Mr. President, I rise to speak against S.J. Res. 9.

Today, the Senate gathers once again to debate the war in Iraq. This

is a debate which has been at the center of our national politics--

indeed, of our national consciousness--for 4 years now. As everyone

here knows, we are now in the thick of the battle for Baghdad, a

critical battle where the outcome hangs in the balance.

A new commander, GEN David Petraeus, has taken command, having been

confirmed by the Senate 81 to 0 just a few weeks ago. A new strategy is

being put into action, with new troops being deployed into Baghdad. The

question we in the Senate now confront is simple: Will Congress give

General Petraeus and his troops a chance to succeed?

This joint resolution before us would deny them that chance, forcing

our troops to break off the battle of Baghdad in 120 days without

regard to how they are doing. Instead of providing General Petraeus

with the necessary reinforcements he has requested, the reinforcements

he is, indeed, counting on, this resolution would strip troops away

from him in the middle of the battle. That makes no sense. It is why

Eisenhower famously once said: ``Anyone who sets a deadline in war

doesn't understand war.''

We need to be clear with ourselves and with the Nation. The joint

resolution we are debating would impose a fixed date for the beginning

of a withdrawal from Iraq. In just 120 days after this legislation

would be passed, American forces would be required by law to begin

redeploying out of Iraq. This would happen regardless of conditions on

the ground, regardless of the recommendations of General Petraeus,

regardless of the opinions of our allies in Iraq and throughout the

region, and regardless of whether security is then improving or

deteriorating. It would bind the hands of General Petraeus,

substituting the judgment of Congress today for the judgment of our

military commanders, our diplomats, and our friends in the region 120

days from now.

Congress has been given many great responsibilities by our

Constitution, but the daily micromanagement of war is not one of them.

In fact, the proponents of this resolution, as I listen to them, make

no attempt to justify why 120 days from now is exactly the right time

to commence a withdrawal. Perhaps that is because there is no military

or strategic logic at work. This is a deadline which is as arbitrary as

it is inflexible. It specifically denies a great American general,

David Petraeus, the room for decisive leadership, which history tells

us any successful commander must have. Surely we know better than this.

Surely we cannot think this is a path to success or security.

I have heard opponents of the current strategy insist that our troops

should not be there ``policing a civil war.'' Well, that position, that

statement would come as a surprise to the soldiers who have been

serving in Bosnia and Kosovo over the past decade, first stopping and

now policing a civil war--in fact, two of them. They were correctly,

wisely dispatched there by a Democratic President, with the support of

Democrats in Congress, the support of many of the same colleagues of

mine who are today calling for this withdrawal.

I ask you, my friends, what has changed? Has security worsened in

Iraq since the new strategy began? Has the political situation

deteriorated? Have you lost confidence in General Petraeus, whom we

confirmed just a few weeks ago? I think the answer to all those

questions is no.

So I would ask: If we were to stop our legislative debating and

maneuvering for a moment and actually look at what is happening in

Baghdad right now, what would we see? We would see that sectarian

fighting between Sunnis and Shiites is down in districts in Baghdad

where American and Iraqi

forces have entered. That is according to General Petraeus' senior

counterinsurgency adviser. We would see that Muqtada al-Sadr has

disappeared, that many of his top lieutenants have been arrested, and

that his mighty army, which terrorized much of Baghdad for the last

year, has gone to ground. We would also see signs of political

progress, including the passage of the new oil law by the Iraqi

Cabinet, renewed talks by Sunni insurgent leaders about reconciliation,

and even word of an impending Government shakeup involving the removal

of some Ministers in the current Government. Finally, if we stopped and

stepped back from the debate here in Washington and looked at what is

happening on the ground in Baghdad and in Iraq, in Anbar, right now, we

would see that the military surge has made possible a critically

important diplomatic surge, as representatives from neighboring

countries gathered in Baghdad last weekend in the first of a series of

such regional conferences.

I don't know if this progress will lead to ultimate success in Iraq,

to victory over extremism and terrorism there, to a victory for

democracy and hope for an alternative path in the Arab world to the

death and suicide and hatred al-Qaida offers, but I can tell you that

what is happening in Iraq today certainly does not look like failure to

me. In fact, it looks like some progress is being made as a result of

this new strategy in Baghdad and in Anbar--preliminary but encouraging

progress.

So why, in the face of these developments, would the Senate possibly

adopt a resolution such as this? Why, in the face of these encouraging

developments that suggest this new plan might well be working, would

this Chamber demand that it end? Why, just weeks after confirming

General Petraeus, would this Chamber block him from carrying out the

strategy he shaped and is now successfully implementing?

There is only one understandable reason for Congress to impose this

kind of deadline to begin a withdrawal, and that is if we were

absolutely convinced the Petraeus strategy is doomed to failure. The

only way a timetable for withdrawal makes sense is if there is no

glimmer of hope that General Petraeus and the troops serving under him

can succeed. I submit that is simply not a conclusion justified by the

facts on the ground in Iraq today.

We are in a long and difficult war. We know that. The price paid by

our heroic soldiers and their families has been heavy. I recognize that

it is a war in which we have made mistakes, some of them serious, and

in which we have experienced exacerbating, heartbreaking, infuriating

setbacks. It is a war that has stirred the anger and frustration of the

American people, feelings that are justified. What is not justified,

however, is for Congress to let the passions and politics of the moment

blind us to what is happening on the ground in Iraq today and what is

on the line for our security tomorrow.

Our decision-making should be driven by the real-world conditions in

Baghdad, not by the political mindset here in Washington. This joint

resolution before this Chamber fails that test, and that is why it

should fail to pass the Senate. General Petraeus has said he will be

able to advise us, the President, the Nation, whether his plan is

succeeding by the end of this summer. Until then, let me suggest an

alternative course for Congress. Let me suggest we declare a truce in

the Washington wars over the war in Iraq. For the next 6 months, let's

let our troops and the Iraqi forces fight with our support and without

us sending them mixed messages. Let us, instead, across party lines, in

this Senate and in the House, come together around a constructive

legislative agenda for our security in the world, including in Iraq,

authorizing an increase in the size of the Army and Marines; funding

the equipment and protection for our troops in Iraq, Afghanistan, and

worldwide; monitoring progress on the ground in Iraq with oversight

hearings, investigating contract procedures being followed in Iraq and

Afghanistan, and guaranteeing Iraq war veterans receive the first-class

treatment and care they deserve when they come home.

I ask my colleagues to think hard about what we are doing and what

this resolution asks us to do. I ask you to look carefully, not at the

public opinion polls in Washington or throughout America, but at the

realities on the ground in Iraq and to think about the consequences of

a forced withdrawal and failure there. I ask you to step back from this

path and to vote against this resolution.

I yield the floor.