Mr. President, I am very pleased to join with the

distinguished senior Senator from Virginia--a former chairman of the

Senate Armed Services Committee, an individual who has devoted his life

to the support of our military--in offering, along with a number of our

colleagues, this very important resolution as an amendment to the

continuing resolution. There are many differing views in this body on

the road ahead in Iraq, and those views are legitimate but they deserve

to be debated. There is no more pressing issue facing this country than

Iraq. The public is disappointed to see the Senate avoid the debate on

the most important issue of our day. The current stalemate is

unacceptable. It is unacceptable to the American people. Regardless of

our views on the appropriate strategy for Iraq, we have an obligation,

we have a duty as Senators to fully debate this issue and to go on

record on what we believe to be the appropriate strategy, the road

ahead in Iraq.

I am very disappointed that the procedural wrangling on both sides of

the aisle prevented that kind of full and fair debate last week. I

believed strongly that we should go ahead with that debate, and I am

sorry that did not occur. I hope our leaders on both sides of the aisle

will work together to come up with a fair approach to debate this most

important issue.

Just this last weekend, the State of Maine lost another soldier in

combat in Iraq. The American people deserve to know where each and

every one of us stands on the President's strategy, on whether to cut

off funding, on the important issues related to this very pressing

issue. There are legitimate arguments on both sides. There are those

who agree with my position that a surge of 21,500 troops would be a

mistake. There are those who believe that the surge is the right course

to follow. I respect the views of Senators on both sides of the aisle

and, indeed, this is not a partisan issue. But surely--surely this is

an issue that deserves our full debate in the best traditions of this

historic body. Surely--surely our constituents deserve to know where we

stand.

I think this is so important that nothing should prevent us from

going to this debate prior to our recessing. I think we should make

this so important that if it is not done, perhaps we should reconsider

our plans for next week. I think we should proceed with this most

important debate without further delay. There are a number of

worthwhile resolutions that have been brought forward. Let the debate

begin.

Finally, I want to add just a couple of comments to those made by the

distinguished Senator from Virginia and the distinguished Senator from

Nebraska, and that is about the importance of these resolutions. They

are by no means unprecedented, as both of my colleagues have so

articulately pointed out. They offer guidance to the administration. It

remains my hope that if the Senate passes the resolution that I have

helped to coauthor that the President will accept our invitation to

take a second look at his plan. We urge him to explore all alternatives

and to work with us on a bipartisan strategy to chart a new road ahead

in Iraq.

As a result of my trip to Iraq in December, I concluded that we face

a number of different challenges in Iraq and the strategy depends on

where you are in Iraq. In Baghdad, the capital is engulfed in sectarian

violence. Yes, Baghdad is in the midst of a civil war between the

Shiites and the Sunnis. To insert more American soldiers in the midst

of this sectarian struggle would, in my judgment, be a major mistake.

Only the Iraqis can devise a solution to the sectarian strife that is

gripping Baghdad, and I think if the Iraqis had taken the long overdue

political steps, if they more fully integrated the Sunni minority into

the power structures, if they had passed an oil revenue bill that more

equitably distributed oil revenues, if they had held the long overdue

provincial elections, we would not be in the crisis in which we are

today.

Indeed, that is not just my opinion, that was the opinion of General

Petraeus when I asked him that question during his nomination hearing

before the Armed Services Committee.

By contrast to the sectarian strife that is plaguing Baghdad, the

battle is very different in Anbar Province to the west. There the fight

is with al-Qaida and with foreign jihadists, and there and only there

did I hear an American commander ask for more troops--only in Anbar

Province--and he did so in order to capitalize on a recent positive

development in which some of the local Sunni tribal leaders are now

backing the coalition forces against al-Qaida.

My conclusion is that we do need more troops in Anbar, but we should

reallocate from troops already in the country. I personally would

choose to take troops out of Baghdad and send them west, to Anbar

Province, and put the Iraqis in charge, fully in charge of security in

Baghdad. I fear that by inserting thousands of additional troops into

the midst of the sectarian strife in Baghdad, ironically we will ease

the pressure on the Iraqi leaders to take the long-overdue steps to

quell the sectarian violence, for I am convinced that the sectarian

violence in Baghdad requires a political, not a military, solution.

In Basra, the third stop on our trip, I heard a British commander, a

British colonel, give an excellent presentation to us. He said that

initially the British and American troops were welcomed in Iraq, but as

time has gone on, what he called the consent line has declined and

their presence has been less and less tolerated and more and more

resented.

I think perhaps the only issue on which all Members of this body can

agree is that our troops have served nobly and well in Iraq, and that

we need a new strategy. We disagree on the road ahead, but that is what

democracy and the traditions of the Senate are all about. We should not

be afraid of this debate. We should debate this issue fully and openly

and let our constituents and the administration know exactly where the

Senate stands.

Mr. President, if I may respond to the Senator from

Virginia, I remember very well General Abizaid's testimony before the

Armed Services Committee in mid-November. And as the Senator has

pointed out--and he presided over that hearing--it could not have been

clearer General Abizaid said that he consulted with all the American

commanders and that the effect of bringing in more American troops

would be to relieve the pressure on the Iraqis to step up and take

control of the security themselves.

Indeed, and ironically, General Petraeus, the new commander in Iraq,

had written an article for the Military Review in January of 2006 in

which he said that one of the lessons from his tours of duty in Iraq

was that you should not do too much, that you should call upon the

Iraqis to take responsibility for themselves. Indeed, my experience was

just as the Senator's was. About a month after General Abizaid's

testimony, I was in Iraq. I talked with the commanders on the ground,

and I would like to share with the senior Senator what one American

commander told me.

He said that a jobs program for Iraqis would do more good to quell

the sectarian violence than the addition of more American troops. He

told me that some Iraqi men are so desperate for money because they

have been unemployed for so long that they are joining the Shiite

militias. They are planting roadside bombs simply for the money because

they are desperate.

I thought that was such a telling comment, I say to my distinguished

colleague, because this was from a very experienced commander who had

been in Iraq for a long time. At that moment he was not calling for

more troops. None of the American commanders with whom I talked in

Baghdad called for more troops. The only place where we heard a request

for more troops was in Anbar Province, and as I have explained, the

situation

in Anbar is totally different. It is not sectarian violence. The

violence is with al-Qaida, the foreign jihadists, mainly Sunni versus

Sunni, and it requires a different strategy.

So my experience, when added to the distinguished Senator's, shows a

consistent pattern. Whether it was the distinguished Senator's trip in

October or the testimony of General Abizaid in November or my journey

in December, we heard exactly the same themes, exactly the same answers

to the questions of whether we needed more troops.

Finally, let me say I went to Iraq with a completely open mind on

this issue, and I came back convinced that sending more troops to

Baghdad would be a colossal error.