Mr. President, I rise to speak against the measure

introduced by Senator Feingold.

It has been only a year since GEN David Petraeus arrived in Baghdad

and took command of American forces in Iraq. But in these brief 12

months, he and the American and coalition troops under his command have

brought about a tectonic shift in Iraq that has altered the course of

the war there and, with it, the future of at least two great nations--

Iraq and the United States of America--and the lives of hundreds of

millions of people in those two nations and so many others threatened

by violent jihadist terrorists in the Middle East and beyond.

When the surge first began a year ago, many doubted that the violence

then raging in Iraq could be brought under control. Even as American

troops began implementing this bold new counterinsurgency strategy,

some opponents of the war inside and outside of Congress declared that

the war in Iraq was already ``lost,'' that the surge had already been

``tried and failed,'' and that it mattered more, frankly, that we get

out of Iraq than that we succeed in Iraq.

They could not have been more wrong. Thanks to the surge, the bravery

and skill of American and Iraqi troops and the will of the Iraqi people

to be free from terrorists, conditions on the ground in Iraq have been

totally transformed from those of a year ago.

A year ago, al-Qaida in Iraq was entrenched, in control of,

exercising murderous control in Anbar Province and Baghdad. Now those

evil forces of Islamist extremism are facing their single greatest and

most humiliating defeat since 2001.

This is not just my opinion. It is a matter of fact. In Baghdad, a

fact: sectarian killings are down 95 percent in the last year; suicide

bombings are down nearly 70 percent; IED attacks have been cut nearly

in half.

In the face of those extraordinary improvements in Iraq--and many

more I will speak of in a moment in the social and political and

economic life of that great country--however, antiwar forces here in

America have reacted not with sighs of relief and gratitude but,

instead, by doing everything in their power to downplay or diminish our

hard-won gains in Iraq.

Rather than admit the possibility that they had been wrong about the

surge and about the capability of reestablishing security in Iraq,

they, instead, reached for another rationale for retreat. What they

argued was the lack of political progress in Iraq and, therefore, that

the surge had failed.

But this argument has also now been defeated by facts on the ground

in Iraq.

In the first place, the Iraqi people have taken over their local and

provincial governments in a grassroots up democratic revolution. At the

national level, a response is occurring. It took too long, but it is

now significant. Benchmark legislation has surged forward in the Iraqi

Parliament. The budget law, passed; the debaathification law, passed;

the provincial powers and election law, passed; the amnesty law,

passed.

Thanks to the surge, the Sunni Arabs, who once constituted the core

of the insurgency, have now risen, because we stood by them, to join

with us

and go ahead on their own to fight against al-Qaida and put al-Qaida--

the same al-Qaida that attacked us on 9-11-01--on the run.

Thanks to the surge, the Shiites, who had turned in desperation to

militias and death squads for protection from al-Qaida and Iranian-

backed extremists, are now rejecting those militias, death squads, and

extremists. They want a better, more peaceful life for themselves and

their families. And the American-led surge has put that within their

reach.

Last week, Moqtada al-Sadr announced he is extending his unilateral

cease-fire. He did not do this as a favor to the United States of

America or the Maliki Government in Baghdad. He did it because in Iraq

today, thanks to the surge, and all that has been part of it, the rules

of the game have changed. Violence and extremism are no longer the

clear path to power in Iraq. In fact, they are becoming the path to

political oblivion in Iraq. The people of Iraq want peace and stability

and hope.

What then has been the reaction of antiwar groups here at home to

these enormous achievements in Iraq? Are they now ready to admit they

were wrong about the surge? Even if they were opposed to the war in

Iraq in the first place, are they now ready to acknowledge that we are

there, we are succeeding, and it would be wrong and hurtful to the

United States for Congress to force a retreat now that would, in

Churchill's terms, ``snatch defeat from the jaws of victory''?

To judge by the resolution now before us, the answer to that question

is no. On the contrary, even as the facts on the ground have changed so

much for the better, the resolution before us offers the same familiar

prescription for retreat and surrender--ordered by Congress, not by our

military leaders in the field or here at home--and it orders that, no

matter what the consequences for the freedom of the Iraqi people, the

future of the Islamic world, and the future national security of the

United States of America.

Some claim the war in Iraq is a distraction from the ``real'' war on

terror. Al-Qaida disagrees. And so do I. Al-Qaida's leadership has

repeatedly made clear they consider Iraq to be the central front of

their campaign against us and most of the rest of the civilized world.

According to our intelligence agencies, al-Qaida in Iraq remains al-

Qaida's most visible and capable affiliate worldwide and the only one

known to have expressed a desire to attack the American homeland--us

here at home.

I know there are some who hear these arguments, watch what is

happening, and say: Oh, no. The sponsors of this legislation certainly

understand exactly how much political and military progress we are

making against al-Qaida and Iranian-backed extremists in Iraq and how

much is riding on the line there for America and most of the rest of

the civilized world faced by this threat of violent jihadist terrorism.

But this argument goes that the sponsors of this kind of resolution

feel compelled to offer it to show antiwar groups in the United States

that they have not forgotten them.

I refuse to believe that. I refuse to believe--I do not believe it--

that my colleagues would so trifle with the honor of American soldiers

who have served and are serving in Iraq--too many of whom have given

their lives in that service--or they would play such a political game

with our national security. I respect my colleagues too much to take

this legislation as anything other than what it says. It orders a

retreat within 120 days.

It actually imposes so-called caveats on American forces after that

120 days, which are exactly the kind of caveats, limitations, on what

they can do that we are now arguing with our European allies to stop in

Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, some of our NATO allies are there, but

they can only do certain things. They cannot enter into battle, et

cetera. They cannot go out into the field with the Afghani National

Army. We are saying you cannot fight a war that way.

Listen to what one section of this matter before us offered by the

Senator from Wisconsin says. Our troops, after the 120 days, can

provide training to members of the Iraqi Security Forces ``provided

that such training does not involve members of the United States Armed

Forces taking part in combat operations or being embedded with Iraqi

forces.''

That is a caveat, a limitation, exactly what we are arguing with our

European allies to stop doing in Afghanistan.

The fact is, the legislation, this measure now before this Chamber,

flies in the face of the recommendations of our proud and tested

commanders on the ground in Iraq. If enacted, it would unravel all the

hard-won gains our troops have made in the past year. It would hand

victory to the suicide bombers and fanatics who are now on the run. It

would betray the millions of Iraqis who are standing with us today

because they desire a better, freer life for themselves and their

children. And it would endanger the lives of and hopes of hundreds of

millions more who live in the Middle East and throughout the Islamic

world who yearn for a life of peace and justice, not a life of

extremism, death, and primitivism that al-Qaida offers them.

I wish to close, if I may, with a word directed to my colleagues on

this side of the aisle, the Democratic Members of this Senate. I have

thought a lot about this war, and I cannot help but wonder, in a moment

such as this, what some of the political heroes of my youth, who were

Democrats, would think if they were here and could see and listen to

this debate and read this resolution.

I think of President Kennedy, who declared:

In my opinion, that is exactly what we are doing in Iraq today.

I ask my colleagues: Do these words have meaning, have significance

or are these just words?

I think of President Harry Truman, who proclaimed, at the outset of

the Cold War:

Are these too just words? Isn't that exactly what is happening in

Iraq today? The people of Iraq, liberated from the terrible

dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, hoping to secure a better future for

themselves, now, with our assistance and encouragement, ``are resisting

attempted subjugation by armed minorities''--read here: al-Qaida--``or

by outside pressures''--read here: Iran. Are these just words? I hope

not. I do not believe they are.

There was a time when these were not just words, but they were the

convictions that lay at the heart of the Democratic Party's foreign and

national security policy.

The legislation now before this Chamber, if implemented, would not,

in my opinion, only betray our friends in the Middle East, it would not

only betray America's own vital national interests against our

deadliest enemies, al-Qaida and Iran, it would also betray the best

ideals of the Democratic Party that I joined decades ago.

They were strong and liberal ideals, and I use those words

intentionally. Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy, great

Democratic Senators such as Hubert Humphrey and ``Scoop'' Jackson,

believed that the party stood for being liberal at home and liberal

abroad. What did that mean? Liberal in the classic sense of the term

``freedom,'' which is what America is all about: the self-evident truth

that we are all endowed by our Creator with the rights to life and

liberty.

So I wish to appeal particularly today to my Democratic colleagues in

the Senate to reject this resolution, and in that sense to return to

what I believe are the strongest, proudest, most purposed moments of

the history of the Democratic Party in recent decades on matters of

foreign and national security policy.

In sum, a year ago, the Bush administration acknowledged its mistakes

in Iraq and changed course there. It is now time for opponents of the

war and the surge to do the same. It is time for them to admit that the

surge has worked and that America's security and freedom are on the

line in Iraq today, that we are winning there, and it would be a

disastrous mistake to impose the policies ordered by this resolution,

this amendment, which would deprive our brave American men and women in

uniform and the brave soldiers of other countries, including Iraq,

of the victory that they are winning now for the people of Iraq, the

people of America, and the cause of freedom, which is America's cause.

I implore my colleagues, vote against this resolution.

I thank the Chair and I yield the floor.