Mr. President, I will make a few comments about what is

going on around here. I am not sure what has gotten into the water

around here, but something strange has happened over the last couple

days. Well, maybe it is not so strange, or even unusual, and that is

unfortunate. What I am talking about is a sort of snowstorm, a

whiteout--the people in Wyoming will know what I am talking about--

except this whiteout isn't made of snow.

Bear with me while I describe our last vote, the one we did last

night. It was cloture on a motion to proceed to a measure that says we

should have a plan to fight al-Qaida and that we should basically put

that plan out for public comment. That might strike people outside

Washington as a little odd, and it should. Doesn't our military already

have a plan? Yes, it does. Why would we want to tell al-Qaida how we

plan to defeat them? Good questions. Good points.

The fact that the motion to debate the proposal passed overwhelmingly

might further leave people scratching their heads. Senators, the

majority of whom, I would venture to say, do not want the proposal to

become law, voted to waste the Senate's time debating this measure.

Why? Is it because debating this will actually help us to defeat al-

Qaida? Is it because debating this will make our Nation more secure?

No, it would not.

This is all happening at a time when we have an urgent need to work

on solutions to the problems just about every one of the American

people worry about. Health care is at the top of the list. Congress

needs to wrangle with spiraling health care costs. Medicare is going

broke. Social Security is following suit a little bit later. There are

education measures on the table right now that we need to finish. Our

economy begs for positive action. We have a budget problem in Congress.

But the Senate came to a decision. On a vote of 89 to 3 last night,

this body decided that instead of working on these problems I

mentioned, we needed to debate a bill few of us want to ultimately

approve. That is wrong. The American people did not elect us to play

``gotcha'' politics. They want to see action on real problems. They

want to see results--positive results.

I voted against debating on this ill-begotten proposal because

Congress needs to be doing the work the people sent us here to do.

National defense is of utmost importance to our Nation. Without a

strong national defense, we would not have the free country we have. I

strongly support our troops. I thank them every day and pray for them

and their families every night. I do all in my power to

see that they have the support and the resources to do their job. Their

lives, and ultimately our way of life, depend on it; it depends on

them. But this proposal we are debating now doesn't help them. Our

military strategists, our leaders in the field, do not want this

legislation.

Of course we need a plan to defeat al-Qaida in every corner of the

world where this wretched terrorist group hides. We need to focus on

the terrorists and defeat them at every turn. But is it Congress's role

to insist on a plan and then share the plan with al-Qaida? That is

ultimately what this legislation would do. If Congress forces the

administration and our military to write this plan according to

Congress's specification, then Congress is going to want to see the

plan to ensure it meets Congress's requirements. We all know Congress

cannot keep a secret. If you tell the enemy your strategy, then your

strategy will not work. This is a bill that is fundamentally flawed at

the outset. I voted not to debate the bill. I was one of three, but a

bill not worth doing is a bill not worth debating.

Just before September 11, 2001, I was given the opportunity to serve

on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I was the ranking member of

the Subcommittee on International Operations and Antiterrorism. It was

during August that I was assigned to that. So in September, since I was

the newest person on the committee and the least ranking, a lot of

people said: How did he get on that committee? It wasn't important

until after September 11, 2001--or at least we didn't place that kind

of importance on it. Through that role, I was given the opportunity to

work directly with other countries at the United Nations on ways to

stop terrorism. I am an accountant, so I was delighted to be a part of

the group that said one of the answers was to concentrate on following

the money. It made a huge difference and it continues to make a

difference. Countries that will never publicly admit to helping in the

hunt for terrorists have helped. I know countries peer pressured other

countries into helping with the fight against terrorism. Terrorists

were caught, they were prosecuted, and some were executed. More

sophisticated versions of this plan to fight terrorism are still in

operation today. But we should not disclose the plan because that would

make them worthless.

The Senate wants additional reports. Why? Congress has already

mandated reports on the National Security Strategy of the United

States, the National Defense Strategy of the United States, the

National Homeland Security Strategy of the United States, the National

Military Strategy of the United States, the Quadrennial Defense Review

Report, the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terror, the

National Military Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction, the

National Strategy for Victory in Iraq. Does that sound like plenty of

work for the Pentagon?

I want you to know the Pentagon is already doing what this bill wants

us to do. We do need a plan. We have a plan. We cannot make that plan

public without allowing the enemy to figure out how to combat every

article in it. Why are we having this debate? Well, I know we are

having this debate partly to place emphasis on the fact that we need to

get the FISA legislation passed. Daily, we are missing opportunities to

know what al-Qaida is doing and planning. We were able to do that until

about a week ago. Congress could easily approve the FISA bill. It

passed out of this body by a significant majority. The House needs to

pass it and send it to the President. What does that bill do? One of

the things it does is make terrorists almost as accountable as drug

dealers. Yes, we have stronger laws in this country for drug dealers

and the way to interdict that than we do for terrorists, without having

the FISA bill.

What do the American people want Congress to do? They want us to

improve their ability to access quality health care. They want us to

have the capability under FISA, but they want us to concentrate on

those areas that we have specific jurisdiction on, not just checking up

on other people to see if they are getting their work done but checking

up on ourselves to see if we are getting our work done. I think the

economy, which includes health care, is the biggest issue the American

people are interested in. Are we debating that? No. We are debating

something I think we already have had 36 votes on in various forms, all

of which failed. If you try something 36 times and it doesn't work,

maybe you ought to move on to something else. I am suggesting health

care is one of those issues we ought to be working on and that we could

work on and that comes under our jurisdiction and we have direct

responsibility for it. Or maybe education. I know the people of America

want better education for their kids. They expect us to have as much as

possible in place that will expedite that, that will work with the

parents, the teachers, the administrators, and the communities to make

sure our kids have the best job opportunities in the world. They want

them to be able to have jobs and afford a home and have food for their

family. They want a retirement system that helps them to be secure when

they finish working.

That is why I voted against debating this bill. We are not here to be

nonresponsive and nonproductive by taking non-actions. Let's act. Let's

sit down together and come to an agreement on what we can do to make

health care better for this country. Let's talk about what we can do to

improve education in this country and then let's make it happen. Let's

spend the Senate's time on real legislation of substance--ones we are

supposed to solve and that we have the jurisdiction to solve and ones

we have the ability to solve and ones we have the desire to solve. I

have been working with people on both sides of the aisle on a number of

bills that are solvable--maybe not to perfection, but hardly anything

here winds up with perfection. They can be solved with 100 percent

agreement across the aisle on the 80 percent of the issues that we

agree on. That would be real progress for America.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.