Madam President, as I begin my comments on the resolutions

we have under consideration, I want to first make very clear my strong

support for the members of our Armed Forces and the vital work they are

doing around the world every day. I have the greatest admiration for

them all for their heartfelt commitment to preserving our freedoms and

maintaining our national security. They are all true heroes and they

are the ones who are doing the heavy lifting and making great

sacrifices in our country's name so that we might continue to be the

land of the free and the home of the brave.

Over the years, I have been to Iraq and I have met with the members

of our Armed Forces there and, later, here in the United States when

they have returned home. These remarkable men and women exemplify the

best qualities of our Nation. They volunteered to serve in the best

trained force in the world and they deserve our complete and unwavering

support. If it were possible, I would like to have each and every one

of our troops back home with their families and friends immediately. We

cannot, however, pull our troops out of Iraq at this point without

facing extremely dire consequences for a long time to come. I have

spoken at length to our troops about their mission and they understand

their mission.

I was thinking about them, and all of the members of our military who

are presently serving around the world as I began to prepare my

remarks. I thought back to the days, years ago, when I was first

elected to serve as the Mayor of Gillette, WY. I made a habit of

carrying around a copy of the United States Constitution with me

everywhere I went. I kept it in my coat pocket, next to my pen, and

whenever I looked at it, it reminded me of two things--the Government I

was a part of, and the people I was elected to serve.

Then, when I came here to the Senate, the Constitution took on an

even greater, deeper meaning for me. I see it as my job description.

That is why I make sure to always keep it handy so it can continue to

serve as a reminder of the detailed portrait it contains of our Federal

Government and how it was designed to work by our Founding Fathers.

Today, it provides us with a

good starting point for our debate and it provides some of the answers

to the issues before us.

The relevant parts of the our country's Constitution are quite clear.

Congress must be consulted before any large scale military operation is

begun. But once that has been done, the Commander in Chief of our Armed

Forces, the President, is to direct the effort that we have approved.

The Founding Fathers had a good reason for establishing the President

as the Commander in Chief of our Armed Forces and the one who is

responsible for making the decisions affecting the actions of our

Nation's military.

That does not mean that Congress does not have a play in these

decisions. We all have an important role to play when it comes to

matters like these. Again, in their great wisdom, the drafters of our

Constitution knew that Congress could--and should--influence policy--

but they knew it would be impossible for us to have all the information

available to the President to debate and assess before making a

decision on the viability of every military operation. The process of

determining military strategy would be a nightmare if we were to be

expected to debate all of the intricacies of every policy and, by so

doing, publicly reveal some of the information obtained by our

intelligence agencies on the House and Senate floor before reaching a

decision. Our procedure on the Senate floor is a good process for

debating and considering legislation, but it is a process that does not

lend itself well to producing a quick and informed military decision at

a time of crisis.

Those thoughts were on my mind when the President put forward a new

strategy for us to pursue in Iraq, recognizing that what we are

currently doing is not working. General David Petraeus, our U.S.

Commander in Iraq, testified before us about that policy. He is

consulting with highly educated and trained members of the military,

many from universities where criticism of U.S. efforts in Iraq has

flourished. It is evident that the President and his advisors are

seeking analysis and recommendations from people who recognize the fact

that the road ahead will be complicated and difficult.

Listening to the debate, I have heard many of my colleagues sum up

the President's new strategy as just increasing the number of American

troops in Iraq. I do not believe it is a matter of numbers. The real

question should be what the placement of these troops is designed to

accomplish. There is no question that there must be a clearly defined

mission for them on the ground. By having more forces on the ground, we

may be able to decrease the vulnerability of our troops as they move

from place to place. That will provide them with the backup and

protection they need to more safely pursue their mission.

In the months to come, it is clear that there are several things the

new policy must do if it is to be successful. First and foremost, the

new campaign must provide the security the people of Iraq must have to

feel safe at home. If they do not feel secure under the protection of

the United States, coalition, and Iraqi forces, they will turn toward

terrorist organizations that will prey on their fears and provide a

false sense of security. America's long-term security interests and the

possibility of world peace will be best served by an Iraq that can

sustain, govern, and defend itself, while serving as an ally in the war

against the terrorists.

Looking long term, I think we would all agree that the future of Iraq

will directly affect the balance of power in the Middle East. That is

why countries throughout the region are watching to see what action we

will take in Iraq. An immediate withdrawal of United States and

coalition forces will leave our allies in the region forced to prepare

for additional conflicts.

Our mission in Iraq has not been easy, and it will not get easier in

the days to come. After all, we are facing centuries-old difficulties

as we work with the people of Iraq to help them overcome their

religious and ethnic differences to form a nation that will work to

benefit and protect all their people.

Ultimately, what the future of Iraq will be is up to the Iraqi people

themselves. Iraq must put together a working coalition of its three

major groups, the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shia, as well as other ethnic and

religious minorities. They must work for national reconciliation

through shared responsibilities as well as shared oil revenues that

will be used to solve the problems that exist in their own backyard.

Such a reconciliation will not only be good for Iraq, but the Middle

East as a whole.

We have set forth benchmark requirements for the Iraqis to make. Our

first benchmark has been met. Their parliament has approved an

equitable split of oil revenues between the three factions. This is

progress.

Looking back, the record is clear. Like many Members of the United

States Senate, I supported the original decision in 2002 to take action

against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The vote I cast that day was not an

easy decision. The tough ones are like that. You make the best decision

you can, based on the information you have on hand at the time you have

to make it. Those are the decisions that make us all lose sleep for

years afterward. Anytime you vote to put our Nation's young men and

women in harm's way, it stays with you long after the fighting is over

and our troops are on their way back home.

Today, I remain concerned about the safety of the people on the

ground: Americans, coalition allies, and the Iraqi people. And there is

good reason for my concern. 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 do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the

whole world is watching to see what we will decide to do.

That leads me to ask, what do we hope to accomplish through this

debate? We have already approved the nomination of General Petraeus by

a unanimous vote. Now we are considering a resolution condemning a plan

he has not had a chance to put into action yet. What sort of message

will we send our troops with our vote on that?

As Members of the United States Senate, we have the opportunity to

voice our opinions to the President and our constituents. But the fact

that we are even going through this debate at this point in time may

give those who wish to do us harm hope and embolden them--and once

emboldened they will pose an even greater threat to our troops.

As we continue with our consideration of these resolutions, I want to

be clear that I do not want to cut funding for the troops. Their safety

and their very lives depend on that funding. When you are in a war, you

do not do that to the troops.

Looking ahead, in the months to come, Congress must continue to

closely monitor the actions of the new Iraqi government, our military

leaders, and our civilian leaders. We should continue to express our

opinions, and take whatever actions are necessary to ensure our troops

are provided the best support possible so that they can come home soon.

We should not, however, further endanger the lives of Americans and

Iraqis simply to make a statement and take a stand against the

President.