Mr. President, the President of the United States has

recently stated that we are remaining in Iraq in order to defeat al-

Qaida--a summary of a statement he made yesterday. Well, I wish to

briefly state what I think the facts are.

Iraq has become a Bush-fulfilling prophecy. Al-Qaida was not there

before the war, and it is there now. It is a problem, but it is not the

primary problem. In my view, the President of the United States is

inadvertently handing al-Qaida a propaganda victory here by vastly

exaggerating its role in Iraq.

The sectarian war--the war between Sunnis and Shias, Sunnis and Shias

killing each other--is the core problem, and our troops are caught in

the middle of that war. New statistics from Iraq make it absolutely

clear that sectarian violence is getting worse and now exceeds the

levels immediately prior to the surging of American forces over a month

ago.

The focus of the President of the United States on al-Qaida and Iraq,

ironically, supports exactly what I have been arguing for. We need to

dramatically limit the mission of U.S. troops in Iraq, getting them out

of the middle of this sectarian civil war and refocusing their mission,

which should be battling al-Qaida from occupying territory in Anbar

Province and training Iraqi troops. That would require far fewer troops

and allow us to begin to remove American troops immediately and get the

vast majority of our combat troops out of Iraq early next year,

consistent with the Biden-Levin provision that was in the bill the

President vetoed.

Our troops cannot end the sectarian war. Mr. President, 500,000

American troops will not end the sectarian war. What is required is a

political solution, even as we continue to take on al-Qaida, which is a

growing but not the primary problem in Iraq.

The President continues to bank on a farfetched hope. His hope is

well-intended, but it is farfetched that the Iraqis will rally behind a

strong democratic central government in Baghdad. But there is no trust

within the Government in Baghdad. There is no trust of the Government

in Baghdad by the Iraqi people. And there is no capacity by that

Government in Baghdad to deliver either services or security.

Instead, the President should throw his full weight--the full weight

of his office--behind the solution based upon federalism in Iraq,

allowing the Iraqis to have control over the fabric of their daily

lives, helping them bring into reality the Iraqi Constitution, where

article 1 says: We are a decentralized federal system. We should not

impose this. We do not need to. It is already in the Iraqi

Constitution.

The President should call for a U.N. summit to get the world's major

powers and Iraq's neighbors to push for a political agreement. It is

not an answer to put up a straw man and say we remain there because of

al-Qaida. What is an answer is to call for the permanent five of the

United Nations to call for a regional conference; make Iraq the world's

problem. I met with the Security Council permanent four, with us being

the fifth, in New York on Monday. It is like pushing an open door. They

are ready to respond to the President's request to do that. This is

doable. This is necessary. The President should begin to focus on the

facts, not the fiction of al-Qaida being our rationale for being there.

I will end where I began. Al-Qaida's presence in Iraq has become a

Bush-fulfilling prophecy. They were not there before. They are there

now. But they are not the primary problem. It is the vicious cycle of

sectarian violence. It must end.