Madam President, let me commend my colleague from the State

of Washington for her comments and her views. I associate myself with

many of the things she expressed in the Senate. I congratulate her for

her words, her passion, and her strong feelings about where we stand

today on this issue.

Let me also commend the Democratic leader for his efforts to engage

in what is probably the single most important debate this Senate could

possibly be engaged in. There are other very important matters at home

and around the globe--but everyone would agree, regardless of your

views on policy, that the issue of Iraq and where we stand and the

effort by the President to increase the number of troops on the ground

in Iraq, particularly to place them in the large, highly densely

populated urban areas of Iraq, is one of the most serious issues facing

our country.

We have had a series of serious and thought-provoking hearings

conducted by Chairman Biden of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

over the last number of weeks on this issue, with people who represent

a variety of ideological perspectives. Yet without fear of

contradiction, I believe the overwhelming majority of the witnesses who

have appeared before that committee have expressed serious reservations

about this escalation, this surge, placing some 21,000 of our young men

and women into Baghdad to try and act as a referee in what we all admit

today is clearly a civil war.

Having this debate is important. I wish to take, if I can, the few

minutes allotted to me to express my concerns about the process, my

concerns about the surge, and my concerns about the overall direction

of the policy in Iraq. There is not a lot of time to do that, but let

me share some thoughts.

First of all, I believe that every Member in this Chamber, regardless

of his or her view on the issue before the Senate regarding Iraq, would

do everything he or she could to make sure that our brave men and women

in uniform, serving in harm's way, would receive everything they could

possibly need to defend themselves. That ought not to be a debating

point. I know of no one in this Senate who feels otherwise. And the

fact that we have to have some discussion about this very point is a

reflection, I think, of what has gone wrong in this debate already.

In fact, I point out that over the last 4 years or so, there have

been amendments offered by those of us here to provide different

additional resources, such as for body armor, because we felt our

troops were not getting what they needed. There has been significant

discussion here in the wake of testimony offered by our senior military

leaders about what has happened to the combat readiness of our troops

as a result of our failure to continue to provide the kind of equipment

and support they deserved over the years. Certainly what has happened

to veterans coming back has also been the subject of debate. But,

nonetheless, I believe most Members here, if not all Members here,

believe our troops deserve the kind of support they ought to have when

they are serving in harm's way.

And so, the debate is not whether you support our troops. The debate

is whether the policy direction the President wishes to lead us in is

the right one. That is a debate which ought to occur in this Chamber.

Frankly, in my view, it ought to be a debate that resolves around at

least a legislative vehicle that might have some meaning to it, some

bite, some teeth, some reality, some accountability.

My leaders know I have strong reservations about a sense-of-the-

Senate debate. Now, normally, we have sense-of-the-Senate resolutions

when there is a consensus that develops. Normally, sense-of-the-Senate

resolutions are offered around matters that are noncontroversial and we

wish to express ourselves regarding these matters, so we all sign on or

virtually everyone signs on.

I would say if, in fact, the goal here was to get 70 or 80 Members of

this Chamber--Republicans and Democrats--to sign on to a proposition

that said we think the surge and escalation is the wrong thing to be

doing, then the vehicle of a sense-of-the-Senate resolution would have

value. But I would suggest here we are into the second day of this

debate and we cannot even decide what sense-of-the-Senate resolution we

want to debate.

So if you are sitting out there watching this Chamber at this moment,

in terms of where we ought to be going and what the effect of what we

are about to do is, it is rather confusing, to put it mildly, as to

where we stand in all of this. We cannot even decide what sense-of-the-

Senate resolutions to bring up. If we are going to have a debate around

here that is meaningful, why not debate something that is meaningful?

So my concerns are, in many ways, that given this moment in time,

before these young men and women are placed in harm's way--because I

know full well, after a quarter of a century here, once they are on the

ground, once they are in place, the debate changes. The debate changes.

So if we are truly concerned about dealing with the surge and

escalation, then I believe we ought to be engaging in a debate that has

some meaningful outcomes when it comes to the decision of whether we go

forward.

I, for one, would like to see a new authorization come to this body

to be debated. The resolution on which we are operating today is one

that was crafted 5 years ago. It was fundamentally linked to weapons of

mass destruction and the conduct of Saddam Hussein. The first argument

was, of course, a fiction. There were no weapons of mass destruction.

And the second argument is no longer viable. Saddam Hussein is gone.

Today, we are being asked to place men and women in uniform in the

middle of a civil war. It seems to me that if the President of the

United States wants that to be a policy endorsed by the American people

through the actions of this body, then we ought to be voting on a

matter that says this is something we agree with and go forward. That

would have some meaning to it, it seems to me. If we rejected it, then

the President would have a strong answer from the Congress about

whether we are about to continue to finance

and support that activity--again, not undercutting the needs of our

troops in harm's way but a legitimate debate about a real issue that

requires Members to stand up and vote yes or no.

I realize I am in sort of a minority of one or two here who believes

the vehicles we are choosing to debate over the next several days, if,

in fact, the debate goes on, are ones that in the final analysis are

nothing more than really message proposals. If we are highly divided

over which one to bring up, what is the message, in effect, if we

cannot even decide which vehicles we want to choose to discuss?

Regarding the surge itself and regarding the Warner-Levin or Levin-

Warner proposal, I have some problems with the language of that

proposal. It essentially abdicates the power of the purse. It calls for

selective diplomacy in the region instead of engaging all of Iraq's

neighbors. The language opposing the surge is weak to the point of

being nonexistent. And there is language that suggests that nothing in

this resolution ought to imply a call for redeployment--something I

wholeheartedly believe we should be pursuing in a phased manner.

But those are my concerns about it, both in terms of the process and

the language under consideration. I realize other Members do not have

those problems. I respect that. But those are my concerns.

Now, regarding the surge itself, again this has been stated by others

who have examined this proposal in great detail, including our senior

military people and senior diplomats. As I said a moment ago, in

testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, they have

spoken eloquently about their concerns that this proposal does nothing

but contribute to the chaos that reins in Iraq.

There are some 6 million people who live in the city of Baghdad. To

suggest we are going to send 17,000 or 18,000 service men and women

into a city of 6 million, where there are at least 23 militias along

with insurgents, Baathists, hardened criminals, and possibly some al-

Qaida elements, and that we are going to sort this out in a way that is

going to move us toward a political settlement in the country is I

believe, frankly, beyond dreaming. I do not think it has any viability

whatsoever. In fact, I think it contributes to a further escalation of

the conflict in the country and delays even further what everyone

agrees must occur: some sort of political accommodation between Shias

and Sunnis and Kurds--between Shias and Shias, for that matter. The

idea that placing our troops as a referee in the middle of this civil

conflict is going to get us closer to that result, I think, has been

successfully argued against by those whom we respect and admire in

these debates.

Secondly, may I say that, in fact, if you are trying to encourage

those elements to get together and you are also trying to encourage

regional diplomacy to play a role here, then it seems to me we ought to

be talking about how best we can achieve that. When you have an

administration that refuses to even engage in any kind of conversation

or negotiations with governments in the region with which we have

serious disagreements, then I think we get even further away from the

suggestions made by the Baker-Hamilton study group on Iraq that

proposed what I thought were very commonsense, sober, and sound

recommendations that would allow us to have a greater likelihood of

achieving the success we ought to be pursuing. I see little likelihood

of that occurring if, in fact, we are talking about a further military

escalation of the conflict here. Every single person who has looked at

the situation in Iraq has drawn the following conclusion: There is no

military solution--no military solution--in Iraq. So continuing to

pursue that option, continuing to pursue that particular goal in the

face of all the evidence to the contrary, I believe is a major, major

mistake for this country.

I think this body--the Senate--ought to be on record expressing its

opinion about it and that we ought to go forward in a meaningful, real,

accountable way. Unfortunately, that is not likely to happen. In fact,

we may end this debate without voting on anything at all regarding

Iraq, as we need to move on to other items that the leadership clearly

must address in the coming weeks. So we are missing an opportunity,

other than to express our views, which most people have done. I know of

no Member in this Chamber who has not spoken out publicly about whether

they think the surge is the right direction to go in, what alternatives

they would offer in terms of how we might begin to talk about

redeployment, and the need for the Iraqis to assume responsibility for

their own country.

The American people have also publicly spoken out. They voted for a

change of course in Iraq last November and according to recent polls, a

majority of Americans oppose a surge. Now I do not believe polling data

ought to be the way you conduct foreign policy, but the fact is that

the American public is exhausted and fed up, to put it mildly, with our

Iraq policy. And let's consider the following data out of Iraq: Over 80

percent of the people in that country believe that our continued

presence in that country contributes to the chaos they are facing, and

over 60 percent of Iraqis believe it is appropriate to attack American

service men and women. Over 60 percent of the people in Iraq believe

that.

How do you justify supporting an escalation, a surge in our military

presence, when the very people whom we are told we are trying to help

in this case believe that, one, we contribute to the chaos, and only a

slightly smaller number believe it is appropriate to attack our service

men and women? For the life of me, I do not understand how an American

President could possibly support a policy that takes us further down

that road.

Now we are not just talking about only two options here of escalating

or leaving. There are policies that come in far between these two. For

example, there have been suggestions about redeployment, with our

service men and women filling other roles like training the Iraqi

military, which was suggested by Baker-Hamilton. I think we should do

this. We could engage in counterterrorism activities. Border security;

we could play a very meaningful role in that as well. So there are

those of us here who believe we ought to be redeploying, bring down

those numbers, but none of us whom I know of have suggested we ought to

be just packing our bags over the next 6 months and leaving Iraq. We

are talking about other roles we can perform, as the 300,000 Iraqi

soldiers and police take over the responsibility of their country.

Madam President, I am telling you as I stand before you today, if we

continue to provide the kind of level of support militarily we are

engaging in, there is less and less likelihood that the Iraqis are

going to assume the responsibility, both politically and militarily, to

take over leadership of their country.

For those reasons, I urge that we find a means and a vehicle, sooner

rather than later, for this body--the Senate, this coequal branch of

Government--to say to the administration and to others: We believe in a

different direction. We would like a new authorization. We would like

debate on a meaningful proposal that would allow us to be accounted

for, yes or no, as to whether you want to move forward.

Again, with all due respect to those who crafted this, I have no

greater admiration for any two Members than I do for Carl Levin and

John Warner, people I have served with here for many years. I respect

immensely the effort they have engaged in here to try to build a

proposal that would attract a substantial majority of our colleagues to

support. If you could do that, then sense-of-the-Senate resolutions

have value. But I rest my case on what is occurring at the very moment

I stand before you this afternoon. We are divided here. We have some

four or five different resolutions. All of them are sense-of-the-Senate

resolutions. None of them have any meaning in law at all. And we cannot

seem to come around a single debate. We ought to be having one about

whether we believe our resources and our young men's and women's lives

ought to be placed in harm's way. That is the debate which ought to be

occurring here. It is not occurring yet. I think that is unfortunate.

It is tragic. My hope is we will find a means to address that in short

order.

I yield the floor.