Mr. President, I want to be on the record as thanking you

for your leadership on this legislation. You shared it with me more

than a couple of months ago now. I know you worked on it for a number

of months before that. The Senate and the American people owe Senator

Ken Salazar of Colorado a real debt of gratitude for drafting this

legislation and pushing it to the point it has gotten to today.

I open by reading the first two paragraphs of the executive summary

of the Iraq Study Group. This was written 6 months ago. It says:

That was true when it was written 6 months ago, and it is still very

relevant today.

Today, I want to talk about amendment No. 2063 and encourage my

colleagues to consider voting for it and even cosponsoring it. One of

the things Senator Salazar did when he drafted this amendment is he

worked very hard to try to honor the integrity of the findings and the

recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton group, and he has done that. You

can look at each paragraph of amendment No. 2063 and see that it

reflects the essence of what the Iraq Study Group was trying to

communicate to us.

In fact, we have had a couple of colleagues come to us in the last

several days and say: Well, if you will just change this paragraph or

this sentence or this one word, or if we can just work a little bit on

this text, then I might be a cosponsor. Well, the problem there is, if

we change that, then we would be trying to change what the Iraq Study

Group recommended, and we are not going to do that. The purpose of this

amendment is to take this bipartisan commission's work and put it into

legislation.

Some people ask: Who made up this group? What is so magic about the

Iraq Study Group? Well, let me tell you, it has two former Secretaries

of State, it has the former chairman of the House Foreign Affairs

Committee, it has a former Supreme Court Associate Justice, it has a

former White House Chief of Staff, it has a former Secretary of

Defense, and two former United States Senators. This is a group that

comes together with a lot of intelligence, with a lot of experience,

and with a lot of knowledge about the region and international affairs

and history.

I think the Iraq Study Group is the best effort that America has yet

put forward on a thoughtful, responsible approach to Iraq. One of the

things I like about the Iraq study group's recommendations and their

conclusions is it is not just setting an artificial timetable. I am a

little bit out of sync with some of my Democratic colleagues on wanting

to set a timetable on Iraq. I don't think we ought to have a public

timetable in the law. I know many of my Democratic colleagues disagree

with me, and a few of my Republican colleagues do as well. But the

thing I like about the Iraq Study Group legislation, the Salazar-

Alexander amendment, is, it is much more comprehensive than simply a

timetable. In fact, it is more comprehensive than just military.

It tries to take a different approach. It really tries to change

American policy in Iraq. And it is a multifaceted approach on trying to

deal with the issues in Iraq and the region. So what you are looking at

with the Iraq Study Group is you are not just looking at a military

solution. General Petraeus has said if we just have a military solution

we are going to lose. So the Iraq Study Group anticipates that, and it

says we need a diplomatic solution, an economic solution, a political

solution, and a military solution. I think it is the most comprehensive

approach that anyone has put forward yet on Iraq.

Again, this is a bipartisan group that has come together, and this

amendment is bipartisan. We have seven Democrats and six Republicans.

By this time tomorrow we may have seven and seven, or eight and eight,

or some combination thereof. We don't know exactly the number of

cosponsors we will end up with, but certainly we hope we will have a

solid majority of Senators who will support this amendment when it has

a chance to come up.

As Senator Salazar said, and Senator Alexander echoed, part of what

this bill does is it gets U.S. forces out of the business of combat and

into the business of training and equipping others. And, really, what

we are trying to do is stabilize Iraq.

One thing I think the Iraq Study Group does over and over, for

several pages in its findings, in its report, on several pages, is it

talks about diplomacy and regional diplomacy and how important it is to

have the neighborhood, so to speak, around Iraq--people inside Iraq and

around the region--to have a part in stabilizing Iraq and making the

region more stable and stronger.

I have heard a couple of criticisms, such as my colleagues mentioned

tonight, and one is that it is too prescriptive, that our legislation

is too prescriptive. Another is that it doesn't do anything. And those

are kind of polar opposite criticisms. In fact, there is an old saying

that when you are settling a lawsuit, if both sides are unhappy, maybe

you have a good settlement. So I would say in this situation, at least

one way to look at it is both sides are unhappy.

We are trying to thread the needle. We are trying to find a

bipartisan solution on Iraq, a bipartisan consensus in this body. In

fact, I would say this: With all due respect to my colleagues, and my

House colleagues, and the President, the last thing in the world we

should ever have a party-line vote on is Iraq. We have 150,000 troops

in Iraq. They are getting shot at every day. They are putting their

lives on the line for this country and for Iraq every single day. There

are people out there trying to kill them, trying to maim them, trying

to blow them up--you name it--every day. We should never have a party-

line vote on Iraq. We just shouldn't do it. And this amendment right

here, this is an effort to try to bring the consensus that we need on

Iraq.

Senator Alexander told me a couple of months ago, he said: You know,

we talk about needing a political consensus in Baghdad. He said: What

we really need is a political consensus in Washington, DC, on Iraq. And

I think he is right. The Salazar-Alexander amendment tries to get to

that consensus.

I will say this: For the Senators who believe this amendment doesn't

do anything, I disagree. I think this is a significant step in a new

direction, in a positive direction for Iraq. In fact, you can look at

the amendment itself, and it has 13 sections. It is true that 3 of

the 13 are sense-of-Congress sections--3 out of 13. But that means 10

of 13 are binding, 10 of 13 actually change U.S. policy and have

requirements that have teeth. I would encourage my colleagues who

mistakenly believe this amendment doesn't do anything to actually look

at the language of the amendment and they will see it is a very

significant improvement over our current policy in Iraq.

Some people say it is too prescriptive. In other words, it binds the

President's hands too much. I disagree. When you look at the language

that Senator Salazar and members of the Iraq Study Group came up with

when they drafted this, really what you are talking about is laying out

some very specific things but also giving the President quite a bit of

flexibility. And I think that is important. He is the Chief Executive.

He is the Commander in Chief, and I think Senator Salazar and Senator

Alexander have found the right balance in drafting this amendment.

The last thing I will say in closing, going back to the Iraq Study

Group Report that came out this past December, and back to the

executive summary--I started with reading the first two paragraphs of

the executive summary, so let me conclude by reading the last two

paragraphs of the executive summary in the Iraq Study Group Report:

Again, I think those words were true 6 months ago, I think they are

relevant today, and I think we need to give the Iraq Study Group

recommendations a chance to succeed.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a

quorum.