Mr. President, to start this discussion about what to do

in Iraq, I think we need to sort of take inventory of where we are,

what common ground we do have. I do believe there is a vast, wide, and

deep support for the men and women in the military by the average

Republican and Democrat and Independent citizen and Members of

Congress, and that is indeed good news for our country. It is not one

of those situations where people came back from Vietnam and were not

well received by their fellow citizens. For that, we should all be

grateful.

I would like to put this debate in a little different context. As my

colleague from Texas said, whether we should have gone into Iraq is

sort of a matter for historical discussion. The question for us as a

nation is winning and losing, and can you put Iraq in terms of winning

and losing? I think you have to because our enemy has. Our enemy, al-

Qaida and other extremists groups, looks at Iraq very much as a

battlefront and a battle they want to win and us to lose. That is why

bin Laden has rallied the jihadist and al-Qaida sympathizers to go to

Iraq and go to the Land of the Two Rivers and drive the infidel out,

because I think they understand pretty clearly that if Iraq can

reconcile itself, become a stable, functioning democracy, with an Iraqi

spin to it, where a woman can have a say about her children, where the

rule of law would reign over the rule of the gun, and be a place that

would absorb religious tolerance, it would be a nightmare for their

agenda. So our enemy is very certain in their own mind about what would

happen if we won in Iraq.

Again, winning to me would be a stable, functioning democracy,

tolerant of religious differences, where all groups would have a

political say, where a woman would have a meaningful role in society

regarding her children and their future. And it would contain Iran. It

would be a buffer to Iranian ambitions. It would deny extremist groups,

such as al-Qaida, safe haven. That, to me, is winning, and that, to me,

is very possible. The reason I say it is very possible is because it is

in the best interests of the Iraqi people themselves to achieve that

goal. There is a Shia majority in Iraq, but they are Iraqi Shia. They

are Arabs. The Persian Shia majority--there has been a war between

these two countries in the past decades and a lot of animosity. So the

general feeling on the streets that I have found from many visits to

Iraq is that, generally speaking, the Iraqi population does not want to

be dominated by anybody, including Iran.

Now, the biggest news of the surge that is not being reported enough,

in my opinion, is that given a choice and an opportunity, a Muslim

population, the Iraqi Sunni Arabs, rejected the al-Qaida agenda in

Anbar. The al-Qaida movement in Iraq was formulated and inspired by

outside forces. Leaders from al-Qaida internationally came into Iraq to

rally people to the al-Qaida cause. They played a very heavy hand in

Anbar, which was brutal--from the small things such as banning smoking

to burning children in front of their parents who did not cooperate.

They imposed a way of living on the Iraqis in Anbar Province for which

the Anbar Iraqi Sunni Arabs said: No, we don't want any more of this.

And the sheiks and all the tribes came to our side because al-Qaida

overplayed their hand. So the real good news for me is that given an

opportunity and being reinforced, the al-Qaida agenda will not sell,

and people within the region will turn it down and reject it. That

would not have happened without the surge.

I think most of us do not appreciate what life is like in a country

where if you raise your hand to be a judge, let's say, not only do you

become personally at risk, they try to kill your family--the forces

that do not want to reconcile Iraq.

Political debates and discourse in this country can be very

contentious, but on occasion we find that middle ground to solve our

problems. It is hard and difficult to compromise in an environment

where the people who want you to fail literally will kill your family.

So the lack of security in the past has been our biggest impediment to

reconciliation. Thank God for General Petraeus, General Odinero, and

all under their command. You have done a wonderful job.

This we should all agree upon: that the surge, as a military

operation, has been enormously successful and I think will be the gold

standard in military history for counterinsurgency operations. Instead

of bleeding it dry of funds and putting it at risk, we should reinforce

it politically, monetarily, and in every other way.

A political leader can reinforce a military leader. Our military,

because of our system of government, depends on us, those of us in

elected office, to give them the resources to execute the mission they

have been assigned. Who among us believes we understand Iraq better

than General Petraeus militarily? Who among us advocated the surge as

proposed by General Petraeus? Who among us understands

counterinsurgency operations better than the general and his staff?

None of us, if we would be honest with ourselves. He is the expert in

this area. He has been given an ability to engage in military

operations with a completely new theory, and it is working--undeniably

working.

Security in Iraq is better. Anbar has literally been liberated. If

you told me a year ago, this time last year, we would be moving marines

out of Anbar because the security environment

would justify it, I would have thought: That is optimism beyond what I

can muster. But it has happened. And all throughout this country called

Iraq, people are beginning to reconcile themselves because of better

security. Quite frankly, they are war weary.

But I am not going to reinvent history. The blame is across the board

and across the aisle. How many times did Republicans go to Iraq after

the fall of Baghdad, for maybe 3 years, and say: It is really going

well, it is just the media's fault. It was not going well, and it was

not the media's fault. The strategy was failing. So people on my side

of the aisle were cheerleading for a strategy that, if we followed it,

we would have been hopelessly lost in Iraq. So there is plenty of blame

to go around. Finally, we now have adjusted. We have a new general with

a new strategy. It is a lot more complicated than just 30,000 new

troops. We are deploying them differently. We are going after the

insurgency in a different way.

The biggest nightmare for al-Qaida has been the surge. If you ask to

pick winners and losers of the surge, it would be extremist groups. At

the top of the list would be al-Qaida, and it is soon going to be the

Shia militia aligned with Iran. There is an offensive about to take

place in Iraq that is going to put the nail in the coffin of extremist

groups. They are not defeated yet, but they are greatly diminished.

Now is not the time, colleagues, for us to put this surge in

jeopardy. Our troops are in a political crossfire here at home. They

are not in the middle of a heated sectarian war. Security does exist in

Iraq now to get business done. There are extremist groups, and it is

still dangerous, but the military has done its part to allow the Iraqi

people to reconcile themselves.

We have not done our part. We are still fighting a battle as if

nothing new has happened. We are still holding on to positions stated

in April and May as if nothing has changed, and that is not fair to

those who sacrificed to make it change. I took this floor for a very

long time with Senator McCain and a handful of others arguing that the

Department of Defense had a strategy doomed to fail. Thank God the

President changed course. Thank God for General Petraeus and all under

his command.

Now, to my colleagues on the other side, please let us allow General

Petraeus to finish the job he started. Within a few months, the troops

begin to come home based on the surge being successful. They will

return with victory at hand. Victory is not yet achieved, but it is

possible. The only way to roll back the security gains is to change the

mission and have the Congress start running the war.

The political crossfire I speak of is that some people want to give

the money to support the surge only if they get $11 billion of domestic

spending unrelated to the military. Some people will not give any money

for the surge, continued operations in Iraq, unless we change the

mission and withdraw troops by the end of the next year. That is a

crossfire politically that is doing more harm than good that should

end.

Beginning in March, General Petraeus will come back. He will tell us

the situation as it exists on the ground. I am here to tell you, in

December, that I am disappointed in the progress at the central

government level in Baghdad. They have passed a budget in Iraq--$48

billion. All revenue being shared among all groups is a great step

forward, but it is not a permanent solution to the problem.

We need a permanent law, a national law, that will tell every group

in Iraq: As to the wealth of the country, part of it will come to your

area, and you do not have to worry about it budget by budget. Political

reconciliation in Iraq has to happen for the surge to be successful. I

have said on numerous occasions that if there is not some major

breakthrough on the benchmarks by January, I will look at reconfiguring

the aid we give to the Iraqi Government, not changing the troop

missions or the troop numbers. I am going to leave that up to the

military. It is in our national security interest to maintain the gains

we have achieved on the ground to keep Iraq from going into chaos. But

we are giving this Government hundreds of millions of dollars of aid,

and if they cannot reconcile themselves, we may find other places to

spend that money and other ways to spend that money.

So I urge my colleagues to allow the troop funding that is required

to complete the surge, to allow it to go forward. Stop this political

crossfire of trying to extract from this necessary funding event more

money to spend domestically here at home or trying to take the mission

away from the military commanders. That is not where our troops need to

find themselves in this crucial moment in time.

I can promise you, as we go into next year, if the central government

in Baghdad has not done a better job reconciling themselves, I will sit

down with anyone, Republicans and Democrats alike, to find a way to put

political pressure, economic pressure, on this government.