Mr. President, my colleague, Senator Feinstein of

California, this weekend made a point that I think is very important.

She, on a television program, said that Iraq is being debated virtually

everywhere in our country: debated at kitchen tables, business places,

workplaces, and schools. The only place in America that Iraq is not

being debated is in the Senate. Here we are debating whether we should

debate.

That was what went on yesterday, and it is what is going on today, a

debate about whether the debate on Iraq should occur in the Senate. It

is unbelievable. We have a cloture vote on a motion to proceed to the

debate, and the minority party in the Senate voted nearly unanimously

to say, no, we shouldn't be debating. I don't understand that at all,

Mr. President.

Why would we not want to engage in this national discussion about

what is happening in Iraq; what are our obligations, and what are our

national interests with respect to these issues? This is not a war

against terrorists in the main. It is sectarian violence that is

occurring in Iraq. Yes, there are some terrorists in Iraq, I understand

that, but it is largely sectarian violence, Shia on Sunni, Sunni on

Shia.

Let me make a point about Iraq that I think is important. The

dictator who used to exist in Iraq no longer exists. Yes, he was a

madman and a dictator. We have unearthed mass graves in Iraq to show

that nearly a half million people were murdered by the man who ran that

country. But he has been executed, and the people of Iraq have had the

opportunity to vote for a new constitution.

The people of Iraq have had the opportunity to vote for a new

government. Things have changed in Iraq. We now have in Iraq what is

largely a civil war, sectarian violence. Things have changed.

What is the role, then--given that Saddam Hussein has been executed,

given that there is a new constitution, given that there is a new

government--what is the role for the United States and its soldiers? Is

the role to continue to be in the middle of a civil war in Iraq, to

surge additional troops, as the President suggests? That is what was to

be debated this week in the Senate. But at this point we still cannot

debate that because we are debating whether we will be able to debate

it. It is unbelievable to me. Only here on this small piece of real

estate, one of the wonderful places on this Earth, the United States

Senate, do we have a serious debate about whether we should debate.

We should have moved very quickly past this issue of a motion to

proceed and been to the substance of this issue on behalf of this great

country of ours. There is a majority in this Congress for a bipartisan

resolution. And I emphasize bipartisan resolution. Senator Warner, a

very distinguished American, a Republican, and former chairman of the

Armed Services Committee, and Senator Levin, a Democrat, the same.

Warner-Levin. When we get to a vote on the Warner-Levin resolution,

which disapproves of surging additional American troops to Iraq and

deepening our involvement in Iraq, a majority of the Senate will

support that resolution. There is a clear majority for that resolution.

The question is, Can we get to that point?

I hope in the coming hours that the minority will relent and give us

the opportunity, the opportunity the American people would expect to

exist in the United States to debate one of the most important

questions of our time. This is about obstruction and it is about

political maneuvering and about protecting the White House. It is about

a lot of things, unfortunately. It ought to be about this country's

national interest, this country's best interest. It ought to be about

the soldiers we have asked to don America's uniforms and go fight for

this country and what is best for them as well.

Two months ago, General Abizaid said this in open testimony in the

Senate:

That is what the commanding general said 2 months ago in testimony

before the Senate. Why did they all say no? Here is what General

Abizaid said the reason is:

Finally, Mr. President, a week ago, the head of our intelligence

services came to the Senate and testified in open public hearings. Here

is what he said:

That is from the top intelligence chief of our country. Here is what

he said:

Let me say that again. Our top intelligence person says that al-Qaida

is the greatest terrorist threat to our country; that they direct their

operations from a secure hideout in Pakistan.

Mr. President, a question: If al-Qaida is the greatest terrorist

threat to America, and our intelligence chief says it is directed from

their secure hideout in Pakistan, and we know that Osama bin Laden

continues to talk to us in his missives that they send out; if we have

21,000 additional soldiers to surge anywhere, why on Earth would we not

use those 21,000 soldiers to eliminate the greatest terrorist threat to

our country, which would be to eliminate the leadership of al-Qaida?

No, that is not what the President recommends. He recommends we send

21,000 additional soldiers into the neighborhoods of Baghdad where

sectarian violence is occurring in massive quantities and a civil war

exists. With all due respect, and I do respect the President, he is

wrong, and I believe the majority of this Senate would say he is wrong

by voting for the Warner-Levin resolution.

In a Byzantine twist, however, on this Tuesday morning, we find

ourselves debating the question of whether we should debate one of the

central questions of our time.

That is unworthy of the Senate. What is worthy of this Senate, and I

am proud to be a part of it what is worthy of us is to have on the

floor of the United States Senate the great questions before this

country, the questions the American people ask this morning and discuss

this morning all across this country: What is our role here? What is

happening here? How have things changed in Iraq? What is the greatest

threat to our country? How do we deal with that threat? What about Mr.

Negroponte pointing out that the greatest terrorist threat is al-Qaida?

What about the fact he says they are in a secure hideaway in Pakistan?

What about the fact that no one has done anything about it? What about

the fact that if 21,000 soldiers are available to be surged, that the

President says let's send them to Baghdad, in the middle of a civil war

in Iraq, rather than going to Pakistan after the leadership of the

greatest terrorist threat to this country, according to our

intelligence chief?

I simply do not understand this logic. There is a lot to be said

about these issues. All of us in this Chamber want the same thing for

our country. All of us love this country. All of us respect our

soldiers and will do everything to make sure we support them. All of us

want this country to do well and to make the right decisions. In the

last 5 years, however, we have been involved in a war that has lasted

longer than the Second World War. We have been in a war that has cost

us far too many lives and too much of America's treasure. We have been

put in a situation in which there has been dramatic change. Yet the

policy has not changed. This is not the circumstance for which we went

to war in Iraq. All of that intelligence, it turns out, was wrong.

Colonel Wilkerson, who served as Secretary of State Colin Powell's

aide for 17 years and was present when the information was compiled

that led to the presentation at the United Nations, testified before

the Senate, and he said publicly that it was the perpetration of a hoax

on the American people. That is not me speaking. That is someone who

had a distinguished record and who served 17 years with Colin Powell.

He was a Republican and proud of his service to this country, but he

said all of the intelligence that was basketed together and presented

was the perpetration of a hoax on the American people.

Whatever happened, happened. We went to Iraq. Saddam Hussein has now

been executed. Iraq has a new constitution and a government. It is

time, long past time for this country to say this to the country of

Iraq: Saddam Hussein is gone. You have a new constitution. You have a

new government. The question is this: Do you have the will to provide

for your own security? Because if you don't, no one in the world can do

it for you. Do you have the will to take your country back? This is

your country, not ours. This country belongs to you, not us. Do you

have the will to provide the security for a free Iraq? Because if you

do not, I say to the people of Iraq, American soldiers cannot, for any

indefinite period, provide order and

security in Iraq for you. You have to make that judgment, and you have

to understand that it is your responsibility to provide security in

Iraq.

This is not a circumstance where we are trying to embarrass anybody.

We are not trying to say to the President: You have an awful situation

you have created, shame on you. That is not what this debate is about.

All of us understand that things have changed. This debate is about

what do we do at this point. Do we agree with the President that we

should send 21,000 more American troops into Baghdad and surge and

deepen America's involvement in this war?

Quite clearly, if we are allowed to get to this debate and have a

vote on Warner-Levin, a bipartisan resolution, this Senate will say,

no, we believe it is the wrong thing, and that will be the first step

in beginning to change policy. It will say to the President, we believe

you must change the policy, and then use our energies and our efforts

to go after the leadership of al-Qaida. They are the ones who murdered

Americans on 9/11, and they still exist in secure hideaways, according

to our intelligence chief. Let's deal with the greatest terrorist

threat to this country, according to Mr. Negroponte, the head of

American intelligence. The greatest threat to our country. They exist.

They live today, he says, in Pakistan. Let's deal with those issues.

As I indicated earlier, all of us want the same thing for our

country. This is not about politics. It cannot be about politics. It is

about policy and what works for America's future, what strengthens our

country, what keeps our promise to our soldiers, and what keeps our

commitment to ourselves as one of the great symbols of freedom in the

world. That is why I hope we will get past this issue that has now

impaled this Senate, a debate about whether we should debate. The

answer clearly ought to be, yes, we ought to get to the debate that is

significant and important to the future of this great country of ours.

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

quorum.