Mr. President, my purpose today is to say I believe it

is time for President Bush to take the Iraq Study Group report down off

the shelf and use it for something other than a bookend. But first let

me say something about the resolution that we are about to consider.

There is a reason why we don't have 535 commanders in chief or 100

commanding generals each saying: Charge down this street or over that

hill. The Founders of our country made the President the Commander in

Chief and gave to Congress the power to declare war and pay for it.

That is why I will vote against this resolution and any of the

resolutions that seek to micromanage the war. Once a war is authorized,

as this one was by a bipartisan vote of 77 to 23 in 2002, it is the

President's job to manage the war.

As an example of why we don't need 535 Members of Congress

micromanaging the war, consider this: Since last January, the new

Democratic majority has offered 17 different bills and resolutions

outlining what we ought to do in Iraq, and there will be more coming in

the next few weeks, I am sure.

I am not about to cut off funds for General Petraeus's troops in the

middle of the current military exercise, which clearly Congress has the

power to do but should not do.

I have--and each of us has--the responsibility as a Senator to say

what I believe is the right way forward for our country in Iraq, and my

belief is this: The President would be wise to take down off the shelf

the recommendations of the bipartisan Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group

to develop a strategy based on those recommendations and to ask

Americans to accept that strategy as the right way forward in Iraq.

I believe the President would have been wise to do that in January

during his State of the Union Address. The country was then looking for

a new way forward in Iraq. The Iraq Study Group, after 9 months of

careful bipartisan work, offered such a plan. Instead, the day after

the report was announced in December, some who wanted another 100,000

or 200,000 troops to win the war said the report was a recipe for

defeat. On the other side, those who wanted the United States out of

Iraq immediately dismissed the report as more of the same. So the

report was put on the shelf. That is, until lately.

Lately, the President's National Security Adviser has cited the

Baker-Hamilton report as authority for the surge of troops in Baghdad,

which, in fact, on page 73, the report did say might be necessary. Over

the weekend, the United States participated in meetings with Syria and

Iran, perhaps the most controversial recommendation in the report. The

timetable and strategy for reducing our combat strength in Iraq

contained in the new Democratic Senate resolution sounds very much like

the Iraq Study Group, calling for combat troops to be largely withdrawn

from Iraq by next March. But the Iraq

Study Group specifically opposed setting timetables or deadlines for

withdrawal, noting that its recommendation should be ``subject to

unexpected developments on the ground.''

At the same time, like one of the Republican-sponsored resolutions,

the Iraq Study Group recommended the United States work closely with

Iraq's leaders to support the achievement of certain ``milestones.'' In

short, if there is any bipartisan consensus emerging about how the

United States should go forward in Iraq, the best blueprint of that

consensus can be found in the report of the Iraq Study Group.

The membership and process of the Iraq Study Group is as important as

the substance of what it said. It included some of America's most

distinguished citizens from the Reagan and Carter and the first Bush

administrations, from the Congress, and the Supreme Court. One of its

former members is today's Secretary of Defense. It was ideologically

and politically diverse. The group spent 9 months, met 9 times,

including a trip to Baghdad, interviewed 171 individuals, and made 79

specific recommendations.

Its assessment of the ``dire'' current conditions in Iraq was honest

and sober. It didn't shy away from bad news--that 79 percent of Iraqis

have a mostly negative view of United States influence in their

country; that 2,900 Americans at that time had been killed, with

another 21,000 wounded; that we had spent roughly $400 billion, and

that estimates run as high as $2 trillion on this war. The group

acknowledged its recommendations weren't perfect, but were the best

options.

As much as America needs a new strategy in Iraq, we also need a

consensus in support of that strategy. To put it bluntly, a majority of

the American people do not now have confidence in the President's

course in Iraq. The Iraq Study Group offered the President an

opportunity to say, okay, here is a different approach suggested by a

bipartisan group of distinguished Americans. It is not my strategy, it

is theirs. The President could say, I accept it, and for the good of

our country and the Armed Forces fighting for it, I ask you to accept

it.

Such a statement would not exhibit Presidential weakness. That would

be Presidential leadership, recognizing that the President's job is not

only to choose the right strategy but to successfully persuade at least

half the people he is right. The President still has this option before

him. I respectfully suggest he would be wise to exercise it today, this

week. Come back to Congress, report on the progress of the last few

weeks in Iraq, invite the Iraq Study Group members to sit in the

gallery, compliment their work, accept their recommendations, and ask

the Congress and the country to also accept their recommendations.

Now, this course won't satisfy those who want another 100,000 or

200,000 more troops to win the war in Iraq. Neither will it satisfy

those who want all troops out on a specific timetable. But it will get

United States troops quickly out of the combat business in Iraq and

into the support business. It will reduce the number of American forces

in Iraq over the next year. It will leave American special forces in

Iraq to go after al-Qaida and the troops to help guard the borders,

because there would still be a limited United States military presence.

It will send a signal to the rest of the Middle East to stay out of

Iraq. It will give support to General Petraeus and his troops, who are

in the midst of a surge to make Baghdad safer. It will expand

diplomatic efforts to build support for Iraqi national reconciliation

and sovereignty, including with Iraq's neighbors. And it will

recognize, or at least begin to recognize, that America has done most

of what it can do to help Iraq. As Prime Minister Tony Blair has said,

it is time for the next chapters in Iraq's history to largely be

written by the Iraqis themselves.

Finally, this course will recognize that while the United States can

and should be a shining example of democracy, and while the United

States does have the mightiest military force in the world, a

conservative view of human nature and our own national interest places

limits on what we can do to make it possible for others to adopt our

democracy and to adopt our way of life.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.