Mr. President, first, I thank my colleagues from Rhode

Island and Michigan for yielding me some time. I appreciate it. Their

expertise in this area has been invaluable not only to the Senate but

to all Americans. I could not think of two people who have shown light

more on this issue than the Senator from Michigan and the Senator from

Rhode Island.

Where are we now, Mr. President? Somehow--and there will be many

debates as to how--what we are doing in Iraq has largely evolved into

fighting a civil war, into patrolling a civil war, into policing a

civil war, and, yes, into fighting it at times. The age-old enmity

between the Sunnis and Shiites, of course, has exploded. Once Saddam

Hussein was gone, it was perhaps inevitable that it would occur,

particularly without any real authority in large parts of the country.

Most of what our soldiers are doing, and most of those who come back

from making the ultimate sacrifice, dying or making a large sacrifice

by being wounded, are doing is not fighting terrorism but, rather,

policing, patrolling, and even fighting in a civil war. That is not

what the American people bargained for. That is not what President Bush

stated when we began going into Iraq. In fact, he has never stated

that.

Now they say we need to bring order to allow their government to

work, but that is a fallacious argument for two reasons. First, we may

bring temporary order to Iraq but, make no mistake about it--you don't

have to be a Ph.D. in middle eastern studies to realize that the minute

our troops leave, whether it is 3 months or 3 years, the fighting

between the Sunnis and the Shiites will continue. We will have lost

lives, and men and women will have lost limbs, but not much will have

changed--even in the medium term.

Second, the absurdity of what we are doing is shown by this: We are

sending more troops to create a temporary peace to bolster a government

that we don't trust, like, or believe in. Prime Minister Maliki is

almost universally regarded poorly, not just at this end of

Pennsylvania Avenue but at the other end as well. Their government

seems incompetent. The government seems unable to accomplish the most

basic things. The government, of course, created a terrible drama,

almost, when they could not complete the execution of Saddam Hussein in

a way that would have conformed to how it should have been done. So

their government is incompetent. It is also controlled, in large part,

by someone we do not like, Sadr. The Sadr party is the Prime Minister's

base. He cannot do anything, even should he want to, in terms of

actually bringing peace and creating a government that is friendly to

America.

So here we are with this escalation, a surge to bolster a government

we don't like or trust. Here we are, instead of fighting terrorism,

policing a civil war. The American people know that. We have seen all

of the data and all of the polls. The overwhelming majority does not

support the President in Iraq. So we need a change in strategy.

Substance dictates it, people see it, and our job in the Senate is to

do that. That is what we are attempting to do in this debate.

The proposal that most of us on this side of the aisle are behind is

a very simple one. We require the President to change strategy. Instead

of policing a civil war, fighting a civil war, our troops should have

the far more limited mission of protecting us in America from

terrorism. That means that if al-Qaida sets up a base anywhere in Iraq,

we should take it out--do what it takes to take it out. But it doesn't

mean that our soldiers should be patrolling the streets of Baghdad

simply because the Sunnis and Shiites are fighting with each other.

That will require a change in mission and will require fewer troops,

and those troops need not be in harm's way. It makes eminent sense.

We set a deadline of a little more than a year from now, during which

time the mission will have changed. The number of troops will be

greatly reduced. We don't set a number. That is up to the President. It

is our job in the Congress to debate missions and the broad context of

foreign policy and then, should we pass a law, have the President carry

out the details.

Now, some on the other side have said that any debate means you are

not supporting the troops. Well, I have talked to the troops--to

generals and enlisted men and women. They want debate, Mr. President.

The more demagogic the other side is, saying if there is a debate, you

are not supporting the troops--frankly, that is not the American way.

Of course, we debate issues. In fact, their view is that basically the

only way to support the troops is to rubberstamp the President's

policy. We don't agree with that. We are supporting the troops. We are

supporting the troops when they are in the field by trying to get them

the body armor and humvees and blood-clotting bandages they have not

had. We are supporting them when they come home by trying to fully fund

the Veterans' Administration. Don't talk to us about supporting the

troops. We are walking the walk and putting our money where our mouth

is.

So, sadly, our colleagues on the other side, instead of joining us in

this debate, often seek to thwart it, as they did last time. I hope

they will not do that again because America is demanding debate. We

hope they will come together with us, as we did last year in the Levin-

Reid resolution, in a bipartisan change of mission. That is what the

people are asking for.

I know my colleagues on the other side are in an uncomfortable

position. They are torn between the policy of our President, their

party leader, and what their constituencies want. By the way, the

constituencies across America want this. I have seen the polling data.

It is not just in places such as Rhode Island, New York, and

Pennsylvania where the people are asking for a real change in strategy;

it is also in places such as Kentucky, North Carolina, and Mississippi.

It is throughout America. They are not doing it because they don't

support the troops or for some nefarious reason. They are doing it for

a reason that is as plain as the noses on our faces: what we are doing

now is not working--whether it be with 140,000 or 150,000, 160,000, or

200,000 troops.

So we are here in the hallowed tradition of our Constitution to

debate what we are doing in foreign policy and war policy and whether

it is right. We will stand together on this side of the aisle and state

that, as patriots who support our troops, we desperately need a change

in strategy and in mission. We will bring up this issue on the floor of

the Senate again and again and again, until our colleagues on the other

side join us, until our colleagues on the other side understand that

the wishes of their constituencies are for a change in strategy, until

our colleagues on the other side have the courage to tell the President

that on this issue he simply is wrong. That is part of the hallowed

tradition of this country. We are proud to do what we are doing.

Mr. President, I hope and pray that our colleagues on the other side

of the aisle will allow this debate to go forward, that they will put

forward their ideas, and we will put forward ours. Debate it we will

and debate it we must. I hope and pray that debate starts to yield the

change in strategy that our troops in Iraq, our people in America, the

Iraqi people, and the people of the world so desperately need.

With that, I thank my colleague from Rhode Island for the time.

I yield the floor.