I thank the Chair.

Madam President, America has reached a critical crossroad in the war

in Iraq. More than 4 years ago, this Senate voted to authorize the use

of force against Saddam Hussein, a tyrant who slaughtered his own

people, attacked his neighbors, and threatened our security.

Thanks to the courageous service of the men and women of the American

military, that evil regime was overthrown and in its place came hopes

for a democracy in the heart of the Middle East, hopes for a victory in

the war for the hearts and minds of the Muslim world.

As of today, sadly, as we all know, those hopes have not been

realized. Because of the ruthless conduct of our enemies in Iraq, as

well as our own failures, we instead today find ourselves on a knife's

edge in Iraq.

Now a new course has been chosen. A new commander is in place in

Iraq, confirmed unanimously by this Senate. A new Secretary of Defense

is in place at the Pentagon, also confirmed overwhelmingly by the

Senate. And a new strategy has begun to be put into action on the

ground in Iraq by American troops.

It is altogether proper that we debate our policy in Iraq. It should

be a debate that is as serious as the situation in Iraq and that

reflects the powers the Constitution gives to Congress in matters of

war.

But that, sadly, is not the debate that the Warner-Levin resolution

invites us to have. I am going to speak strongly against this

resolution because I feel strongly about it. I do so with the greatest

respect for my colleagues who have offered it. But I believe its

passage would compromise America's security, and I will say so within

the clearest terms I can muster.

The resolution before us, its sponsors concede, will not stop the new

strategy from going forward on the ground in Iraq. In fact, as we speak

in the Senate, thousands of American troops are already there in

Baghdad, with thousands more moving into position to carry out their

Commander's orders. This resolution does nothing to alter those facts.

Instead, its sponsors say it will send a message of rebuke from this

Senate to the President of the United States, from one end of

Pennsylvania Avenue to the other. But the President has made clear he

will not be deterred in carrying out what he sees as his duties and

responsibilities as Commander in Chief.

And there is a world well beyond Pennsylvania Avenue that is also

watching and listening to what we do. What we say is being heard in

Baghdad by Iraqi political leaders, by moderates trying to decide

whether we Americans will stand with them over the long term.

What we say is being heard by our men and women in uniform who

naturally will be interested in knowing whether we support the plan

they have been asked to carry out at risk to their own lives.

What we say in the Senate will be heard by the leaders of the

thuggish regimes in Iran and Syria and by al-Qaida terrorists eager for

evidence that America's will is breaking.

And what we say in the Senate will be heard across America by our

constituents who are wondering if their Congress is capable of serious

action, not hollow posturing.

This resolution is not about Congress taking responsibility. It is

the opposite. This is a resolution of irresolution.

For the Senate to take up a symbolic vote of no confidence on the eve

of a decisive battle is unprecedented. But it is not inconsequential.

It is an act which I fear will discourage our troops, hearten our

enemies, and showcase our disunity. And that is why I will vote against

the motion for cloture.

My colleagues, if you believe that General Petraeus and his new

strategy have a reasonable chance of success in Iraq, then you should

resolve to support him and his troops through the difficult days ahead

and oppose this resolution.

On the other hand, if you believe this new strategy is flawed or that

our cause is hopeless in Iraq, then you should put aside this

resolution--nonbinding--and you should vote to stop what is happening

in Iraq, vote to cut off the funds, vote for a binding time line for

American withdrawal.

If that is where your convictions lie, then have the courage of your

convictions to accept the consequences of your convictions. That would

be a resolution.

This nonbinding resolution before us, by contrast, is an accumulation

of ambiguities and inconsistencies. It is at once for the war but also

against the war. It pledges its support to the troops in the field but

then washes its hands of what they have been commanded to do. It urges

more troops be sent for Anbar Province but not for Baghdad.

My colleagues, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot vote full

confidence in General Petraeus but no confidence in the strategy he

says he needs for success.

We cannot say our troops have our full support but disavow their

mission on the eve of battle. This is what happens when you try to wage

war by committee. And that is why the Constitution gave the authority

of Commander in Chief to one person, the President.

Cynics may say this kind of irresolution happens all the time in

Congress. In this case, however, they would be wrong. If it passed,

this resolution would be unique in American legislative history.

I asked the Library of Congress this question last week and was told

that never before, when American soldiers have been in harm's way,

fighting and dying in a conflict Congress had voted to authorize, has

Congress turned around and passed a nonbinding resolution such as this

one, disapproving of a particular battlefield strategy.

I ask each of my colleagues to stop for a moment and consider the

precedent that passage of this resolution would establish. Even during

Vietnam, even after the Tet Offensive, even after the invasion of

Cambodia, Congress did not take up a nonbinding resolution such as this

one.

Past Congresses certainly debated wars. They argued heatedly about

them. And they sometimes clashed directly with the executive branch,

with the President, over their execution. But in so doing, they

accepted the consequences of their convictions

This resolution does no such thing. It is simply an expression of

opinion. It does not pretend to have any substantive effect on policy

on the ground in Iraq. But again, I ask my colleagues, what will this

resolution say to our soldiers? What will it say to our allies? What

will it say to our enemies?

We heard from General Petraeus during his confirmation hearing that

war is a battle of wills. Our enemies believe they are winning in Iraq

today. They believe they can outlast us, that sooner or later we will

tire of this grinding conflict and go home and leave the field in that

country open for them. That is the lesson Osama bin Laden has told us,

in his writings and statements, he took from our retreats from Lebanon

and Somalia in the 1980s and 1990s. It is a belief at the core of the

insurgency in Iraq and at the core of the fanatical goals of radical

Islam worldwide.

I fear this resolution before the Senate, by codifying our disunity,

by disavowing the mission our troops are about to undertake, will

confirm our enemies' beliefs that America has grown impatient and

unable to fight the long fight to victory. This resolution also sends a

terrible message to our allies. Of course, I agree that we must hold

the Iraqi Government to account. That is exactly what the resolution

Senator McCain and I and others have offered would do. But I ask you,

imagine for a moment that you are a Sunni or Shia politician in Baghdad

who wants the violence to end, and ask yourself how the Warner-Levin

resolution would affect your thinking, your calculations of risk, your

willingness to stand against the forces of extremism. Will the

resolution empower you or will it undermine you? Will it make you feel

safer or will it make you feel you should hedge your bets, or go over

to the extremists, or leave Iraq?

Finally, what is the message this resolution sends to our soldiers? I

know that every Member of the Senate supports our troops but actions

have consequences, often unintended.

I ask unanimous consent that I be given an additional moment to

finish my statement. That would come from Senator McConnell's time.

When we send a message of irresolution, it does not

support our troops. When we renounce their mission, it does not support

our troops. We heard recently in the Senate Armed Services Committee

from GEN Jack Keane, a former chief of staff of the U.S. Army, who said

of a resolution like this one:

I agree. Everyone here knows the American people are frustrated about

the lack of progress in Iraq. Everyone here shares that frustration.

And as elected representatives of the people, everyone here feels

pressure to give expression to that frustration. This is not a new

challenge. It is one that every democracy in every long war has had to

confront. Nearly a century and a half ago, an American President

wrestled with just this problem. It was in the midst of a terrible war,

a civil war in which hundreds of thousands of Americans were fighting

and dying to secure the freedom of millions long and cruelly denied it.

``We here highly resolve,'' that was Lincoln's message at Gettysburg.

It was a message of resolution.

I ask unanimous consent for an additional moment from the time of

Senator McConnell to finish the statement.

Lincoln said at Gettysburg: ``We here highly

resolve.'' It was a message of resolution, of steadfastness in the face

of adversity, of hope over despair, and of confidence in the cause of

freedom which is America's eternal cause. Today, in the depths of a

terrible war, on the brink of a decisive battle for Baghdad, let us

have a serious debate about where we stand and where we must go in

Iraq. But that is not the debate this resolution of irresolution would

bring.

The 60-vote requirement to close debate was put in place by our

predecessors as a way to make it harder for the passions of a

particular moment to sweep through the American people and across this

Congress in a way that would do serious damage to our Nation in the

long term. Because I believe this resolution, if passed, would have

such an effect, I will respectfully oppose the motion for cloture.

I yield the floor.

I would be happy to, briefly. The resolution Senator

McCain and I and others have has been prepared and I gather has been

the subject of negotiation between Senator Reid and Senator McConnell.

That is right. The debate going on now----

My dear friend, it is more than a possibility; it is a

promise.

There are copies of it around now, and we will get you

one. They were publicly distributed Thursday of last week.

I thank my friend. The difference, of course, is that

ours is as nonbinding as yours, but ours is a statement of support to

our troops and benchmarks to the Iraqis.

One is not less patriotic than the other, but actions

have consequences. As I said during my remarks, for the Senate to take

this unprecedented action on a nonbinding resolution, to disavow,

disapprove a mission that our troops are being asked to carry out right

now cannot help their morale.