Mr. President, speaking to this resolution, I wish to be

clear that it had been my intention to cast a ``no'' vote to proceeding

to this nonbinding resolution. The majority, of course, has to muster

60 votes in order to proceed on that particular resolution.

I believe my time will be more productive fulfilling a commitment I

have made to lead a trip to Iraq. Without disclosing when or precisely

where we will be in the Middle East, I will tell my colleagues that I

will be able to personally deliver a message not only to our troops of

support of the American people for their mission but also hopefully to

deliver a message directly to the Prime Minister of Iraq that we expect

him to continue to fulfill the commitments he has made to carry out

this new strategy, which has signs of success already, and to learn

directly, firsthand from our commanders and troops on the ground, their

assessment of how this new mission is proceeding. What the Congress

needs to do is to provide assistance and to be able to bring home a

report unfiltered through the media of precisely where the conditions

stand right now.

While I would have voted no, in effect, I will be voting no by my

presence in Iraq.

There are three reasons I oppose the resolution to move forward with

this particular nonbinding resolution. First of all, we have been

debating almost nonstop this subject of Iraq, now, for several weeks--

both in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. So there has

been no lack of debate.

Rest assured that Republicans are committed to continuing this debate

for as long as the American people believe it is productive. We welcome

debate. We also welcome something else: The opportunity to express

ourselves in a meaningful way, not simply on a nonbinding resolution.

We have no objection to voting on this nonbinding resolution as long as

we can also vote on something that is actually more meaningful than

that, and that is a resolution that demonstrates we will not withdraw

support for our troops. We aim to support them in their mission.

Having been precluded, blocked, for being able to have a vote on that

resolution, what we are saying is that we should move forward with the

debate, but until the majority leader is willing to provide Members a

vote on the resolution for support of the troops, we should not be

voting on other resolutions.

I think this is time for Democrats to take a stand. Either you

support the troops in the battlefield or you don't, none of this sort

of slow bleed and nonbinding resolution debate. The nonbinding

resolution obscures your true position. It seems to me, if you merely

seem to tell the President you don't like what he is doing, you have

plenty of opportunities to do that, but a resolution can have a very

deleterious effect on the morale of our troops, on our enemies who see

it as a sign of weakness, and perhaps on our allies who wonder if we

see the mission through.

If you are serious about stopping this effort because you believe it

has failed or cannot succeed, obviously you need to do what Congress

has the ability to do and that is vote no on the funding of the troops.

Instead, what we have been told is that in the House of

Representatives, after this first step of the nonbinding resolution,

there will be a second step, this slow-bleed strategy, a concept that

says Congress will begin to micromanage how troops are deployed in the

field and around the world and equipment provided to them, and that

will determine whether any will receive Congress's continued support.

We cannot condition our support for the troops. They need to know

that when we send them into harm's way, they will have everything they

need from reinforcements to equipment. This sort of slow-bleed strategy

that has been announced over in the House of Representatives is

extraordinarily dangerous and deleterious to our mission.

First of all, it seems to me there are some signs of success. This is

the first reason I would have voted no on the resolution. We do need to

give the new strategy the President has announced a chance to succeed.

There are plenty of stories, and I will have them printed in the

Record at the conclusion of my remarks, about some initial successes--

the Shiite militia leaders appearing to leave their strongholds in

Baghdad in anticipation of our plan to increase our activities there.

The powerful Shiite cleric, Moqtada al-Sadr has left Iraq, spending

his time in Iran away from the danger that might await him if he stayed

in Baghdad.

In Al Anbar Province in the west, the tribal sheiks have now

significantly begun to align themselves with the United States, as a

result of which we have been able to recruit hundreds more police

officers who were not possible to recruit in the past.

A real sign is the fact that Sunni and Shiite Arab lawmakers have

announced plans to form two new political blocs in Iraq. The Iraqi

military is taking a significantly, more robust role, now ordering tens

of thousands of residents to leave homes--these are the so-called

squatters--that they are occupying illegally, and, instead, saying they

will have the original owners of those homes come back. This is

important because the people who have been displaced or dispossessed

primarily are Sunnis. The Shiite militias came in and kicked them out

and allowed squatters in their home.

It is highly significant the Iraqi Government has said, through a LTG

Aboud Qanbar, who is leading this new crackdown, that they are going to

close the borders with Iran and Syria, they are going to extend the

curfew in Baghdad, set up new checkpoints and reoccupy the houses that

have been occupied by the illegal Shiites.

Another significant change, they actually raided a Shiite mosque

which was a center of illegally armed militias, kidnapping, torture and

murder activities and a place where a good deal of weapons had been

stored. This, in the past, had not been done. But it is now being done,

all as a part of Maliki's commitment to change the rules of engagement

and to commit himself to support politically the victories that had

been occurring on the ground militarily but which were fleeting because

when you capture people and put them in jail, if the politicians get

them out of jail the next day, you have gained nothing. We need to give

it a chance.

I referred to former Representative Hamilton of the Hamilton-Baker

Commission, who said in testimony:

Second, we need to support this mission and oppose the nonbinding

resolution opposed to it because it would send a horrible message not

only to our troops and military leaders but to our allies and to our

enemies.

General Petraeus, whom I mentioned a moment ago, at his confirmation

hearing got this question from Senator Lieberman.

Soldiers believe the same thing. From ABC News, on February 13, they

asked Army 1SG Louis Barnum what they thought of the resolution. They

had strong words. Here is what one said:

On the NBC nightly news, January 26, interview of three of our

soldiers.

SPC Tyler Johnson said:

SSG Manuel Sahagun:

There was in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 15, a poignant

communication from an Army sergeant whose name is Daniel Dobson. He

said:

The American people believe this as well. FOX News, according to an

opinion dynamics poll in the last couple of days, 47 percent of the

American people say it is more likely to encourage the enemy and hurt

troop morale compared with 24 percent who think it would make a

positive difference to the policy of the United States toward Iraq.

So we better be careful what kind of message is sent through a so-

called nonbinding resolution. It would not change the course of what we

are doing on the ground in Iraq, but it can certainly affect our enemy

and the morale of our troops and our allies.

I conclude by saying it seems to me it would be a huge mistake to

proceed to vote only on a resolution which is acknowledged by its

proponents as being merely a first step toward a second step of

reducing and ultimately removing support for the troops whom we have

sent into harm's way. Far better it would be for us to continue this

debate at the conclusion of which we would vote on another resolution

which would explicitly express our support for our troops and their

mission.

To expound in further detail, I oppose this resolution and would vote

``no'' on taking it up without considering other resolutions first,

because it would put a halt to the progress which has begun to occur in

Iraq since the President announced new strategy. Some examples:

Finally, this resolution is but the first step in a ``slow bleed''

strategy, and should be rejected for that reason as well.

Democrats claim that they just want an up or down vote on this

resolution to send a message to the President, but I fear that the real

plan is much more expansive. If this resolution passes, votes to cut

off support for our troops and micromanaging the war won't be far

behind.

In the other Chamber, Representative Murtha has made it clear that he

intends to bleed our troops of support for their mission in Iraq.

Speaking about his resolution, Murtha said: ``They won't be able to

continue. They won't be able to do the deployment. They won't have the

equipment, they don't have the training and they won't be able to do

the work. There's no question in my mind.''

Speaker Pelosi essentially endorsed this slow-bleed strategy,

according to reports in The Poltico this morning.

Those who believe that this vote is a simple gesture, and that it

will be the last word on the ``surge'' from this body, then why did

Senator Feingold say on the floor just this morning that the Warner

resolution is a ``first step''? Please listen to these additional

quotes from some of my Democratic colleagues:

This is from the Foreign Relations Committee, January 24, 2007:

From Speaker Pelosi, February 13, 2007:

If our Democratic colleagues don't intend to make this resolution the

``first step'' in a campaign to cut off funding for our operations in

Iraq, then why won't they allow a vote on the Gregg resolution?

In summary, debate? Yes. But votes that are meaningful--not just on a

critical non-binding resolution but on a commitment of support for our

troops and their mission as well.