Mr. President, I state again for my

colleagues that this debate is not about support for the troops or

support for their extraordinary work on the ground in Iraq. Our troops,

the best fighting force in the history of the world, have performed

admirably, honorably, and successfully under extreme and dangerous

conditions in Iraq. We are not here today to besmirch their efforts,

their work, or their sacrifice. To indicate otherwise is disingenuous

and out of line.

This is not the time or the place for political attacks. The

President even made an offer to Congress before a nationally televised

audience on January 10 that, ``if Members have improvements that can be

made, we will make them.''

This is a debate about a serious topic: What is the way forward in

Iraq? How can we achieve a political solution without the additional

loss of American lives?

One of my colleagues has said over and over, ``this comes down to if

you support an escalation or not'' and ``the American people deserve

this debate.'' For me, the question is, Will the Senate lead? Will the

Senate express its opposition to the surge? I know many do not think

passing a nonbinding resolution is leading, and I know others say the

resolution goes too far. I say that, on an issue of this magnitude, an

issue this important, it is critical for the Senate to speak with the

strongest voice possible. Generating a revised resolution with broader

appeal was putting our best foot forward in securing the strongest

bipartisan vote possible.

I am proud to have worked with my colleague, Senator Warner, the most

recent past chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and our

colleague, Senator Collins of Maine, in this cause. They have shown

tremendous leadership on this issue, as have Senator Levin, Senator

Biden, and Senator Hagel. But it seems that even when it comes to the

lives of our troops, partisanship prevails. Here we are, after weeks of

negotiations, after weeks of public proclamations, after weeks of

consideration, about to witness the minority choose politics over

progress--and this is after we revised our original resolution to

address some of the concerns that were raised by both Democrats and

Republicans.

It is important that we point out that this is not simply about being

opposed to a surge. It is about opposition to a surge to do what? To go

into Baghdad? To go into the midst of sectarian violence, civil war,

criminality? There is no opposition to continuing to support troops in

Al-Anbar and even an increase in the troops to fight the bad guys in

that location. But that is altogether different from going into Baghdad

where our troops will be expected to be on the point and in harm's way

in the midst of sectarian violence that is unparalleled across our

great world today. But in strong support of Iraq, we must, in fact, do

what we can to support Iraq but without putting our troops in the midst

of that caldron.

The Baker-Hamilton report made things very clear. We have established

benchmarks as well--that we should empower the Iraqi Government to be

able to do what it can to quell its own violence. We cannot win their

civil war. We cannot stop the violence in Baghdad. Only a political

solution achieved by the Iraqis will be able to do that.

If we are to do our duty, if we are to exhibit leadership, let us

begin by allowing a full debate on the resolutions we have pending.

Let's talk about the President's plan to deploy American troops to the

crossroads of civil war in Iraq. Let's talk about holding the Iraqi

Government accountable for its responsibilities.

I am prepared to defend the resolutions I have offered with Senators

Warner, Collins, and Levin. I am prepared to vote on the McCain

resolution. And I am prepared for the debate because its time has come.

I ask my colleagues, if not now, when? If not now, do we wait for

more troops to die before we oppose the President's plan? If not now,

do we wait for more violence, more unrest, more danger for our troops

before we act? Some have said the President deserves one last chance to

succeed. How do we ask our troops to do again what has failed in the

past? We have had other surges that have not succeeded for a variety of

reasons, not the least of which is the Iraqis have not shown up. So

what is different this time?

I hope we do not look at this as our last hurrah.

I yield the floor.