Mr. President, I rise to talk a little bit about the

situation in Iraq and how we are trying to deal with this as a nation.

We need to start with, when we are discussing Iraq, what are our

national interests and why are we engaged there.

Our basic national interest in Iraq is the protection of America, our

desire to make sure that we are projecting our purposes in a way that

reduces the ability of those who would wish to do us harm in this war

against us, which was declared in the late 1990s, when it was obviously

brought to our shores on September 11, that in that war we are best

postured to make sure terrorists, specifically Islamic fundamentalists

who wish to do us harm, are not successful. That is the first purpose

of our engagement in Iraq.

The second purpose, of course, is to make sure our troops, who are

engaged in pursuing this war on the ground in Iraq, are adequately

funded and given the support they need in order to do their job and not

be exposed to risks which would occur were they not adequately funded

and supported.

It has been 5 years since we were attacked. That is the good news,

that we have not been attacked for 5 years. Obviously, some of that is

good fortune and luck, I suspect. But a lot of that is the result of a

policy which has essentially said we are going to find the terrorists

before they can find us, and we are going to bring them to justice. And

we are going to also try to initiate a process where we establish, in

the Middle East, an attitude that respects democracy, respects

individual rights, respects the rights of women, and respects the

approach of a marketplace economy.

In Iraq, we have attempted to accomplish that, and much has occurred

in Iraq that has been good, although, obviously, there is a lot there

that has occurred that has been unfortunate, and there have been

mistakes made. But the fact is, they have gone through major election

processes. They have elected a government. They have had a number of

elections, where a large percentage of the population participated.

Women have been allowed out of the household and are participating in

society.

It remains, however, a nation which is torn by religious strife and

cultural and deep ethnic differences. We have not been successful in

being able to resolve that and nor have the Iraqi people been able to

do that through their democratic process.

But the question becomes for us--in light of the President's request

that there be an increase of troops, called the surge, of potentially

20,000 troops, especially concentrated in the Baghdad area, to try to

bring more stability to that region--how do we approach this as we move

down the road?

Well, I think we have to, as we approach this, keep in context what

is our goal. Our goal is to protect us--America--from attacks by

radical fundamental Islamic movements and individuals, terrorists

specifically, and to

make sure our troops, who are in the field, are adequately protected

and have the support they need in order to do their job correctly.

A precipitous, immediate pullout, which is the proposal that has come

from the other side in a number of different scenarios, would, I

suspect, lead to a number of results which would not be acceptable to

us and would undermine our basic purpose, which is to protect America

from further attack and to protect our soldiers who are in the field

protecting us.

How do you manage a precipitous pullout that does not immediately

lead to chaos in Iraq, where the sectarian and religious violence has

escalated dramatically, where the potential that a client state of Iran

will be set up, at least over a portion of Iraq, where safe havens will

occur and result for al-Qaida in other portions of Iraq, and where even

greater numbers of people--even though that may seem hard to

understand--but where even greater numbers of people may die in Iraq,

where a massive civil war, potentially in catastrophic proportions in

relation to the population there, will precipitate?

I do not see how you avoid those occurrences if you immediately

withdraw. An immediate withdrawal also leads to the issue of what

happens to the troops who are left behind. You cannot get 130,000

troops out of Iraq overnight. It is going to take, even under the

scenario laid out here by the Democratic leadership, 8 to 12 months to

accomplish that. And if you are doing that in a compressed time--as is

proposed by the recent language that has been put forward by some of

our colleagues--if you compress that time, you are going to leave some

troops behind at significant risk, much more significant risk than if

they have the support mechanisms they need in order to do the job

right.

Is the surge the right approach? Is this concept of 20,000 troops

going to resolve this? Is that going to lead us to an Iraq that is more

stable? I do not know the answer to that question. I have deep

reservations that that is going to accomplish that goal. I have to

admit, I suspect if we are able to stabilize certain sections of

Baghdad, divided into nine districts, as is proposed--stabilize them in

sequence or in parallel--that as you stabilize one district, you are

going to push the people who are causing the problems into another

place. It is not as if they are going to disappear or even probably be,

for the most part, corralled. They are simply going to move.

So I am not sure it is going to accomplish its goal. But I do know

this: It is the proposal put forward by the people who are on the

ground and to whom we have given the responsibility of trying to

address this issue of how you deal with an Iraq in the context of the

problems which it has. To take the other option is to lead inevitably

to a dramatic problem that will be immediate, both for us as a nation,

because it will give potentially safe haven to al-Qaida and create an

Iran client state, and it will also lead to what I suspect would be a

huge explosion in the area of civil war.

So although I have reservations, I, also, am not about to vote to cut

off the support for the troops who are in the field. Now, I do not

command those troops. I am a Senator. I am not the commander of the

troops. The President is Commander in Chief. He has literally the

unilateral authority to pursue this course of action, unless we vote as

a Senate to cut off funding. And the practical implications of us doing

that would mean that troops in the field would not have the money they

need in order to undertake their own protection. That would be the

result of us cutting off funds.

That is a vote I am never going to take or support because the first

obligation we have is to those soldiers who are in the field. You may

disagree with the Commander in Chief's position, but I do not think

that as people who are charged with the responsibility of funding the

troops in the field, that you take that disagreement to the point of

putting them at risk. So that would not be a vote that I think would be

a good vote for us, as a Congress, to take.

But it appears to me--listening to the debate as it has evolved

here--there are some who wish to have it sort of both ways. They want

to be able to say one thing but not do what they say. I almost am of

the view that we should engage this at the level of substance, and we

should have that vote. I am not going to vote for it, but we should

have that vote. We should say: OK, if it is the position of the

Democratic Party that they want to cut off funds to the troops in the

field, if they feel that should be the course of action, so be it.

I happen to be attracted, more appropriately, or more positively, to

the proposals of the Iraq Study Group. I think they have laid out a

blueprint for us to pursue. I am not sure that is going to lead to

anything that fundamentally resolves the problem in Iraq, as the

problem in Iraq is religious and it is ethnic and it is cultural and it

goes back a long way. But at least they have laid out a roadmap. I will

not use that word because that word, obviously, has other implications.

They have laid out a blueprint we can pursue and I believe we should

pursue.

I, for example, think we should engage both Iran and Syria in

diplomacy. I agree with former Secretary of State Baker on that point.

The way you engage them--of course, that does not instantaneously give

them credibility, but there are ways to engage governments that are so

antithetical to us, as has been shown over the years, without giving

them inordinate credibility as a result of that engagement. And I think

that is appropriate.

So there are processes we could follow. But we have to, under any

circumstances, get back to what is our basic purpose, I believe, as

governors--and I use that term in the generic sense--and it is, A, No.

1, to protect this Nation from another attack. And that means finding

the terrorists before they find us and bringing them to justice. And

the effort in Iraq was a legitimate and appropriate effort to try to

support the construction of a state in the middle of the Middle East

which would subscribe to democratic values, which would give its people

the opportunity to have a pluralistic society, where individuals are

respected, especially women, and as a result to build a center from

which we would have the capacity to undermine the Islamic

fundamentalist movement's philosophy that Western values are

fundamentally at variance with the Muslim religion and the Muslim way

of life. And I believe that is still a legitimate and valued purpose.

But it all comes back to how it protects us. And it protects us by

creating an atmosphere where we can go to the Muslim world and say we

are not your enemy, but we are actually an opportunity for you to have

a better lifestyle, if you follow the course of action of liberty,

freedom, individual rights, rights for women, and a market-oriented

approach. That protects us. And that should be our first goal: the

protection of America from further attack.

We should respect the fact that this administration has succeeded for

5 years in protecting us. Some of that is good fortune, as I said, but

a lot of it is the fact that we have reached beyond our borders to find

them before they could find those who wish to do us harm.

The second purpose must be to make sure the troops who are in the

field have the support they need, not only financial and technical and

logistical support but the moral support they need, so they know they

are fighting for what is an American cause and is going to keep America

safe--which they are. And we need to respect them. They are

extraordinary young men and women who are on the frontlines of this war

against terrorism and who are doing exceptional service for us.

So that is a brief outline of my thoughts on this matter. I notice,

in the concurrent resolution which was submitted by some of our

colleagues, they stated that the primary objective of the strategy of

the United States in Iraq should be to have the Iraq political leaders

make political compromise necessary to end the violence in Iraq. That

is an objective, but that is not our primary objective. To make

compromise? Whom are they going to compromise with, al-Qaida? Are they

going to compromise with Iran?

That is not our objective. Our objective is to, hopefully, have an

Iraq that is democratic, is pluralistic, and that is reasonably stable,

that is not a client state of Iran, that is not a safe haven for al-

Qaida.

Our primary purpose in Iraq is to create an atmosphere in the Middle

East

where people will look at democracy, at liberty and say: It works. Even

though I am Muslim, that works for me as a Muslim--where women have a

chance to pursue their options, where market forces work.

Our other primary purpose in Iraq must be to make sure our soldiers,

who are fighting for us and protecting us and who are engaged there,

are properly supported as long as they are there. Our Commander in

Chief has made a decision to move additional troops in there; and that

those troops are equally supported.

It is, obviously, a difficult and torturous issue for us as a nation

because we are a good nation. We do believe genuinely--I ask unanimous

consent for an additional 5 minutes.

Mr. President, if I could complete a quick thought and

then turn to the Senator for his question, my thought was this: This is

obviously a torturous issue for us as a nation, because we are

basically a very good people. And our history shows that when we use

force, we use it for the purposes of trying to free people, of giving

people more options and a better lifestyle. We did it during World War

I and World War II, and we did it throughout the Cold War. Our success

is extraordinary. We have never sought territorial gain, and we do not.

We seek to give people the opportunity to pursue the liberties and

freedoms which were defined so brilliantly by our Founding Fathers.

When we see something such as Iraq, where there seems to be such an

inability of the culture to grasp these concepts, even though we are

trying as hard as we can to give them that option, it is difficult.

But we still can't take our eye off the ball, which is to basically

recognize that we are doing this for our national defense, as we try to

stabilize a region that represents an immediate threat to us and has

already damaged us more than any other event in our history has damaged

us, other than potentially Pearl Harbor, and that we have troops in the

field who need to be supported.

I yield to the Senator from Texas for a question.

Answering the Senator through the Chair, that seems to me

to be the logical approach. As I mentioned earlier, there are some who

seem to want the language of opposition but don't want the

responsibility of opposition. If the case is that some believe we

should have immediate withdrawal, then that ought to be put on the

table in a context which would have the force of law and effect, and

let us vote on that. I would vote against it, but let us vote on it.

Yes, I yield to the Senator from Texas.

Responding to the Senator through the Chair, the Senator

makes a good point. My big concern goes to the morale of the troops in

the field. What are they thinking? What are they thinking as a young

19-, 20-, 22-year-old soldier in Iraq today when they hear this

discourse going forward and they are asked to go out on patrol, and

they are told that maybe the troops their military leadership says it

needs to support them is an issue? It is a legitimate issue as to how

long we should allow this to hang out there. Let's have the debate.

Let's resolve our national position as to what it is going to be, at

least for the next year, if we get that far, and resolve it so that we

know where we are; otherwise, we do harm to our national policy,

because it is so disruptive to have this many voices at the same time

claiming legitimacy and, more importantly, it does harm to our troops

in the field, which is my primary concern.

I thank the Senator from Texas for his questions and yield the floor.