Mr. President, first of all, I welcome this opportunity

to talk about the current status of the involvement of the United

States in Iraq. I am glad we are having this discussion. I start by

thanking the troops for their incredible service to our country and the

incredible work they are doing, and I think this Congress, by words and

deeds, has shown its support for our troops. The budget we provided

last year provides the resources to take care of our veterans and the

funds to take care of our active military. That is what we should be

doing.

But we have now been in Iraq for many years. Several years ago I was

in Iraq. I had a chance to visit our troops and take a look at what was

happening on the ground. I saw then that we didn't have the right

equipment there; that the administration had sent our troops without

having the right support. I was proud of the action the Congress took

in providing the military support and the type of equipment our troops

needed.

But the discussion of what is best for our troops is whether we have

the right mission in Iraq. This campaign is now entering its sixth

year. We have been in Iraq longer than we were in World War II. We have

now spent a half trillion dollars directly on our war in Iraq. Almost

4,000 Americans have been killed, almost 30,000 have been wounded, 67

Marylanders have given their lives, and over 800 have been injured.

Many of these injuries are life changing.

I have had a chance to visit Andrews Air Force Base as our wounded

soldiers come home, and I have been able to see firsthand the type of

injuries they sustained. They will have to deal with them for the rest

of their lives.

When we look at the strength of al-Qaida, our experts tell us they

are stronger today than they have ever been. So we haven't accomplished

our mission as far as dealing with the threat against the United

States.

Let's talk about the facts. The inescapable conclusion is that

President Bush was wrong in sending our troops to Iraq in the first

place. I am proud I voted against that authorization when I was in the

other body. Our troops are involved in trying to referee a civil war.

That is their primary focus. Yes, we are fighting terrorists, and we

need to continue to do that, but the primary need for American troops

is to deal with the civil unrest that is currently taking place in

Iraq.

The costs, as I explained before, in lives has been our deepest loss,

but also the dollars--a half trillion dollars. Think about what we

could have done with that money. I think about schools in Baltimore

that should be replaced. We could have replaced every school with the

money that has been spent so our children could get a proper education.

We could have dealt with the energy crisis in this country and built

the transit systems we need and become energy independent so we are not

dependent on foreign oil in the Middle East. We could have done

something about the health care system in this country.

A year ago, Diamonte Driver died in Prince George's County, MD,

because he couldn't get dental care. We are suffering an economic

downturn right now because we have large debt, in part, and that debt

is accumulating because we are not only spending a half trillion

dollars, we are not paying for it. We are borrowing the money. It is

making it even more dangerous for our economy.

So I know there has been a lot of debate on this floor about whether

the President's surge policy has worked. I must tell my colleagues, I

think our soldiers are performing, as I said earlier, in a great

manner. When you put American troops in a country, they are going to do

their job and they are going to provide the type of help to that

country and to its communities that American troops are trained to do.

But the problem is the mission is wrong. The surge has not worked in

accomplishing the U.S. mission that is in the best interests of this

country.

I remember when the President said: We are going to have the surge

because we are going to provide stability in the country so the Iraqi

Government can take control and we can bring our troops home. That was

the mission. That is what we are trying to accomplish, but we haven't

accomplished that. Let's look at the facts. Look at the facts.

Violence in Iraq continues today. The majority leader mentioned the

headlines in today's paper. Violence continues. It is a dangerous

country. Suicide bombers operate at will. The troop levels were

supposed to be reduced. In January of 2007 we had 130,000 American

troops in Iraq. Today we have in excess of 140,000. There is now a

pause in reducing our troop levels. We haven't been able to reduce the

troop levels. On governance, on the Iraqi Government representing the

people of Iraq, they set their own benchmarks. We didn't set them. Of

18 benchmarks, only 3 have been accomplished. So, no, we haven't

accomplished the mission the President established for why we needed

our troops in Iraq.

But let's take a look at our military and foreign policy experts.

They tell us our military today is spread too thin, that we aren't

looking after the best interests of America's military interests. Talk

to our people who run our National Guard and Reserve units.

I had a chance to meet with members of the Maryland National Guard.

They have, again, answered the call. People of the Maryland National

Guard have been deployed regularly into Iraq and Afghanistan. But I am

told today we don't have the equipment in our National Guard to

continue the proper training missions because the equipment was left in

Iraq. We haven't replaced that. Also, recruitment is going to be more

difficult, and we need to deal with the reintegration of the National

Guard people who are coming back to Maryland in our community, and that

is going to take a real effort. Now they have to be prepared for

redeployment.

We have lost our focus, according to our experts on the war against

terror. We should have taken care of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. We

haven't done that. Now Afghanistan looks as if it is moving in the

wrong direction because we are not focusing on the threat, which is

terrorism. Instead, we have our troops dealing with a civil

war in Iraq. There is no disagreement among the foreign policy experts

that America has lost its leadership internationally and is galvanizing

the international community to help us in the war against terror. We

have lost that focus. So our mission is wrong.

The question, though, is where do we go from here. Well, if we want

to follow President Bush's policy, we will have a permanent presence of

American troops in Iraq. I think that is the wrong policy. I believe

the people of Maryland and of this Nation believe it is the wrong

policy. The President's policy is basically waiting out the burning out

of the civil war. We know 4 million Iraqis are displaced, some in the

country, some outside the country. That is not the right answer for the

people of Iraq, and it is certainly not the right answer for U.S.

policy.

So we have an alternative. Senator Feingold has brought to us a bill

which I believe warrants our support. It is the right mission for our

troops and our Nation. Fighting terrorism, I am for that. That is what

we should be doing. Protecting our troops, that is what we should be

doing. Helping the Iraqis in the training of their own military, that

is what we should be doing. It focuses our mission on what is in the

best interests of the United States. We need a political solution, not

a military solution, for the people of Iraq. The Feingold resolution

acknowledges that.

We need to work with the international community. We work best when

we work with the international community. The international community

is wondering what we are doing in Iraq.

The Feingold bill does not place a time limit on the withdrawal of

U.S. troops. It is an honorable and orderly process for us to complete

a mission in Iraq. I believe it is in the best interests of the United

States. I believe it is the right policy for our soldiers, and I

believe it deserves the support of this body.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.