On the question of Iraq, and specifically as I have my own

amendment which I will be offering--it is not my amendment; I have an

amendment in which I am joined by other Members, including Senator

Salazar, on how to proceed in Iraq, and we will be talking about that

later--maybe even later today--I wish to speak briefly on an amendment

being offered by Senator Reid and Senator Levin which fixes a timeframe

for withdrawal that is arbitrary and which is condensed. That

timeframe, as I understand it, would occur within 6 months, when there

would be a withdrawal. There are no underlying policy proposals which

say that the Government of Iraq has to be a functioning government and

has to have the capacity to secure itself and has to have the capacity

to maintain stability in order for the withdrawal to occur; the

withdrawal simply is going to occur. I think the practical implications

for that are pretty staggering and not constructive to the process,

quite honestly. I think a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq, which has

no underlying policy and which leaves behind a stable government or

attempts to leave behind a stable government, will inevitably lead to a

desperate government, which will, in turn, lead to chaos, and chaos in

Iraq is not in our national interests.

We have to remember what the stakes are. Our purpose of being in Iraq

is fundamentally to protect ourselves as a nation. The people who wish

to do us harm--and they have made it clear they intend to do us harm

and they have done us harm--intend to use their ability to attack the

United States as the essence of their war on us. The way you keep them

from attacking our Nation is to find them where they are and attack

them and to make it very difficult for them to have a safe haven and to

disrupt their activities and to find them before they can attack us.

That is our philosophy. It is a philosophy which is totally appropriate

to the war that we now find ourselves engaged in.

This is not a conventional situation. We are not fighting a nation

state. We are fighting individuals who subscribe to a philosophy which

says they will have a better afterlife if they destroy Western culture

and specifically kill Americans and destroy America. That is their

purpose. They have said that and they have done it. Let's not be naive

about this. Let's not look at this through rose-colored glasses and say

they wish some other outcome and if we are nice to them they will go

away; that if we ignore them, they will ignore us. That is not the

case.

So we have pursued a policy in Iraq and across the world of finding

them before they find us. If Iraq, because of a precipitous withdrawal

which leaves no stability behind, is allowed to devolve into chaos, it

is very obvious what is going to happen. Besides a civil

war, which is obviously already going on, to some degree, which will be

expanded radically with many thousands of people, more thousands of

people dying, there will undoubtedly occur within Iraq the creation of

a client state for Iran, and Iran has made it very clear what their

intentions are. Their intentions are to develop a nuclear weapon and

produce hegemony throughout the Islamic world.

Secondly, it will become a safe haven for al-Qaida and give them a

base of operation which will represent a clear and present threat to us

as a nation.

So that type of course of action, although it obviously looks

attractive because it gets our troops out of immediate harm's way, and

everybody wants to do that to the fullest extent possible, will have

the exact opposite effect on our national security. It will actually

put us at greater risk.

There has to be an underscoring of the withdrawal, or the drawdown,

which I think is the more appropriate term, because even the most

strident people on the other side of the aisle who wish to withdraw

recognize there is going to have to be some residual force left for the

purpose of protecting American assets, such as our embassies, and

training, hopefully, troops of the Iraqi Government. But any process

for the drawdown really has to be done in the context of leaving behind

as stable a government as we can possibly create, or participate in

helping to create. That is why I have become a sponsor of and

participating in the effort to put in place the proposals of the Iraq

Study Group, which essentially outlines a series of steps that can be

taken which will, hopefully, lead us toward a drawdown of American

troops which is tied to leaving behind a stable government.

The Reed-Levin amendment abandons all of that. It abandons the Iraq

Study Group proposal. It abandons the effort to try to leave in place a

stable government. It essentially says: Here is the date; we are going

to leave by that date. And it is a date certain.

That has two effects. It means the Government of Iraq will inevitably

be in desperate shape and potentially collapse, which will lead to

chaos, and, more importantly, it means our troops who are on the ground

will, during that period leading up to that date, be under significant

stress because their morale will be at serious issue because they will

know when they get to that date, they are leaving and they are leaving

behind a mess and, more importantly, they will be pursuing a mission,

which they will have been told by the other side of the aisle at least,

has no viability. And how can you ask somebody to go out and walk the

streets of Baghdad and participate in ``the surge and the clear and

hold and hopefully pass on stability'' exercise that is going on there

if you have the other side of the aisle saying: I am sorry, that

mission is irrelevant. You are out there, we don't believe in what you

are doing, we have no faith in that effort.

Yes, everyone has total commitment to our troops, but we also have to

have a commitment that when we send the troops out on the street, and

they put their lives at risk, they know there is a policy behind that

effort which is supported. In this case, what is being said is that

policy isn't being supported and their efforts on the streets in

Baghdad and other places are not going to have support.

It is a very dangerous message to send, first, to our enemies who

have a specific date and can ratchet up the violence radically to force

that date on us; second, to our troops on the ground; and thirdly, to

the long-term stability of a region which is critical to our national

interests and which plays a major role in whether we are going to be

successful in keeping our homeland, America, from being attacked.

A precipitous withdrawal without a game plan will lead to a

dysfunctional and disorganized and possibly collapse of the Government

of Iraq, and it will lead to chaos. Therefore, I think it is a very

intemperate policy to pursue.

There is also a certain cynicism about it, when you get right down to

it, and this bothers me. The people promoting this amendment have

constituencies who are truly and sincerely, I am sure, committed to

getting us out of Iraq as soon as possible, and they are trying to

respond to those constituencies. We see those constituencies all the

time, and their intensity is huge; especially in the Democratic Party

they have great sway. But the amendment itself is almost a free pass in

that everybody knows it cannot pass, and that is the irony. It is a

free pass that cannot pass. It cannot pass the Senate because it cannot

get 60 votes. If it did pass the Senate, and it did pass the House, it

would be vetoed by the President and, clearly, would not go into

effect.

So, essentially, what is happening is a policy is being put forward

which has serious political implications on the ground and substantive

implications on the ground in Iraq but has maybe a political upside in

the United States for people who are speaking to that constituency

which wants to immediately get us out of Iraq but has no viability

behind it, has no expectation of success behind it, and therefore is,

to a certain degree--a considerable degree--a rather cynical strategy.

The losers in this effort, quite honestly, are our troops on the

ground because they are seeing this debate going forward, and they are

scratching their heads saying: Why am I being asked to go out on the

streets? Why am I being asked to do this mission when they trying to

pass legislation in the Senate which says they don't support the

mission, and they know for sure that is not going to become law?

It is not good to pursue this type of an approach on an issue of such

importance, of such significance to our Nation, and especially to the

men and women who defend us.

I have serious reservations about not only the substance of the

proposal but about the politics behind the proposal, knowing that the

proposal has no capacity to become law, that it would be put forward in

such a way that basically creates false claims, in my opinion, or false

opportunities, or alleged opportunities.

This is an immensely serious issue, we all know that. What we need,

quite honestly, is some sort of approach that has a little bit of

bipartisanship to it, where both sides say: OK, we know we have a

difficult situation, an extremely frustrating situation in Iraq. Let's

come up with something that is a united policy, a bipartisan policy.

That is why the suggestion which is being put forward--to put in place

the Iraq Study Group as the blueprint for how we proceed there--is one

which I think has some vitality to it.

Is it the perfect answer? Obviously not. There is no perfect answer.

In fact, I was interested in hearing Lee Hamilton say there are no good

solutions to this situation. It was a very forthright statement that I

think resonates strongly.

The fact is, this little gambit--not a little gambit--this

significant gambit of putting forward a proposal that speaks to a

constituency, but everyone knows is not going to become law, is not

constructive for the process.