Mr. President, I would like to state my support of the vote

we will take tomorrow. Last week, I expressed my support for the

bipartisan Levin-Warner resolution which was denied a vote by the full

Senate due to procedural motions. Ten days later, we find ourselves in

a similar situation.

Our colleagues in the House have spent the last 4 days debating the

current course of action in Iraq, and they have completed a vote on

final passage today. At the same time, the Senate has continued to

engage in partisan bickering and political gamesmanship. The House

found a way, it found a bill, and it took a vote. We have a bill, and

we need to debate it.

At bottom, this debate is not about whether one is a Republican or

Democrat; it is about the legislative branch exerting its proper

constitutional oversight by deliberating on the most vital and

challenging issue of our day. I would urge my colleagues to think about

the vote that took place in 2002 authorizing the use of force in Iraq

and about what happened afterward. This was not a party-line vote. I

was not a

Member of this body, and I do personally believe it was an erroneous

vote, at least in its outcome, but at the same time, most importantly,

we should look at the lack of respect shown by the administration after

the vote. This lack of respect was a clear signal that the true issues

dividing us in this Government are more related to the relations

between the executive and legislative branches than between our

respective parties.

The administration has failed the country again and again in the

conduct of this war. At the same time, it repeatedly claims that it

holds the power, regardless of the input of the Congress, to continue

to push our military people to the limits of their endurance, while

avoiding the diplomatic options crucial to resolving the situation in

Iraq which inevitably evolved from our invasion and occupation.

I have heard discussion today about the consequences of withdrawal.

No one on this side is advocating a precipitous withdrawal, but the

consequences that are being described--increased terrorism, the

empowerment of Iran, the loss of prestige of the United States around

the world, and economic distress in our country--are, quite frankly,

the exact conditions many of us were warning about if we invaded in the

first place. The question is not how we withdraw or should we withdraw.

Some day, we are going to withdraw. Inevitably, we are going to

withdraw. The question is the conditions we leave behind when we do so.

I have long advocated that an integral part of our strategy in Iraq

must include engagement with all of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran

and Syria. As Iraq's neighbors, they are stakeholders in both the

future of Iraq and the need for stability in the region. As we seek to

decrease our presence in Iraq and increase our ability to fight

terrorism and address strategic challenges elsewhere in the world, we

must bring those two countries to the table. An overwhelming majority

of those who recently testified before hearings at the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee agree with that assessment.

I have heard today the name of General Petraeus invoked several times

as evidence of this body's support for the administration's current

policy. I voted for General Petraeus. A vote for General Petraeus is

not a vote for this administration's policy or its strategy or its,

quite frankly, lack of strategy. That vote was to support the

qualifications of an individual to command troops in Iraq. That was a

military vote, not a political vote. If the strategy were to change, as

I hope it will, I have full confidence that General Petraeus is capable

of overseeing that policy as well. We must see evidence of a new

diplomatic effort from this administration before we, as a Congress,

not as Democrats and Republicans, ratify the expanded use of our

military.

On that note, it should be emphasized that despite comments today

about the fact that the Baker-Hamilton group supported a temporary

military surge in its report, it did so only in consonance with a

robust regional diplomatic surge which was supposed to begin more than

2 months ago.

Many Republicans seem to be implying that we must support all of this

administration's actions or, by inference, we don't support the troops.

The issue is not whether we support the troops; it is whether we agree

on the political issues to which they are being put. This effort

demands clear direction from the top. It depends on the extent to which

this Government is capable of forging a regional consensus regarding

Iraq's future. This administration has refused to do so. It is not in

the interest of our troops to continue sending them in harm's way

without a clear strategy that will bring closure to this endeavor.

I believe very strongly that our political representatives should be

careful in claiming to speak politically for our troops. Our military

is a mirror of our society, and so are its political views. We have

heard a lot of anecdotal evidence today--TV clips, newspaper interviews

with individuals. But anecdotal evidence notwithstanding, poll after

poll shows that our troops are just as concerned about this policy as

is the public at large.

I have one poll from a year ago, a Zogby poll, that says that 72

percent of the people then stationed in Iraq believed the war should

have ended by the end of 2006. This includes 7 out of 10 of our Regular

Army soldiers and a vast majority--nearly 60 percent--of our marines.

These are people who have done their job. They know what their military

job is, but they have the same questions about the political policies

as do the rest of Americans.

I ask unanimous consent to print the Zogby poll in the Record.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in

the Record, as follows:

Another poll, of December 29, 2006, by the Military Times,

the most credible military newspaper in America, indicates that barely

one-third of our service members approve of the way the President is

handling the war. In fact, only 41 percent of our military now believes

the United States should have gone to war in Iraq in the first place.

I ask unanimous consent that this poll be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in

the Record, as follows:

. I believe very strongly that we should leave our military

people out of these political debates. I am not using these figures to

advance the Democratic Party's point. I believe it is inappropriate for

the other party to use our military people in a way that might insulate

them from criticism over the woeful failures of this administration's

policy. The American people's confidence in this administration is at

rock bottom. Many rightly believe they were misled on the reasons for

going to war.

The administration's credibility has suffered--rightly so--also with

respect to its intentions for dealing with Iran. I do not believe one

can speak of our responsibility on these immediate issues without

stating clearly our concerns about the entire region, and especially

the administration's position regarding its constitutional authority to

use military force outside of Iraq.

The administration's view of its Presidential authority to conduct

unilateral military action against other

countries, and particularly with Iran, was documented in President

Bush's signing statement accompanying the original authorization for

the use of force against Iraq in October 2002. I urge my colleagues to

examine this language. In part, it states:

In other words, if one were to read that carefully, this

administration is stating that it has the authority to use force to

respond to threats to our interests. What is an ``interest''?

I have raised this language with the Secretary of State, as well as

with the Deputy Secretary. My question was whether this administration

believes that it possesses the authority to conduct unilateral military

activity against Iran in the absence of a direct threat and without the

approval of the Congress. I have not received a clear answer from

either of them on that point. That is troubling.

This administration and its supporters must understand the realities

that are causing us, as a Congress, to finally say enough is enough.

After 5 years of misguided policy, ineffective leadership, and

diminished U.S. stature around the world, the Congress must show the

way to reclaiming the moral high ground and exert its proper oversight

role more forcefully.

For these reasons, I support the pending Iraq resolution before us,

and I will vote for cloture. I urge my fellow Senators to do the same.

I yield the floor.