Mr. Speaker, I can assure my good

friend from Georgia that I will not bore the folks for 35 minutes in

this House Chamber, nor will I bore you that much, but it is certainly

an honor to be with you here in this House Chamber, this historic

Chamber.

I asked one of the freshmen Members as we traveled from the Chamber

after voting recently through the tunnel going to the Cannon Building,

and I said, well, your first 6 weeks, how does it feel? He said,

Lincoln, I want to be honest with you. He said, I never knew how it

felt to work in a museum, but I do now.

Working here in this Capitol, where those statues of the tremendous

leaders of the past, inside the House Chamber where many decisions have

been made, where on December 8 we declared war on Japan in 1941 and

then two or 3 days later, after being declared war on by the Axis

Nations, Germany and Italy, and that declaration occurred here,

declaration of war, really the last declaration of war that has been

held inside this House Chamber and declaration of war that only

Congress, quite frankly, can declare.

So, being here at this time of history and being on the floor with

you and other members of the Blue Dogs certainly is an honor, not a

privilege, but an honor that the folks back in my district have given

me, and I believe that they expect us to come here and be bipartisan in

our efforts, that we are not here to be demagoguing the other side or

critical, but you have to try to work in a harmonious way to find

solutions to whatever difficulties we have in this Nation.

I had a Member ask me when I first came here, Lincoln, what did you

want to change when you came up here? And I thought real hard, and it

really did not take a lot of thought. My answer was I did not want to

change America. No country in the world has reached the level of

helping its citizens the way that this government of the United States

of America has. I do not want to change it, but there are problems. We

need to fix those, and we can do it by working together.

So, for me, my challenge to my colleagues on the other side of the

aisle and colleagues here on this side of the aisle, let us start being

a little more civil with each other.

I left from this House Chamber after the debate we had on whether or

not to agree with the President's plan for a surge in Iraq is something

we wanted to do in this Chamber, and it got to the point where the

questions of someone's patriotism became a part of that debate and

dialogue. Of course, some may obviously follow suit with that, but we

had a debate about whether or not we supported the troops. The

resolution said we do. We had a debate about whether we agreed with the

strategy, apparently the new strategy of this President to engage an

additional numbers of troops in Iraq.

Now I want to talk a moment about that budget we looked at and at the

deficit. I remember I was elected in 1980 to the State House in

Tennessee. As I was travelling from my home of Byrdstown in Pall Mall

to Nashville to the State capital, it came across the radio that we had

just increased the national debt ceiling to a trillion dollars. That

frightened me. A trillion dollars in the early 1980s. I remember that

as we talked about increasing that debt ceiling by $20 billion or $15

billion how difficult it was in this House Chamber. Now we increase it

by hundreds of billions of dollars without even really having an up-or-

down vote on that particular debt ceiling increase.

I thought how ironic it was that in 1980 how difficult it was for a

debt ceiling to be increased, and now it just seems to be as if a snap

of the finger and all of the sudden, we reach that level.

Then I watched for the next 8 years, the next 12 years, as that debt

not gradually, but very rapidly rose in the 3 and 4 trillions of

dollars. I am thinking in a 12-year period of time, how is that

possible. If we look back basically almost 200 years, we reached a

trillion, and suddenly we had doubled and quadrupled what we had in

that period of time.

Since 2001, even with the surpluses that were applied to reduce the

debt that this country owed, for a period of almost 4 years, out 4

years of surplus budgets where we had more than we spent, we took in

more than we spent, and started paying down the debt, I am surprised

that almost $3 trillion in the last 5 years has been added to that

figure down there.

I often hear people talk about the first thing a baby does--my chief

of staff just recently had a newborn son in early December, and they

nicknamed him Willis, a pretty little thing, handsome little fellow. He

came to one of my open meetings with him. On Saturday, we had 24

throughout the district. I represent 24 counties. The first thing

little Willis did when he came to this earth, he started crying. I know

now why he was crying. He realizes that this country, that these

leaders in this Chamber, that this Nation has handed him a $29,000-plus

debt, that he does not even have a job yet to pay off, and if we

continue to go as we are going, before he gets his first job, he will

owe more money than five times the first house cost me that I bought

for our family in the late 1960s.

I want to talk now about Iraq for a moment. I hear people in this

Chamber talk about cut and run being the policy of Democrats and

staying the course being the policy of the White House. Both of those

are wrong. I do not think standing the course is going to get it done,

and cut and run is something, quite frankly, that I go back in history,

and I cannot find that example, except some folks might say Vietnam.

But I saw Vice President Cheney in Japan early last week thanking our

troops, and it dawned upon me that, let me say now we have troops in

Japan after World War II. We have troops in Germany after World War II.

I went back and looked at the tens of thousands of troops we have in

Korea and South Korea after the Korean War; I go to Kosovo and in

Bosnia and in Serbia and in the Balkans, and I realize that we have

forces there from the late 1990s, although there were those in this

Chamber on the other side of the aisle that called that Nation building

and wanted to know when then-President Clinton was going to give us a

time certain, even I think the presidential candidate at that time as

well who later became the President in 2001, even he was talking about

Nation building and a time certain that our troops should be pulled

out.

As we debate this issue, it is ironic to me that anyone would accuse

someone else of asking for some of the same considerations that they

asked for a certainty of. But we are still in Bosnia and Kosovo and,

quite frankly, this President that is here now and this Congress saw

fit to stay there, that we should keep the peace with our friends of

NATO.

But I look at other parts of the world. We are in Turkey. Our ally in

NATO, the Turks, we still have bases there. But then I got to thinking,

well, now, we had a war in the Middle East, a U.N.-sanctioned, totally

supported, my understanding is we probably had three or four times the

number of troops that went in 1991 to remove Saddam Hussein from his

aggressive actions in Kuwait, and we forced him back into his country.

Then we had north and south no-fly zones, had him pretty much

contained. But we still have troops in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. We still

have troops in Kuwait. We still have troops in places like United Arab

Emirates. Are we going to have troops in Iraq when this is over? This

is never going to be over.

I thank my friend from Georgia.

I think, what my hope is, all of us become a little bit more civil in

this debate that we are having and realize that this is about America.

We want security and we want peace. We want the Iraqis to win. What we

have done is destroyed an Army in Iraq and I agree with that, we have

destroyed an Army in Iraq that was able to defend, or at least to

resist the Iranian Army with three times the population they have for a

period of over 10 years. We now have to be the Army for the Iraqis.

It is our responsibility to defend Iraq. In essence, I think we have

to put our troops along the Syrian and Iranian border to be sure that

no one interferes with Iraq and let the Iraqis settle their own

differences. Twelve million Iraqis voted in December of 2005. They

established their government; it is there. Departments elected. It is

time we let them govern themselves, but we must protect them.

You have been very kind to allow me to be here participating in this

Blue Dog conversation.

Before I leave, one thing I want to say, one of the reasons we have

been in the Middle East since shortly after World War II, quite

frankly, we were there to keep Germany from getting all the oil that

could have helped them delay the war much longer in World War II, maybe

even have won some territories. Europe may have looked totally

different if Hitler and his Nazis had been able to get control of the

oil fields in the Middle East. We have been there and have been invited

by governments in the Middle East for some time. Folks may or may not

have agreed with us, but the leaders who were there invited us to help

them. Quite frankly, there was fear in the Cold War that that might go

to the Communist Nations of Russia and perhaps even China. So we have

been there for a reason.

We now are there we say to protect ourselves from terrorists. My

opinion is that we have to stay there to protect the Iraqis from other

aggressor Nations and let them solve their problems and then we can

bring our troops home. We will be there for a long time. The American

public understands that.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.