to us should we quit the central battlefield in defeat. The Middle East will still be a tinderbox which our defeat could ignite in a regional war that will imperil our vital interests at risk there and draw us into a longer and far more costly war. The prospect of genocide in Iraq, in which we will be morally complicit, is still as real a consequence of our withdrawal today as it was yesterday.

During our extended debate over the last few days, I have heard Senators repeat certain arguments over and over. My friends on the other side of this argument accuse those of us who oppose this amendment with advocating ''staying the course,'' which is intended to suggest that we are intent on continuing the mistakes that have put the outcome of the war in doubt. Yet we all know that with the arrival of General Petraeus, we have changed course. We are now fighting with a counterinsurgency strategy, which some of us have argued we should have been following from the beginning and which makes the most effective use of our strength and does not strengthen the tactics of our enemy. The new battle plan is succeeding where our previous tactics have failed, although the outcome remains far from certain.

The tactics proposed in the amendment offered by my friends, Senators LEVIN and REED—a smaller force confined to bases distant from the battlefield, from where they will launch occasional search-and-destroy missions and train the Iraqi military—are precisely the tactics employed for most of the war, which have, by anyone's account, failed miserably. Now, that, Mr. President, is staying the course, and it is a course that inevitably leads to our defeat and the catastrophic consequences for Iraq, the region, and the security of the United States that our defeat would entail.

Yes, we have heard quite a bit about the folly of staying the course, though the real outcome, should this amendment prevail and be signed into law, would be to deny our generals and the Americans they have the honor to command the ability to try, in this late hour, to address the calamity these tried and failed tactics produced and salvage from the wreckage of our previous failures a measure of stability for Iraq and the Middle East and a more secure future for the American people.

I have also listened to my colleagues on the other side repeatedly remind us that the American people have spoken in the last election. They have demanded we withdraw from Iraq and it is our responsibility to do, as quickly as possible, what they have bid us to do. Is that our primary responsibility? Really? Is that how we construe our role, to follow without question popular opinion even if we believe it to be in error and likely to endanger the security of the country we have sworn to defend? Surely we must be responsive to the people who have elected us to office and who, if it is their wish, will remove us when they become unsatisfied with our failure to heed their demands. I understand that, of course. And I understand why so many Americans have become sick and tired of this war, given the many mistakes made by civilian and military leaders in its prosecution. I, too, have been made sick at heart by these mistakes and the terrible price we have paid for them. But I cannot react to these mistakes by embracing a course of action that I know will be an even greater mistake, a mistake of colossal historical proportions, which will—and I am as sure of this as I am of anything—seriously endanger the people I represent and the country I have served all my adult life.

I have many responsibilities to the people of Arizona and to all Americans. I take them all seriously, or I try to. But I have one responsibility that outweighs all the others, and that is to do everything in my power to use whatever meager talents I possess and every resource God has granted me to protect the security of this great and good Nation from all enemies foreign and domestic. And that I intend to do, even if I must stand to thwart popular public opinion. I will explain my reasons to the American people, I will attempt to convince as many of my countrymen as I can that we must show even greater patience—though our patience is nearly exhausted—and that as long as there is a prospect for not losing this war, then we must not choose to lose it. That is how I construe my responsibility to my constituency and my country. That is how I construed it yesterday, that is how I construe it today, and that is how I will construe it tomorrow. I do not know how I could choose any other course.

I cannot be certain that I possess the skills to be persuasive. I cannot be certain that even if I could convince Americans to give General Petraeus the time he needs to determine whether we can prevail that we will prevail in Iraq. All I am certain of is that our defeat there would be catastrophic, not

just for Iraq but for us, and that I cannot be complicit in it. I must do whatever I can, whether I am effective or not, to help us try to avert it. That, Mr. President, is all I can possibly offer my country at this time. It is not much compared to the sacrifices made by Americans who have volunteered to shoulder a rifle and fight this war for us. I know that. And I am humbled by it, as we all are. But though my duty is neither dangerous nor onerous, it compels me nonetheless to say to my colleagues, and to all Americans who disagree with me, that as long as we have a chance to succeed, we must try to succeed.

I am privileged, as we all are, to be subject to the judgment of the American people and history. But, my friends, they are not always the same judgment. The verdict of the people will arrive long before history's. I am unlikely to ever know how history has judged us in this hour. The public's judgment of me I will know soon enough. I will accept it, as I must. But whether it is favorable or unforgiving, I will stand where I stand and take comfort from my confidence that I took my responsibilities to my country seriously, and despite the mistakes I have made as a public servant and the flaws I have as an advocate, I tried as best I could to help the country we all love remain as safe as she could be in an hour of serious peril.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I yield 3 minutes to the Senator from New York.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I wish to thank my colleagues from Michigan and Rhode Island for their great leadership on this issue, and I want to say that I have a great deal of respect for my friend from Arizona. He said we shouldn't make this debate one of sound bites, and that is one of the reasons I rise.

Repeatedly, we have heard from the other side the slogan ''cut and run.'' When they use ''cut and run,'' that is the same kind of dangerous, nasty sloganeering that got us into this mess to begin with. The other side—some, anyway—seem to have a penchant for avoiding serious debate and instead use slogans as a sort of 2 by 4 to beat the other side into submission. Well, first, I want to assure my colleagues that is not going to happen. We believe strongly in our position, and it is right.

But I want to ask my colleagues who use the slogan ''cut and run,'' do they believe that 70 percent of the American people are for cut and run? Because 70 percent are for withdrawal within a year. Do they believe the brave soldiers who are risking their lives for us are cut and run when they say to us—and many have—that this policy makes no sense? Do they accuse the parents of the loved ones who have died and who then say they do not believe we should be there to be for cut and run?

Let us have a serious debate, as we have had tonight, last night, and this morning. Let us have a serious debate, as we have had, but let us not resort to these slogans, and let us not let fear overtake policy. That is why we got in the mess in the first place.

Let me just review for my colleagues what Levin-Reed does. Levin-Reed says that we begin to withdraw in 120 days, complete the withdrawal by April, and then leave what force is necessary for counterterrorism, training, and force protection. It will be a much smaller force, most of them will be out of harm's way, but it is decidedly not cut and run.

I want to ask my colleagues one more question. When the President, in September, decides to withdraw troops, which he will have to do, given both the facts on the ground and the pressures from his side of the aisle, are those colleagues going to accuse the President of cut and run?

I yield the floor.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I yield to the Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, we had a tremendous debate last night, and we are close to a vote today. I am proud of the debate that has occurred, and I hope all Senators will shortly vote on the Levin-Reed amendment to redeploy our troops from Iraq, to refocus our fight on al-Qaida, and to support our men and women who serve us overseas.

It is time for President Bush to finally accept what the American people already know: the war in Iraq is not making us safer, and our troops should not remain in the crossfire of that country's civil war.

Unfortunately, President Bush refuses to listen to the generals, to the commissions, and to the experts. He stubbornly insists that leaving American troops in the middle of a civil war will somehow cause factions that have been fighting for centuries to agree to work together.

We have tried that approach, and we have paid dearly. We have given the Iraqi Government the time to reach the agreements needed to form a stable government. We have done our part. The Iraqi Government has not done its part.

We should not ask more Americans to sacrifice their lives for an Iraqi government that is unwilling to make even the smallest sacrifices for their people and their future.

Because the President refuses to follow a responsible path forward, we in Congress must force a change in our country's policy on Iraq. For months, Democrats have been trying to force that change.

We have been blocked by Republicans who've continued to support the President's ''war without end.'' Now—we are starting to see responsible Senators break ranks with the President and work with us to improve our security.

The upcoming vote on the Reed-Levin amendment is a test for all Senators. Do they stand alone with the President, or do they support redeploying our troops and making. America more secure? That is the choice every Senator will have to make on this vote.

As we look at the challenges in Iraq—and the threats around the world—Democrats want to do four things; redeploy our troops from Iraq; refocuses our fight on al-Qaida; rebuild our military; and respect our veterans.

That is the responsible way to protect our citizens, keep our country safe, and keep our military strong.

We have tried the President's direction, and where had it led us? More than 3,600 American service members have been killed and another 20,000 wounded. We have spent nearly 500 billion taxpayer dollars, and under the President's approach there is not end in sight.

It's time for a new direction, and it begins with redeploying our troops.

Iraq's civil war cannot be solved by our military. It can only be solved when the Iraqis decide for themselves that working together will bring them a better future.

As a foreign military power, we cannot force the Iraqis to set aside their differences and work together. They have to reach that conclusion themselves it Iraq is to ever become a peaceful, stable country.

When I was in Iraq in 2005, I met with the leaders of the various factions. Each of them saw themselves as representing their ''one group—not as people who needed to come together for the greater good.'' Unfortunately, since my visit, those sectarian differences have only gotten stronger.

The Iraqis have not made the progress that only they can make, and I don't think we should keep asking Americans to risk their lives for an Iraqi Government that's not doing its job.

So our first step must be to redeploy our troops out of Iraq. The Reed-Levin amendment sets a firm deadline to begin the redeployment beginning 120 days after enactment, and it sets April 30, 2008, as the date to complete the redeployment.

Now this does not mean that every servicemember will be coming home. As Senator LUGAR said, we will need to keep some servicemembers in Iraq for counterterrorism, for training, and to protect American interests. Other troops will be needed in other places around the globe as we stay on the offensive against al-Qaida and other terrorists. But under this amendment, the bulk of U.S. troops will be redeployment from Iraq.

Second, after we redeploy out troops, we need to refocus our energy on defeating al-Qaida.

Today, the Director of National Intelligence released the latest National Intelligence Estimate. The report says al-Qaida has ''Protected and regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability.''

The report also says that al-Qaida has established a safe haven in northwest Pakistan, has operational lieutenants, and still has its top leadership in place. And it is determined to strike us here at home.

So while the President has kept our military tied up in Iraq, al-Qaida has been gaining strength, and we must defeat it.

Third, we need to rebuild our military. According to generals who have testified before Congress, the war in Iraq has weakened our military's readiness, left our equipment destroyed, hurt our ability to respond to disasters at home, and left our troops without fully rounded training.

Today, we are forcing a very tough tempo on our servicemembers. The Pentagon has extended tours of duties for our troops. The administration has deployed troops sooner than planned.

The administration has sent troops without all the training and equipment they could have received.

The administration has deployed troops without the down-time at home that our servicemembers and their families deserve. In fact, 56 members of the U.S. Senate tried to fix that last week with the Webb amendment, but a majority of Republican Senators blocked us.

Our military is the best in the world. I believe we need to address the strains on our servicemembers, so we can remain the best in the world.

The Iraq war is also impairing our readiness by destroying our equipment. For example, the Army is supposed to have five brigades' worth of equipment pre-positioned overseas. But because of the war in Iraq, the Army is depleting those reserves.

General Peter Schoomaker told the Senate in March, ''It will take us two years to rebuild those stocks.''

Mr. President, our military is the best in the world. I believe we need to address the strains on equipment and personnel, so we can remain the best in the world.

To meet the President's surge, the Pentagon has been sending some troops to Iraq earlier than planned and keeping other units there longer than planned. That means that troops get less time at home, less time between deployments, and less time to train.

Commanders are forced to shorten the training their troops receive, so they are focusing on the specific training they need for Iraq—but not for other potential conflicts.

Now, that makes sense. If there's limited training time, we want all that time devoted to their most immediate need. However, many military leaders are warning that this fast pace diminishes our ability to respond to other potential conflicts.

Here's how the colonel who commands the 1st Marine Regiment put it:

> Our greatest challenge is and will remain available training time, and because that time is limited, our training will continue to focus on the specific mission in Iraq. This has, and will continue to, limit our ability to train for other operations.

Army COL Michael Beech told the Senate in April that he believes our training strategy is broad enough to support a variety of other events. But he added: ''However, if deployed in support of other emerging contingencies, I would be concerned with the atrophy of some specific tactical skills unique to the higher-intensity conflicts.''

So military commanders are telling us they are concerned that our ability to train for other missions has been limited and certain tactical skills have had to take a backseat to Iraq.

We need to make sure our troops are trained for whatever conflict they might face, and changing direction in Iraq will allow us to do that.

Mr. President, the Iraq war has especially impacted the readiness of our National Guard. The chief of the National Guard Bureau, LTG Stephen Blum, testified that the readiness of National Guard forces is at an historic low. General Blum said that ''Eighty-eight percent of the forces that are back here in the United States are very poorly equipped today in the Army National Guard.''

Not only do we rely on our Guard and Reserve members around the world, but we rely on them here at home to respond to natural disasters and emergencies. With fire season upon us on the west coast, I'm very concerned that we don't have all the capabilities at home we should have.

After the horrible tornadoes in Kansas, the Governor of Kansas said that recovery efforts were hampered because there weren't enough personnel or equipment. Those resources were in Iraq, not here at home.

COL Timothy Orr of the U.S. Army National Guard told the Senate that his brigade's homeland security capabilities have been degraded. He testified:

> Our ability as a brigade to perform these [homeland] missions continues to be degraded by continued equipment shortages, substitutions, and the cross-leveling of equipment between the state and nation to support our deploying units.

Finally, we need to respect our veterans. That means keeping our promise to meet their needs as a they come home—whether it's for healthcare, benefits, education or support.

Since Democrats have controlled Congress, we have made dramatic progress for our veterans. First we passed a budget that treated our veterans as a priority.

I serve on the Budget Committee and I was pleased to work with Chairman CONRAD to pass a budget resolution that provides over $43.1 billion for veterans' care.

Our budget increases funding for veterans by $3.5 billion over the President's proposal; funds 98 percent of the independent budget, which is devised by veterans service organizations; and it rejects the higher fees and copayments that the President had proposed, which would have forced more than 100,000 veterans to leave the VA health system.

We also passed a supplemental that for the first time since the start of the war provided funding to help met the needs of our veterans.

We provided $1.78 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs to help those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, to reduce the backlog in benefits, and to ensure medical facilities are maintained at the highest level.

And just last week, we added the wounded warriors bill to the Defense authorization bill. This proposal will address any of the problems that came to light from the Walter Reed investigations. It will ensure service members don't fall through the cracks as the move from the Pentagon to the VA. It will help us diagnose, prevent and treat PTSD and traumatic brain injury. And it addresses the problems with unfair disability ratings among other improvements.

Mr. President, it is time to change course in Iraq. So far the President has been unwilling to recognize the reality on the ground.

Here in the Senate, we have an opportunity to force the President to change course in a responsible way.

The Reed-Levin amendment gives every Senator a choice; either you want to stay the course in Iraq and leave Americans in the middle of a violent civil war or you believe it's time for a change.

I urge my colleagues to do the responsible thing for our troops, their families, our military's readiness and the fight against terror by voting for this amendment.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I yield 3 minutes to the Senator from Rhode Island.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). The senior Senator from Rhode Island is recognized for 3 minutes.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, President Bush is fond of slogans over strategy. We have heard them—''bring them on,'' ''cut and run,'' ''as they stand up, we will stand down.'' As my colleague, Senator SNOWE, and our cosponsors have pointed out, he is fond of placing hopes over reality. Well, the reality today is threefold.

First, the precise steps must be taken by Iraq's political leaders, and they have not done that. Second, we cannot sustain this level of force past next spring because of the limits of our military structure. Third, the President has lost the confidence of the American people and the public support, and you cannot conduct a strategy without that.

That is not a political comment, that is a strategic tactical comment. According to the Field Manual, and I quote:

> At the strategic level gaining and maintaining U.S. public support for a tactical deployment is critical.

We must change our strategy in Iraq. No strategy can be sustained, regardless of the slogan, without the necessary troops and strong public support, and in this case decisive action by the Iraqi political leadership. The longer we delay—the longer we delay—the more public support erodes and options to avoid a more chaotic redeployment disappear.

To those who urge delay, to wait until September, to wait until next spring, I would ask them to ask several questions: First, after 4 years of observing the political process in Baghdad, political maneuvering without effect, do they believe 6 weeks, until September, 6 months, or even 6 years will fundamentally change the sectarian political dynamic in Baghdad, the violent struggle between Shia, who feel paranoid, and Sunnis, who feel entitled to rule? Even on a tactical level, will 6 weeks or 6 months or 6 years provide irreversible progress on the ground without the political progress necessary?

The Levin-Reed amendment tries to recognize the reality on the ground both there and here and to shape our strategy to sustain an effort to serve the interest of this country, and we hope the region and the world, and I urge passage.

Mr. President, I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I will yield myself the remainder of my time.

Just about everybody now agrees there is no military solution in Iraq and that the only way to end the violence is for the Iraqi political leaders to settle their differences. Their own Prime Minister Maliki acknowledged that in November when he said, in words that all of us should remember:

> The crisis is political and the ones who can stop the cycle of . . . bloodletting of innocents are the [Iraqi] politicians.

Our brave service men and women are dying and being wounded while Iraqi leaders dawdle. The Iraqi leaders themselves made specific commitments to pass legislation relative to sharing power, sharing resources, amending their Constitution, holding provincial elections. They made those commitments to be achieved by specific dates. They were their commitments. We didn't impose them on them. These are their commitments that they have not kept. Because they have not kept their commitments, our troops are paying the price, caught in a crossfire of a civil war.

If there is any hope of forcing the Iraqi political leaders to take responsibility for their own country, it is to have a timetable to begin reducing American forces and to redeploy our forces to a more limited support mission instead of being everybody's target in the middle of a civil war. That transition is the only way we can force the Iraqi leaders to act.

If the Republican leader's procedural roadblock proceeds this morning, we will be denied the opportunity to vote on an issue which just about every American has strong feelings on: whether to change course in Iraq by setting a timetable to reduce the number of our troops in Iraq. Because of that procedural roadblock, we will not be voting at 11 o'clock on Levin-Reed but on whether to proceed to vote on Levin-Reed.

Our amendment deserves the chance to be voted on by this body. The American people deserve that vote. They deserve to know if we support a timetable to reduce our troop presence in Iraq. They deserve to know whether each of us favors a change of course in Iraq. If you do not agree with our amendment, vote against it. But do not prevent the Senate from voting on it, expressing our will on this critical issue. The American people deserve for us to vote up or down, do we want to change course in Iraq in order to improve the chance of success in Iraq, which can only happen if the Iraqi leaders understand we cannot save them from themselves.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday I characterized that the Democratic leadership's decision to hold us here through the night as a theatrical display more worthy of Hollywood than Washington. Indeed, anyone who watched it all unfold might have thought they were tuning in to an episode of the ''Twilight Zone.''

How else can we explain a majority party that was asked repeatedly the day before to schedule a vote on the pending Levin troop withdrawal amendment standing straight-faced on the Senate floor in front of giant billboards that read: ''Let us Vote.'' How else to explain Member after Member standing up to rail against a 60–vote threshold that they frequently insist upon themselves.

The junior Senator from Connecticut has embodied the best traditions of this country and this body throughout this entire debate. He has taken a lonely stand. In acting out the freedom and the power that he and every other proud voice of dissent has under the Rules of this body, he showed the world the greatness and the genius of our Government. Here's what Senator LIEBERMAN had to say:

> I am exercising my right within the tradition of the Senate to do what senior colleagues have advised over the years—to stop the passions, the political passions of a moment from sweeping across Congress into law . . . so with respect to my colleagues who are saying, let us vote, we will vote. But the question is, on that vote, will we ask for 60 votes for pass this very, very significant amendment? And I say it is in the best traditions of the United States Senate to require 60 votes before this amendment is adopted.

So before discussing the amendment itself, I want to thank my colleague, the junior Senator from Connecticut for his courage, for reminding us again and again, at no little personal cost to himself, what we are about in this war and what we are about in this body.

Last night's theatrics accomplished nothing. Nearly every major paper in America noted this morning that we could have had the vote on the Levin troop withdrawal amendment without any of this fanfare. And that is really all it amounted to: sound and fury, because after 24 hours of debate, after all the gags and giggles and gimmicks, the cold pizza and the empty cots, the essential thing remained unsaid. We still don't know what the amendment we are about to vote on would mean for our troops, our allies, our mission, or our interests.

With the Senate now in its second week of debate on the Levin amendment, after last night's 24-hour talkathon, I rise yet again to ask a simple question: What would the Levin amendment do?

Its sponsor tried to explain on Sunday the practical effect it would have. He said, ''Most of our troops would be out of there by April 30.''

Can he show me where in the text it says this? He can't. It doesn't. This 1½ page amendment contains nothing but vague assertions.

We need to know what the authors of this amendment intend to do with this mission, what their plan is. General Petraeus deserves to know. Our troops deserve to know. Our allies deserve to know. The people of Iraq deserve to know.

So I ask again the questions I asked last week: the Levin amendment says the Secretary of Defense shall ''commence the reduction of the number of United States forces in Iraq not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.'' What would this reduction involve?

The Levin amendment says members of our Armed Forces will only be free to protect United States and Coalition personnel and infrastructure, to train Iraqi Security Forces, and to engage in ''targeted counterterrorism operations against Al Qaeda.'' What does ''targeted'' mean?

The senior Senator from Michigan was asked these questions by the press. He said he didn't want to get into a debate as to how many troops will be needed. He said answering that question would be changing the subject. But that is the subject, isn't it?—whether and how many troops we are going to keep in Iraq.

Isn't that what this whole debate is about? Don't we have a right to know how many troops the senior Senator from Michigan thinks are necessary to achieve our goals? To prevent the mayhem our top commanders have warned would be the result of a precipitous withdrawal?

The most important questions are left unanswered. All we have are vague assertions that no one, not even the sponsor of this amendment, has attempted to explain with any measure of clarity.

Let me remind my colleagues what we do have clarity on. Let me remind

the Senate of what we agreed to in legislation in May as a framework for considering our current strategy in Iraq.

A bipartisan majority voted 80 to 14 in May to fund General Petraeus's Baghdad Security Plan. We agreed that we would receive a report on benchmarks in July. We voted, and put into law, that General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker would report in September on progress.

We are now in the second week of debate on the Levin amendment, and we expect several others will be filed outlining a number of different ways of revisiting the Petraeus plan.

But in my judgment, the plan we put forward in May, and put into law, is still valid—to give General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker about 60 more days to prepare their assessment. At that point we will have allowed the Baghdad Security Plan 3 months to work since it became fully manned last month. The benchmarks report and the timeline we set in May was clear. It gave us, the troops, and our allies, clarity on what was expected.

A Democratic-led Senate voted to 81–0 to send General Petraeus into Iraq. A bipartisan majority of 80 senators told him in May that he had until September to report back on progress. His strategy has led to some military successes. Yet just 1 month after this strategy became fully-manned, Democrats are declaring it a failure. Some of them were calling it a failure as early as January.

The Levin amendment is not a credible alternative to the current strategy. By aiming to short-circuit the Petraeus plan just 1 month after it became fully manned and 2 months before we would expect a report, we short-change ourselves and our forces on the field.

We need to give General Petraeus until September to do his work. That is a commitment we made and signed into law. We need to stand by that commitment.

For this and the other reasons I have outlined, I will vote against cloture on the Levin amendment. I urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. First, Mr. President, I extend my appreciation—I speak for all Senators, Democrats and Republicans—for the help we received this past 2 days from the employees who are working in the Capitol complex. Hundreds and hundreds of employees are here every day. They were here all night last night, most of them with little or no rest. This great facility would not operate every day but for them.

I am especially fond of and protective of the Capitol Police because I was one. But they are only the vessel about which I speak today, because it is not only the Capitol Police—and they worked long and hard—but it is the custodians, it is everyone including the valiant staff we have seated before the Presiding Officer. If we were asked—any one of 100 Senators—how to get something done here without them, we couldn't do it. I have been here for a quarter of a century. I could be here for a quarter of a century more and still couldn't understand how their important work is done. Again, speaking for all Senators, I say to all who work here in the Capitol, we appreciate very much your time and effort.

I hope these past 2 days have shined a bright light on how important our work is here in the Senate. The American people have spoken so many different ways. We are, of course, faced every day with the never-ending polls that this organization takes, that organization takes, and a lot of times there is some variance in those poll numbers—but not the last couple of months. The American public opposes the surge; they are opposed to the war; they want our valiant troops to come home.

As I wrote to the distinguished Republican leader yesterday:

> There are no more solemn decisions facing Members of Congress than the conduct of war and the placing of troops in harm's way.

Mr. President, that is true. This I sincerely believe.

Last night we had an event at 9 o'clock in the park. A Congressman by the name of PATRICK MURPHY spoke. He is from Pennsylvania. He was in Iraq, fighting as a soldier, a few years ago. He is now a Member of Congress. He talked about the need for us to bring home his comrades, the people who served with him. When he came home, 18 others, those other paratroopers in his unit, were dead.

What we are dealing with here is most important, most serious, and that is why we have been at it for 2 days nonstop. This is one of the most important decisions Members of Congress will ever be required to make, especially given the stakes involved, the stakes in the Middle East, in Iraq, for our military and for our national security.

We must proceed carefully and deliberately but proceed we must. The actions we take here can force a change, a change in President Bush's badly failed Iraq policy. That is what the American people expect the Senate to do, not simply to walk in lockstep as the President continues to walk down this disastrous path, but to finally change direction. That is our goal. That is what we must do and that is what the Levin-Reed amendment does.

The amendment recognizes what General Petraeus and all the experts have said from the very beginning: There is no military solution to the chaos in Iraq. The amendment recognizes that the more U.S. military forces caught policing the civil war in this country we call Iraq, it is not to the interests of the United States and it is not in the interests of bringing stability to Iraq. The amendment recognizes we have an enduring interest in Iraq, and certainly in the Middle East, and we will not abandon those interests.

Levin-Reed gives the President no choice but to change course. Levin-Reed requires the President take the steps to responsibly end the war that the country and our brave men and women in uniform demand and deserve. Bring them home. Let them come home. Levin-Reed sets a firm start date and a firm end date to transition the mission to begin the reduction of U.S. forces beginning 120 days after enactment, and to be completed by April 30, 2008.

Levin-Reed limits the United States mission to limit it to counterterror, training, and force protection operations after April 30, and requires that the reduction in forces be part of a comprehensive diplomatic, regional, political, and economic effort, including the appointment of an international mediator.

I am compelled to defend the authors of this amendment. My friend, my counterpart, the distinguished Senator from Kentucky, ridiculed, belittled this amendment. Those of us who have served in the Senate know that any time CARL LEVIN deals with legislation, there is nothing—nothing—left for guesswork. Literally every ''i'' that should be dotted, every ''t'' that should be crossed, every comma that should be in a sentence, every semicolon that is placed there once in a while, will be in that legislation. I say this with all my friends here in the Senate, no one is a better legislator than CARL LEVIN. All who have served in the Senate have dealt with him. There is no way you can give him something and say, Is this OK with you, but he will say, No, I have to read it. After he reads it, he has to study it.

We all know what the Levin-Reed amendment talks about. What a combination. This good man from Michigan, who has devoted his life to public service and has spent his Senate career in the Armed Services Committee, teamed up with a graduate of West Point, JACK REED, to whom we all look for advice militarily. How many times has he been to Iraq, 8, 10 times?

Why is it important that JACK REED went to Iraq? Because he served at West Point with many of the people over there now who are officers. He can get information there that none of the rest of us can get. What a combination. What does this combination say to the American people? That there must be an end date to what is going on in Iraq.

Their amendment, I repeat, says there must be redeployment starting in 120 days. That is pretty straightforward.

Mr. President, I will use leader time if my time runs out.

It also says that redeployment will start in 120 days; that on April 30, 2008, the forces left in Iraq according to our military will be used for counterterrorism activities, training the Iraqis, and protecting our assets in Iraq. There is not much to speculate on what that

means. Of course, the military will set what parameters will be used in those different duties they have, but the military—that is what they do. So this amendment of Senators LEVIN and REED is very understandable, it is direct and to the point. It is a simple, straightforward, responsible amendment. It strikes the right balance between military and diplomatic solutions. It allows our Nation to reduce its large combat footprint in Iraq and refocus on the enemy that attacked the Nation nearly 6 years ago.

For the American people, the surge has had far too long to determine whether it will work. Six months, 600 dead Americans, untold numbers wounded, $60 billion. This amendment allows our Nation to reduce its large combat footprint in Iraq. It gives our troops the strategy they need to succeed in a very difficult environment. It is supported by an overwhelming majority of the American people, it is supported by a bipartisan majority in the Senate and, most important, it is binding.

President Bush has proven beyond any doubt that if we simply express opinion and pass ''Sense of the Senate'' legislation, if we do not put teeth behind our legislation, he will ignore us.

It could not be clearer that if we give this President a choice, he will stay hunkered down in Iraq until the end of his failed Presidency.

The National Intelligence Estimate report released yesterday amplifies the fact that the war in Iraq has taken our attention and resources away from the growing threats we face around the world. We cannot keep marking time while President Bush's failed war plan continues to crumble.

We can vote to end the war right now. Democrats are united in our commitment to do so and our resolve has never been stronger. More and more Republicans have come out to publicly break from the President's endless war strategy. They deserve credit for doing so. I commend and applaud them. But their words will not end the war; their votes will.

After 52 months of war; after more than 3,600 American dead; after tens of thousands more wounded; after $500 billion of our tax dollars spent; after chaos in Iraq has become entrenched; after no meaningful signs of progress by the Iraqi Government; after the President's own intelligence reports indicate that the war has made us less safe and al-Qaida is gaining strength; after a troop escalation has only led to more violence; after all of this, after all of this, isn't it time to choose a new path? The answer is yes.

Let's choose that new path now. Let's finally answer the call of the American people. I urge my Republican colleagues to end this filibuster. I urge them to stop blocking a vote on this crucial war-ending amendment. By voting yes on cloture, we can make this the first day of the end of the war.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Members would vote from their desks. I further ask unanimous consent that the Chaplain give our daily player immediately following my remarks, which I have completed. The reason is, otherwise, he would do it at 1 o'clock. If ever there were a time for prayer, it would be before this very important vote.

I ask unanimous consent that we vote from our desks. I have cleared this with the Republican leader, and ask that the Chaplain be now called upon to render the prayer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Pursuant to the order of February 29, 1960, as modified this day, the Senate, having been in continuous session, will suspend for a prayer by the Chief of Staff to the Senate Chaplain, Alan N. Keiran.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, Creator of the season, as the Members of this body run a legislative marathon, may they feel Your devine presence. Allow contact with You to calm their fears, to silence their anxiety, to hush their restlessness and to fill them with Your peace. Strengthen them so that they are not weary in pursuing a worthy goal knowing that a harvest awaits those who persevere in doing Your will.

Give them gratitude for the opportunities You have given them to be stewards of our national destiny. And as You remind them that to whom much is given, much is expected.

We pray for Your will to be done here in this Chamber as in heaven. In Your mighty Name I pray. Amen.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the clerk will report the motion to invoke cloture.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the Levin-Reed, et al., amendment No. 2087, to H.R. 1585, Department of Defense Authorization, 2008.

Carl Levin, Ted Kennedy, Byron L. Dorgan, Russell D. Feingold, B.A. Mikulski, Debbie Stabenow, Benjamin L. Cardin, Amy Klobuchar, Pat Leahy, Richard J. Durbin, Jeff Bingaman, Jack Reed, Ron Wyden, Barbara Boxer, Patty Murray, Robert Menendez, Daniel K. Akaka, Charles Schumer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on Senate amendment No. 2087 offered by the Senator from Michigan, Mr. LEVIN, to H.R. 1585 shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and names are mandatory under the rule. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. JOHNSON) is necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 47, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 252 Leg.]

YEAS—52

Akaka	Feingold	Nelson (FL)
Baucus	Feinstein	Nelson (NE)
Bayh	Hagel	Obama
Biden	Harkin	Pryor
Bingaman	Inouye	Reed
Boxer	Kennedy	Rockefeller
Brown	Kerry	Salazar
Byrd	Klobuchar	Sanders
Cantwell	Kohl	Schumer
Cardin	Landrieu	Smith
Carper	Lautenberg	Snowe
Casey	Leahy	Stabenow
Clinton	Levin	Tester
Collins	Lincoln	Webb
Conrad	McCaskill	Whitehouse
Dodd	Menendez	Wyden
Dorgan	Mikulski	
Durbin	Murray	

NAYS—47

Alexander	DeMint	Martinez
Allard	Dole	McCain
Barrasso	Domenici	McConnell
Bennett	Ensign	Murkowski
Bond	Enzi	Reid
Brownback	Graham	Roberts
Bunning	Grassley	Sessions
Burr	Gregg	Shelby
Chambliss	Hatch	Specter
Coburn	Hutchison	Stevens
Cochran	Inhofe	Sununu
Coleman	Isakson	Thune
Corker	Kyl	Vitter
Cornyn	Lieberman	Voinovich
Craig	Lott	Warner
Crapo	Lugar	

NOT VOTING—1

Johnson

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 52, the nays are 47. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is not agreed to.

The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I enter a motion to reconsider the vote by which cloture was not invoked on the Levin-Reed amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is entered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this has been a long week, and it is hard to comprehend, but it is only Wednesday, Wednesday morning. We have now been in session continuously for 2 days. On Monday, I submitted a simple request for consent to proceed to an up-or-down vote on the Levin-Reed amendment to the Defense authorization bill. As I have stated, this amendment provides a clear, binding responsible path to change the U.S. mission and reduce our combat presence in Iraq. It honors the sacrifice of our troops, reflects the will of the American people, and lets us rebuild and focus our military on the growing threats we face throughout the world.

Regrettably, Republicans chose to block this amendment. They chose to block a bipartisan amendment, Mr. President, to deny the American people an up-or-down vote. They chose to continue protecting their President instead of our troops, no matter the cost to our country.