Madam President, I rise to express my strong

opposition to the Reid resolution, S.J. Res. 9.

This is a dangerous piece of legislation. It is constitutionally

dubious, and it would authorize a scattered band of Senators to

literally tie the hands of the Commander in Chief at a moment of

decisive importance in the fight

against terrorism in Iraq. I would never doubt the patriotism of my

colleagues across the aisle, but I have become increasingly troubled

over the last few weeks as this debate has taken shape.

When the President prepared a solution to the growing violence in

Baghdad, he had good reason to expect the support of at least some of

our friends on the other side of the aisle. The democratic whip,

Senator Durbin, said in late December:

That is the assistant Democratic leader not years ago but 3 months

ago. Yet as details of the President's proposal to do so became clear,

our friends on the other side circled the wagons, and Senator Durbin

got in line. Just 2 weeks--2 weeks--after saying he would support

reinforcements as a way of stabilizing Iraq, the Senator from Illinois

said:

Then later on that day he added:

That is 2 weeks after announcing that it might be a good idea. Would

our friend from Illinois have felt the same way if one of his

Democratic colleagues had proposed the surge? Increasingly, the

troubling answer to this question appears to be yes. Indeed, it is

increasingly clear that the only principle guiding our colleagues on

the other side is this: If the President proposed it, we oppose it.

This is a bad principle in good times. It is an outrageous principle in

times of war.

Two months after many Democrats said they would support a surge in

troops if it meant stabilizing Baghdad, and incredibly 1 month after

sending General Petraeus on his mission to do so, Democrats are now

calling for the very thing they have consistently opposed: setting a

timetable for withdrawal. This is beyond silly. It is a chaotic

embarrassment that threatens to shake the confidence of our commanders

and of our troops, and to embolden an enemy that predicted and longed

for nothing less. Of course, at some point it is not enough to simply

say: If the President proposed it, we oppose it. The principle begs for

a counterproposal: What would the Democrats propose instead? We all saw

the answer: Seventeen different proposals, many of which contradicting

the last, and then finally this, a proposal everyone could get behind,

a proposal that sets a date certain for America's withdrawal from Iraq.

This resolution is a clear statement of retreat from the support that

the Senate recently gave to General Petraeus; as I have said, its

passage would be absolutely fatal to our mission in Iraq.

Senator Clinton put it well. She said:

That was Senator Clinton. Well, ``ever'' is here, and our friends on

the other side of the aisle apparently now think it is a good idea to

telegraph our intentions to the enemy. Osama bin Laden and his

followers have repeatedly said that the United States does not have the

stomach for a long fight. Passage of this resolution will prove Osama

bin Laden, regretfully, was right. This is the vote he has been waiting

for.

Setting a date certain for withdrawal will please a vocal group of

Democratic Presidential primary voters, but it would discourage many

others, including many Democrats, who agree that timetables are foolish

and dangerous. More importantly, it would discourage our own troops--

and this is the most important part about this--who wonder whether we

truly support their mission, and it will discourage our allies and the

millions of brave Iraqi men and women who have dared to stand with

America in this fight.

I will proudly vote against a resolution that sets a timetable that

actually announces the date for our withdrawal from Iraq. I will do so

for the same reason that many prominent Democrats opposed it up until

the day President Bush announced his plan for securing Baghdad 2 months

ago.

Republicans have a message for our allies and for our troops, and it

is this: We will continue to fight a timetable for withdrawal that has

no connection to events or circumstances on the ground. We will give

General Petraeus's mission a chance to succeed. We are proud of the

work the general has done, and we stand with him until the job is done.

We will send this message today when we vote in favor of the Gregg

resolution. This resolution pledges us to support the troops and their

mission. The Republicans proposed a month ago that we be allowed a vote

on this resolution, but we were denied. We are being allowed that vote

today, and just as proudly as we will vote against S.J. Res. 9, we will

vote in favor of the Gregg resolution.

In one sense, this debate has been academic. Senators will have a

chance to show their support for the mission in Iraq when we vote on

the supplemental appropriations bill later this month. That is the bill

that matters. That is the one that funds the operation in Iraq. But in

another sense, this debate was worthwhile because it exposed the

principle that appears to guide the opposition: If the President

proposed it, we will oppose it. This is no principle at all; it is pure

politics. It is unworthy in good times. It is shameful at a time of

war.

Meanwhile, the fighting in Iraq continues, and General Petraeus's

mission is showing early signs of success. We are told that bomb deaths

are down one-third in Baghdad since the new plan took effect last

month. Execution-style slayings are down by nearly half. Traffic has

returned to the once empty Baghdad streets.

No one is foolish enough to say this will last. This is not a

prediction, but it is a sign of hope, the kind of sign that everyone in

this country--Democrat and Republican--has been waiting for. We in this

Chamber have a choice: We can fan this flame or we can smother it. By

voting on a timetable for withdrawal, we are very decidedly doing the

latter. Republicans take the hopeful path today.

Madam President, how much time do I have remaining?