Mr. President, I rise to speak in opposition to the

Iraqi troop withdrawal bill that we are discussing, the bill as

proposed by Senator Feingold. We have been here before, simply stated.

The Senate has voted to reject measures similar to this bill at least

three times over the past year. The only thing that has changed since

we have had those votes is that conditions on the ground in Iraq have

continued to improve as a result of the President's new strategy. Even

the opponents of the surge have had to acknowledge that it is, in fact,

working. In the midst of this progress and of al-Qaida's continued

retreat in Iraq, the Senator from Wisconsin would have us surrender to

an enemy that is on the run.

I understand his concern for the welfare of our soldiers and for

those who have sacrificed in Iraq. But the way we pay tribute to those

who have sacrificed and to our brave men and women still fighting in

Iraq today is to finish what we started so that we honor them and bring

those who are still in Iraq home victorious and not defeated. If we are

trying to reverse the progress we have made in Iraq, embolden our

enemies and the enemies of the Iraqi people, and ensure that our

mission fails, I probably could not have crafted a better bill than

that of the Senator from Wisconsin.

As a result of the U.S. troop surge, the Al Anbar awakening,

significant al-Qaida in Iraq defeats, and the unilateral cease-fire

last August declared by Muqtada al-Sadr, the security in Iraq has

steadily improved. Violence has reached its lowest level since the

insurgency began, and there has been a large increase in Iraqi security

forces trained and equipped. Today that stands at about 440,000 men. In

the last year ethnosectarian-related deaths have decreased 95 percent.

Suicide attacks in Baghdad have gone from 12 a month in January of last

year to just 4 last month, a 66 percent decrease. Attacks have

decreased in 17 of the 18 provinces in Iraq, and IED detonations are

down by 45 percent in Baghdad itself. Security incidents countrywide

and in the 10 Baghdad security districts have declined to their lowest

level since February 2006 when the Samarra Golden Mosque was bombed.

As Sunnis in Al Anbar got frustrated with AQI, the troop surge

provided the opportunity for them to work with coalition forces to

disrupt AQI operations. Al Anbar now will be transferred to Iraqi

security control in the near future, bringing 10 of the 18 provinces in

Iraq under the sole control of Iraqis. AQI attempted to shift

operations to Baghdad and its surrounding northern provinces, but the

Al Anbar awakening movement prompted other awakening movements and

concerned local citizen groups began to spring up all over Iraq. As a

result, AQI has been disrupted. But as the DNI told the Senate

Intelligence Committee in February, ``AQI remains capable of conducting

destabilizing operations and spectacular attacks, despite disruptions

of its networks.''

These successes cannot blind us to AQI's abilities or to their

resolve in attacking Americans. Kurdish areas in northern Iraq were the

safest in Iraq a year ago, but today AQI is taking advantage of this

safety by establishing around Mosul and launching attacks against the

population. This is an area where U.S. troops are used sparingly. In my

humble opinion, that is no coincidence. U.S. operations forced AQI out

of al-Anbar, restricted their operations in Baghdad, and they are now

moving to more rural areas with less U.S. military.

If this legislation passes and our troops must withdraw from Iraq,

AQI

will have the freedom to terrorize the rest of Iraq and beyond. The

Director of National Intelligence stated that he is ``increasingly

concerned that as we inflict significant damage on al-Qa'ida in Iraq,

it may shift resources to mounting more attacks outside of Iraq . . .

Although the ongoing conflict in Iraq will likely absorb most of AQI's

resources [over] the next year, AQI has leveraged its broad external

networks--including some reaching into Europe--in support of external

operations.'' Forcing our troops out of Iraq would result in a

resurgent AQI which could mount attacks from Iraq against Americans and

our allies.

Security is not the only aspect improving in Iraq. On the political

front, the Council of Representatives is taking steps to institute

necessary legislation to help reconcile Iraq.

Earlier this month, the Council of Representatives passed a

debaathification law which will help reintegrate former regime

officials into society. Two weeks ago, the Council of Representatives

passed three key pieces of legislation: an amnesty law, a provincial

powers law, and the 2008 fiscal budget. For the first time, Iraq's main

political parties compromised in order to support passage of these

bills. The provincial powers law requires the council to pass an

election law within 90 days and for provincial elections to occur no

later than October 1, 2008. These are encouraging steps. In spite of

the fact that the provincial powers law was vetoed yesterday, it is

encouraging, and I am very hopeful we are going to see the differences

reconciled in short order and that law become permanent.

By limiting our military actions to specific areas, this bill would

ensure that every one of these successes and improvements in security

is reversed. In the midst of progress in Iraq, which no one denies, and

with a strategy that is working, it simply does not make sense to tie

the hands of the commanders on the ground and force them to implement a

strategy which will lead to failure--a strategy that in the best

judgment of our military leaders, our intelligence agencies, and from

the perspective of countless outside observers have stated will lead to

the failure of our mission and the rapid deterioration of conditions in

Iraq and for the Iraqi people.

Hopefully, it is evident to people who are watching this debate and

have examined the Feingold bill that the strategy which inspires the

provisions and limitations in this bill is not a military strategy; it

is a political strategy. The tactics being used by those who would

enact conditions and limitations on our involvement in Iraq, such as

those contained in this bill, are not based on strategic thought or

analysis. Rather, they appeal to a political base that has always

opposed the war, refuses to acknowledge the progress we are making, and

wants to see our mission fail.

Political strategies for fighting wars such as the rhetoric some are

now imploring all have one thing in common: They all result in failure.

They are shortsighted, politically motivated, do not serve any national

security objective and, most importantly, are a disservice to the men

and women who have been called into action and are on the ground in

Iraq.

We are making progress in Iraq. The strategy our President and our

military commanders have implemented is working. We are receiving

positive updates from our leaders in the field. Our leaders are

adjusting their strategy in accordance with those developments on the

ground as well as the realities back home. They are doing this wisely,

not hastily or in response to opinion polls, but according to good

judgment and a realistic assessment of what will work, what will not

work, and what is appropriate at this point in time.

The Feingold bill will stop our leaders' ability to do this. It will

keep them from doing the jobs we sent them to do; and that is to lead,

to decide, to make judgments, and to report back to us on their

effectiveness. Most importantly, it will keep them from completing the

job we have sent them to perform. This is unacceptable. For these

reasons, I urge my colleagues to vote against this bill.

Mr. President, I yield back.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.