Mr. President, I thank the Presiding Officer, Mr.

Salazar, the Senator from Colorado, for his impressive leadership in

helping our Senate and our Congress and our President and our country

find a consensus about where we go from here in Iraq. That is, as he

said, truly our most urgent and difficult issue. It is on the minds of

every single Senator every day. It is the first thing on my mind. It

deserves to be. Adding up the lives, the dollars--$10 billion a month,

3,600 lives, and many wounded--it is a difficult situation.

Mr. President, the occupant of the chair has said this himself. It

struck me that we should spend less time in what we think of as the

world's greatest deliberative body lecturing Baghdad about coming up

with a political consensus and more time working together ourselves to

come up with a political consensus about what to do in Iraq. After all,

they are an infant democracy and we are the oldest democracy; we ought

to be able to do more than make speeches and have partisan votes. Of

course, we respect each other's positions, but at some point, there is

consensus about where we go from here.

We owe it to our troops fighting there, when they look at Washington,

not to see us shouting at one another but saying, yes, we can agree on

why you are there, where we are going to be in a while, what our goals

are, and say to the rest of the Middle East that we know what we are

doing in Iraq, give them a chance to flourish and say we in the U.S.

have free debate, but we are capable of coming to a conclusion,

especially on our most urgent issue. That is why this report is so

important.

When I saw this report in December, what attracted me about it was,

first, the members of this group--Larry Eagleburger, Secretary of State

for Bush 1; Vernon Jordan, National Urban League, a close friend of

President Clinton's; Ed Meese, President Reagan's Attorney General;

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor; Leon Panetta, President Clinton's Chief of

Staff; William Perry, Secretary of Defense for Clinton; Chuck Robb,

former U.S. Senator; Alan Simpson, the former Republican whip; and, at

one point, Roberts Gates, who is now the Secretary of Defense in this

administration. They unanimously agreed, after 9 months, about what to

do in Iraq. In 9 months, they unanimously agreed.

I thought that perhaps President Bush, in January, in the State of

the Union Address, would invite them to sit in the gallery, as

Presidents often do, and point to them and say: There they are, nine of

our most distinguished Americans who have been working for 9 months

trying to understand where to go on our most difficult issue.

They say there is no magic formula. They say it is grave and

deteriorating. They say the consequences of the cost, but they have a

recommendation and it is a sensible recommendation, and the President

might have said it is not my recommendation, it is theirs, but I accept

their recommendation and I invite you to do the same.

I think the President would have received a good deal of bipartisan

support in this body had he done that. The President and our country

need that. A President's job is to see an urgent need, to develop a

strategy to meet it, and to persuade at least half the people he is

right. Even if President Bush is right about the current strategy, he

hasn't persuaded a broad enough number of Americans that he is right or

a broad enough number in this body that he is right in order to sustain

his policy in Iraq.

A part of Presidential leadership is recognizing that adjustments

have to be made to take into account the views

of others and then, having done that, to go forward. That is

Presidential leadership. It is not Presidential weakness. It is what I

wish President Bush had done in January, and I said so then, and I said

so in March on the floor of the Senate. I have learned sometimes you

have to say things two or three times around here before anybody hears.

Senator Salazar heard it. We talked about it and the outgrowth is

this legislation that Senator Salazar worked so well on to develop, and

so expertly, which Secretary Baker and Congressman Hamilton have told

me accurately represents the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton

group.

Exactly what does Baker-Hamilton do? One, it establishes a long-term

presence for the United States in Iraq but a limited one. Two, it says

as soon as security conditions on the ground permit--and it estimates

that would be a year--we would move our combat forces out of the combat

business and into the support, training, and equipment business in

Iraq. And third, it steps up regional and diplomatic efforts to cause

others in the region to help Iraq succeed.

That is it. Those three things. There are 79 recommendations in this

book. I am not sure all of us would agree with all of them. But that is

not the point. There is a new direction for the United States in Iraq

in this book, and if we were to adopt it and the President were to

agree with it, what our legislation says is the President should

formulate a comprehensive plan to implement the recommendations of the

Iraq Study Group. That in plain English to me means the President would

take all these recommendations, call together his advisers, come up

with a plan, and do his best to implement it.

Would he be able to implement every provision? I doubt it. Would he

say this was recommended in December and I didn't get the law until

September, so I am going to adjust some timetables? I would expect so.

Would he have some improvements to make and some suggestions to make? I

would guess he would. But he would come up with a comprehensive plan,

and then he would proceed with it. Then, of course, we would have our

constitutional duty to review it. We don't have to approve it under our

recommendation, we just review it and we appropriate money and we have

other things we could do. But what we could say to our troops, the

world, and the country is that we have found a common way forward in

Iraq. We know what we are doing, and we are doing it together. And that

is the job of our Government.

The Senator from Colorado dealt with a couple of objections that have

been made. Let me deal with three or four very quickly. We will have

other time to do that. I see the Senator from Arkansas is here. I am

looking forward to what he has to say.

One objection that was made was this may be dated. It was December.

One Senator said this was a snapshot taken some time ago and times have

changed. I don't see this as a snapshot. I see the war in Iraq as more

like a movie. You go into it after 15 minutes or you go into it 30

minutes after it started and it is the same movie. You see the same

characters. It is the same story. A few adjustments might have to be

made, but it is the same story. And as Lee Hamilton said, the

recommendations are as relevant today as they were in December. And I

would say that February would have been a better time than March to

adopt the recommendations. April would have been better than March.

Today is better than last month, and last month would be better than

today. The sooner they are adopted, the better.

A second point. One Senator said this doesn't have many teeth in it.

I used to work in the White House for a wise man named Bryce Harlow 40

years ago. I was an impatient young man. I said: Mr. Harlow, we need to

do more of this or more of that. I forget the issue.

He said: Lamar, in the White House, just a little tilt here makes a

great big difference out there.

That was a very wise statement. If the President of the United States

and the Congress of this country were to agree this month on a new

course in Iraq that defined a limited long-term role, shifted the

mission from combat to training, support, and equipment over a period

of months, subject to unexpected developments on the ground, and

stepped up our diplomatic and political efforts, that is a major shift

in strategy.

Next, I have heard from the other side that it has too many teeth,

too prescriptive on the President. That is not the way I read it.

Sometimes that comes from this side. The White House has some worries

about that as well. But that is not the way I read our amendment. It is

the sense of the Congress that the President and the Congress should

agree that the way forward in Iraq is to implement this and the

President should formulate a comprehensive plan to do so.

I assume the way the President does that is he gets the law in

September, and he sits down with his advisers. I suppose the first

person he would sit down with is General Petraeus whose advice we are

all looking forward to. He would ask his advice about the surge, ask

the Joint Chiefs what they think, ask a lot of people, and then within

a few weeks, send us his plan. That is what we ask him to do.

It is not so prescriptive either about the changes in troops on the

ground because it says in another section, section 1552, that while we

intend to move our troops out of the combat business into support,

equipping, and training business--and the goal is within about a year

to do that--that it is subject to unexpected developments on the

ground.

Here is what the report itself actually said:

In other words, when we move out of the combat business into these

other areas, we still have troops there, we still are able to go after

al-Qaida, we still can protect the troops who are there, and we are

sending a message to the rest of the Middle East: Stay out, give Iraq a

chance to flourish.

The other thing I have heard, and I say this in conclusion--I thank

you, Mr. President, for your time--is that all people hear in the

debate in the Senate is discord. I hear another message. It is not as

loud as the discord, it is not as loud as the partisan votes, but I

hear a lot of consensus. It may surprise some people to hear me say

that. I hear a lot of consensus and the seeds of that consensus are in

the Iraq Study Group report.

For example, the administration has already begun to act on some of

the recommendations in the Iraq Study Group report by increasing the

number of troops embedded in Iraqi forces, using milestones to chart

progress, by meeting with Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria.

The President's National Security Adviser has pointed to the Iraq Study

Group report as valuable. The President himself has spoken well of it.

Across the aisle on the Democratic side, where there is a great

desire by many Members for a fixed timetable, which is not a part of

the Iraq Study Group, the Democratic proposals still have been guided

by this document. For example, working on milestones for improvement in

Iraq, limiting the role of the United States to one of training and

equipping and counterterrorism operations and stating as a goal the

drawdown of combat forces by a year from now. That is all part of over

there. I hear more consensus than I do discord.

I guess my message to my colleagues is much the same as the Senator

from Colorado said. We have a responsibility to vote and state our

convictions, but we also have a job to do, and our job to do is to look

for a way to come to some consensus about where we are going from here

in Iraq and agree on it so when our troops look back, they know we

support them, we really support them because we know what they are

doing. And when the Middle East looks it up, they know to stay out. And

when the rest of the world looks at this great deliberative body, they

know occasionally on the foremost issue facing our

time, we can come to a conclusion, we can join hands with the

President, even though we may debate with him and say, OK, Mr.

President, let's have a new strategy, one on which we agree, we

together, and that we need to do.

We have an opportunity that is very rare, and it is impressive to

have seven Democratic Senators and six Republican Senators on this

subject at this time supporting a comprehensive recommendation. One of

our former colleagues, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, wrote a book

about Boss Plunkitt of Tammany Hall. Since I said some respectful

advice to my colleagues about what I thought our job was, I say to the

President respectfully: Mr. President, one of Boss Plunkitt's favorite

maxims was: When you seize your opportunities, you take them. This is

an opportunity for the President to develop bipartisan support for a

way forward in Iraq that has a long-term presence there, but limited,

with a different mission for our combat troops and enhanced political

and regional support.

I respectfully suggest that January would have been the best time to

seize this opportunity, but today is a much better time than September.

I thank the Chair and I congratulate him for his leadership.

I yield the floor.

I thank the Senator from Virginia for coming back to

the floor from another engagement and offering his comments on our

proposal. He has made an extraordinary effort to do that at a late hour

in the evening. I am grateful to him for that.

I hope he will not mind my saying that I have seen him agonize over

this war. We have talked about it privately, going many months back

before many Senators did, about how do we reconcile our national

interests with the lives of young men and women from Virginia and

Tennessee, which we have to think about every day.

He was one of the first to raise questions about our strategy.

Because he did and because of his background as Navy Secretary and his

service in World War II and in the Korean War and his senior position

on Armed Services, everyone paid attention when John Warner spoke.

We have paid attention to his advice every step of the way. What I

would like to say, very briefly, in response to my friend from

Virginia, is this: I would hope that over the next few days as we

consider this, that he will think a little differently about his own

contribution to the shift in direction our country needs.

His first contribution, in addition to his statement, is the Iraq

Study Group report. He was a little too modest about it. He had a major

role in getting it started. If he had not, we would not have the kind

of membership on the Iraq Study Group that we had with Secretary Baker

and the leaders of so many different administrations.

Their recommendations need not be put on the bookshelf as a bookend,

they need to be used.

Having said that, I can understand how he and the President and

others might be concerned that if one were to read our proposal too

prescriptively, they would say: Well, how can we pick up 79

recommendations and say, Mr. President, do all of those things.

The way I read our amendment, we do not do that. The way I read our

amendment we say very simply that the President and the Congress agree

the way forward in Iraq is to implement this comprehensive set of

recommendations, and the President himself should formulate a

comprehensive plan to do so.

In another part of the amendment, when we get to the part about when

the troops come home or when the troops' mission moves from a combat

mission to a support and equipping mission, that is all subject to

unexpected developments in the security situation on the ground.

So I would say with respect to my colleague from Virginia, that

another way--and perhaps I am reading it wrong, but the way I read it,

another way to read this is to say: Let's take the wisdom of this group

of 10 people, one of them who has ended up as Secretary of Defense in

this administration, and say: That gives us a framework. We can adopt

that together. And then, Mr. President, you take these recommendations

and you draw up a plan.

This is not going to be a plan that the Senator from Colorado and I

drew up. The President is the only one authorized to draw it up. As it

affects troops, it is subject to security developments on the ground;

there is no fixed deadline of any kind here.

I assume that what the President would do, if he were to receive this

as a law, which might be September by the time it got all the way

through the conferences, the first person he would sit down with is

General Petraeus and say: Tell me again about the surge. How are things

on the ground? What is your recommendation?

The second thing he might do is sit down with General Jones and say:

Tell me, General, what have you found out about the position of the

Iraqi forces?

Then I think he would call in the Joint Chiefs and the intelligence

folks and say: I have to develop a plan. Give me your advice about what

works and what does not work. Then he would present us the plan within

90 days. But it is not subject to our approval. It is his plan.

Now, we can then do what we can do with our constitutional duties

about it. But the one thing I am afraid we will miss if we do not move

to adopt the recommendations now of the Iraq Study Group is the

bipartisan support that was in that group that the Senator from

Virginia helped to create and the bipartisan support that is on this

floor for those recommendations. The President doesn't have that now.

Without that, he cannot sustain a long-term mission in Iraq of any

kind, I am afraid. I think we have to have one of some kind over a long

time.

So I think this goes about as far as it can within this group to say

to the President: Okay. We can agree with you. But now you draw up the

plan according to these structures.

I greatly respect the Senator from Virginia. I will continue to

listen to him. I am deeply grateful to him for coming back to the floor

tonight. I thank him for his direction in helping to make possible the

Iraq Study Group plan, General Jones' study. I know we will have many

more discussions. But the one thing I do not want the President to lose

is the opportunity to borrow for our long-term strategy the bipartisan

support in this document and the bipartisan support on this floor.

I yield the floor.