Mr. President, first, I want to commend the senior Senator

from Virginia, Senator Warner, for his unparalleled leadership, because

it is borne of a tremendous credibility based on his military and

professional experience on these vital issues, and that precise

credibility lends the kind of expertise to the Senate, to the Congress,

and to our Nation that is so vital at this point in time. But I think

in the final analysis, it is something we have to honor as we consider

the most consequential issue of our time.

I am very pleased the Senator has offered an amendment that reflects

his resolution that was modified and that was supported by both sides

of the political aisle. I am pleased to join my colleague from

Nebraska, Senator Hagel, and my colleague from Maine, Senator Collins,

because this is a critical issue. It is one of the issues that is the

most significant of our time.

As we begin this week, it is regrettable we don't have the Iraq

debate before the floor of the Senate in the form of considering a

resolution. Tomorrow, the House of Representatives is going to proceed.

They are going to proceed to debate a resolution in opposition to the

troop surge proposed by the President of the United States. They will

have that debate this week. The question is when and if the Senate is

going to have that debate on a specific resolution, on specific issues,

with specific votes.

Unfortunately, what we are witnessing today is the shrinking role of

the Senate when it comes to the war in Iraq, a war that has been

ongoing for 4 years. I am dismayed because I don't see any evidence. I

don't see any evidence of working on a bipartisan basis to coalesce

around an issue and on a position where it has been demonstrated there

is a majority of support in the Senate to have negotiations, to have

consultation, to work it out. I don't see any evidence of that. Have we

come to the point in the Senate where we haven't been able to determine

procedurally how to move forward on a nonbinding resolution? It is hard

to believe the Senate would be marginalized on that point.

Now I am speaking from experience. This is my 13th year in the

Senate--my 13th year. I served in the House of Representatives for 16

years. I served for more than 20 years--I think about 24 years--on

Foreign Affairs, Foreign Relations, Armed Services, and currently the

Intelligence Committee. So I speak from experience. You have to work

across the political aisle. And there wasn't a time when we didn't

discuss these issues: Lebanon, Persian Gulf, Panama before the Persian

Gulf. We had Bosnia and Kosovo. We were able to work it out. The fact

is I well recall a statement I had drafted back in 2000 illustrating

examples of bipartisanship here on the floor of the Senate, one of

which I said about the Senator from Virginia, Senator Warner, in

working across the aisle with the Senator from West Virginia, Mr. Byrd,

on the issue of Kosovo.

That has been the hallmark of the Senate. Does it mean that we

disagree on a major issue of our time? No. There are differences of

opinion, but what is the Senate afraid of? What are we afraid of? To

debate and to vote on various positions, whether it is on our position

on the troop surge, whether it is on the position of cutting out

funding, the troop gaps, a new authorization? Some of those issues and

positions I would disagree with. But does that mean to say the Senate

cannot withstand the conflicting views of various Members of the

Senate? It is not unheard of, that both sides of the political aisle

will have differing views.

I came to this debate a few weeks ago when we were getting prepared

ostensibly to work on this issue, to debate, which is consistent with

the traditions and principles of this institution, which has been its

hallmark. That is why it has been considered the greatest deliberative

body in the world. Unfortunately, it is not living up to that

expectation or characterization, regrettably. But I joined with the

Senator from Nebraska in his effort across the aisle with the chairman

of the Foreign Relations Committee and the chairman of the Senate Armed

Services Committee because I wanted to send a message that here and

now, there will be those of us on this side of the aisle who disagree

with the President on the troop surge. So I wanted to send that

message. I read the resolution. I know there are some on this side of

the aisle who didn't accept that language. But I thought it was

important to do that. I cosponsored that resolution.

We had many meetings, as the Senator from Nebraska would note, with

Chairman Biden and Chairman Levin, to work through this issue: how we

could work with the Senator from Virginia, because we knew we had a

majority on both sides of the aisle that could work it out, who were

opposed to the troop surge. So how is it we couldn't get from here to

there? And we met in good faith to negotiate, working out even the

procedures. We agreed: Let's have an open, unfettered, unrestricted

debate, which is consistent with this institution that is predicated on

our Founding Fathers' vision of an institution based on accommodation

and consensus. You have to get 60 votes. So we said: Let's work it out,

and the good Senator from Virginia worked it out. He incorporated our

concerns in his modified resolution so we could enjoin our efforts.

Now, it is not surprising on this side of the aisle that there are

strong views that support the President, that don't believe we should

have a vote. But does that mean to say we can't move forward and the

House of Representatives can? So the House of Representatives is going

to be debating this issue this week, and the Senate is going to be

dithering. While our troops are on the front lines, the Senate is

sitting on the sidelines.

I am amazed we have reached this point in the Senate. We should be

embracing this moment. We are the voice of the American people.

Constitutional democracy is predicated on majority rule, but a respect

for minority rights. I don't see any ongoing negotiations and

discussions. Maybe I missed something. I don't see that happening

across the political aisle. If historically we took the position: You

missed your chance, that you missed your chance with a vote--2 weeks

ago--you mean that is it in the Senate? How did we pass major pieces of

legislation, major

initiatives without saying: That is it; there is no room for

discussion, there is no room for negotiation, there is no room for

compromise.

Oftentimes I am challenged on this side because I work so much across

the political aisle. Senator Hagel did the same thing, as did Senator

Warner. We worked across the political aisle to make it work. But I do

not see that mutual trust to say: Let's see how we can move forward on

the most profound issue of our time. It is unimaginable that we cannot

develop a strategy for deliberating on this most consequential issue.

We are expecting to adjourn next week for a recess. I thought to

myself: Why? Why, so we will get back to Iraq before we know it? That

is what we have heard: Just wait. The troop surge isn't going to wait.

The Iraqi war doesn't take a recess. Our men and women aren't taking a

recess. Why can't we debate now and vote on these issues? Are we saying

we are simply not capable of talking?

That is what the Senate is all about. It is based on consensus. It is

based on compromise. It is based on conciliation. It is based on the

fact that you have to develop cooperation in order to get anything

done. It is not unusual. If historically we took the position: You

missed your chance because there are disparate views, so that there

would be no opportunity to further discuss or negotiate--we missed our

chance? Are we talking about scoring political points? Are we talking

about what is the best policy for this country with respect to Iraq at

a time when men and women are on the front lines; at a time when the

President is proposing a troop surge which I and others joined with

Senator Warner because we oppose that; at a time in which we are almost

a year to the anniversary of the bombing of the Golden Mosque in

Samarra?

In fact, Senator Warner and I paid a visit just days after that, the

first congressional delegation, and we saw all the manifestations of

what exists today in the most pronounced way. And we are saying we

can't get it done in the Senate. Is this about scoring political

points? I read every day: Who is winning politically? Because that is

what it is about. It is about winning politically on a policy with

respect to Iraq where we have been mired for 4 years with a strategy

that hasn't been working. And we are saying, who is winning

politically? Isn't it about Iraq? Isn't it about our men and women?

Isn't it about what is in the best interests for this country?

We have given so much. Our men and women have sacrificed

immeasurably. As Senator Collins indicated, we lost another from Maine

this weekend, SGT Eric Ross, 26. These men and women have put

themselves on the frontlines. Yet we sit and hesitate to talk about

what is in their best interests. Some say it is a nonbinding resolution

that has no impact. I daresay, if it doesn't have any impact, then why

is it we are not voting? What has a greater resonance in America? Is it

silence or is it taking action on the most consequential issue of our

time? I can only imagine, if we had an overwhelming bipartisan vote on

Senator Warner's resolution--that is bipartisan, I might add--because

those Members strove to make it bipartisan in the Senate, many strive

to do that, so we can send a message that would be profound, that would

resonate. To have a strong vote in the Senate or silence, which would

have greater resonance? I think we know the answer to this question.

I am concerned we are taking a political U-turn away from the message

in the last election. I was in that last election. I heard loudly and

clearly. I don't blame the people of Maine or across this country for

their deep-seated frustration. They are right. There was too much

partisanship and too much polarization.

What we need now is leadership. We need leadership for this country.

They are thirsting for a strong leadership, an honorable leadership

that leads us to a common goal. No one expected unanimity in the Senate

but we would give integrity to this process to allow it to work and not

cynically say who is winning and who is losing today politically, so we

have 30-second ads that will be run by outside groups or we are seeing

them now. We are not shedding the political past. We have made a

political U-turn. We are returning to it.

This isn't about party labels. This isn't whether it is good for

Republicans or good for Democrats. It is what is good for America. It

is not about red States and blue States. It is about the red, white,

and blue.

I am dismayed we are the second month into a new Congress, after the

American people resoundingly repudiated the politics of the past, the

partisanship and polarization, creating a poisonous environment. They

repudiated all of that. Here we are, back to the same old approach.

Instead of giving confidence to the American people that we will speak,

we are their voice, we give voice to their fears and to their hopes, to

their concerns that they rightfully have because we are not making the

kind of progress, we are moving in a different direction on Iraq that

obviously has been exemplified by the continuing and ongoing sectarian

warfare.

Fifteen months ago when Senator Warner came to the Senate and offered

a resolution, 2006 was going to be the year of transition to Iraqi

sovereignty. It was 2006 when we would turn over all the security to

the Iraqi security forces. But 2006 has come and gone. We haven't made

any measurable progress.

As I said, when I was there a year ago, we saw the manifestations of

the sectarian warfare, a vacuum had been created politically because no

new central government had been created. That took months. We allowed

that vacuum to continue. We got a new government. Yet they have been

hesitant--indeed, they have been an impediment--to quelling the

sectarian violence and confronting and demobilizing the militias.

I heard a year ago about the graft and corruption that was running

rampant in the ministries, as we saw recently with the Deputy Minister

of Health funneling money to support the sectarian violence and the

militias. We have seen and we have known all of that.

So Senator Warner got that resolution passed. We united around him.

In June of 2006, we passed a resolution as well that called for a

regional conference so we would begin the diplomatic offensive the Iraq

Study Group spoke to. But that has been ignored as well. I know the

administration has had a number of strategies in Iraq. They had the

national strategy for victory that was also 15 months old, that

represented all the issues Senator Warner has embraced in his

resolution, to which they only paid lip service, regrettably.

So we are here today. We want to give voice to the concerns of the

American people who want us to move in a different direction, not to

commit additional troops at a time in which we have a government in

Iraq that hasn't demonstrated a measurable commitment to controlling

the sectarian violence and make the political changes within its

Government that demonstrate a good-faith effort--whether it is the oil

revenue-sharing distribution money, the provincial elections and, as I

said, the demobilization of the militias; in fact, impeding our efforts

to capture people who were responsible for some of the genocide and the

warfare. But here we are.

I hope we can find a way. What could be of higher priority than to be

able to debate and to vote on our respective positions, to give a vote

on the Warner resolution that is so important that a majority of

Senators support? I know we can build the threshold for the 60. It is

imperative we do it. It is inexcusable, frankly, that on the process

for debating, we cannot reach an agreement. We are failing the American

people on a colossal scale. We are held up by arcane procedural

measures that could be worked out, if only we reached across the

political aisle.