Mr. President, I can remember events 12 years ago so

clearly. I was not far from here at the time. I was in S-219, which is

a meeting room. That is where Leader Daschle held his leadership

meetings every Tuesday morning at 9 a.m. I was the first one in the

room. Senator John Breaux from Louisiana came in and said: Flip on the

TV. There is something going on in New York.

We turned on the TV, and it looked as though something happened in

New York. We just thought an airplane had malfunctioned or something

had gone wrong to cause the plane to hit that tower.

So the meeting started and the TVs were off. We were doing our

business of the day when suddenly a group of police officers came in

and grabbed Senator Daschle and took him outside. He came back very

quickly and said: There is an airplane headed for the Capitol. We have

to get out of here.

There was a lot of confusion, to say the least, as staff and Senators

were ordered out of the buildings--plural. As we left S-219, we looked

out the window toward the Pentagon, and smoke was billowing out of it.

We could see it so very plainly. At that time we didn't

know what was happening; we just knew we had been ordered to get out of

the building.

Of course, we all have memories of what took place that day. I was

the assistant leader, as was Senator Nickles from Oklahoma. Senator

Lott was the Republican leader, and Senator Daschle was the Democratic

leader. We were taken in helicopters from the west front of the Capitol

to a secure location. When I was taken to the west front of the

Capitol, the scene was eerie to say the least. There were lots of

people in black uniforms trying to create order out of confusion.

Without going into a lot of detail, we went to a location, and the Vice

President was there. He met with us and kept us informed as to what was

going on with the President. We spent the day there and then came back

to the west front of the Capitol, where all Members of Congress

gathered. Barbara Mikulski, for lack of anyone having a better

suggestion, said: We should sing ``God Bless America.'' She got the

song started, and that was extremely memorable.

We are going to have a ceremony in a few minutes out front, and I

will talk a little bit there. The four leaders have been asked to talk

out there.

We did have a moment of silence regarding the more than 3,000 people

who were killed in New York, Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon. In

addition to those 3,000 people who were taken from us permanently,

thousands of other people were injured, some of them permanently

injured. Some of them have missing legs, some are blind, and some

suffer from paralysis. So we raise our voices today in celebration of

America's spirit and perseverance. May we never forget 9/11.

It is also worth mentioning that on this day we also honor what took

place a year ago in Libya, where one of our stellar Ambassadors was

murdered along with three of his brave colleagues. They were all killed

in Libya. Our country remains committed to seeking justice for them and

every American victim of terrorism, and that is what the debate of

Syria is all about--terrorism.

Before I began the caucus yesterday, when the President came, my

introduction to the President was a film that was created by Senator

Feinstein and others. It is about 12 or 13 minutes long, and it shows

what went on in graphic detail with the brutal chemical weapons attack

in Syria where these children were left to die. Remember, these poisons

get the little kids first.

Senator Durbin has a Palestinian on his staff. We all know Reema. She

does the whip count for Senator Durbin and for me. I had her listen to

the film. I watched it and she listened so she could give me some idea

of what people were saying there. They were yelling. It was so sad.

Mostly they were praying. It was very, very sad to see people holding

little babies and saying: Breathe, breathe. They couldn't breathe. We

could see the perspiration on some of them. They dumped water on them--

anything to give them some relief. The video showed rows of dead

people. Hundreds of them were little children. Some of them were

dressed in their play clothes, little fancy, colorful T-shirts.

Even as we pay tribute to America's tradition of freedom for every

citizen across the globe, an evil dictator denies its citizens not only

their right to liberty but also their right to live. The Asad family is

pretty good at killing people. The New York Times had an article over

the last 24 hours about his dad, because of the failed assassination

attempt, killing 30,000 people he thought needed to be killed--30,000.

That country, Syria, denies its citizens the right to liberty, but even

more significant the right to live.

Yesterday I showed the video at the caucus. No one wanted to see it.

I didn't want to see it again. It was all I could do to glance up. I

had already seen it. Those visions will always be in my mind. I showed

my Senators a video of this: little boys and girls and grown men with

their eyes crusted, frothing from the mouth. It was such unspeakable

scenery. They were convulsing, writhing, spasms from the poison gas he

used to murder his victims. It was hard to watch, but it confirmed all

of our conviction that the United States must not let the Syrian regime

go unpunished for using something that is outlawed. Those weapons are

not to be used in a war, let alone used on a bunch of innocent people.

Yesterday the President spoke to two caucuses. He spoke last night

and made a compelling case for military action against the Asad regime.

As the President said, we have to send an explicit message not only to

Syria but the rest of the world. Remember--who has more chemical

weapons than Syria? Only one country--North Korea. Think about that. If

they get away with this, what is North Korea going to do? Then are we

going to have a marketplace for purchasing chemical weapons? The use of

chemical weapons by anyone, any time, anywhere, including the

battlefield, should not be tolerated.

Preventing these weapons from being used is not only in our own

national interests, but it is in the interests of the world. Diplomacy

should always be the first choice. That is who we are as a country. So

we have been asked to temporarily suspend consideration of the Syria

resolution to allow for these conversations to take place around the

world.

Tomorrow our Secretary of State is meeting with the Russian Secretary

of State, Mr. Lavrov, to explore in fact if this is a legitimate

proposal. Talking and action are two separate things. So what the

Republican leader and I have spoken about--and we will talk more about

it today--is to see what we can do to give the President the time and

space our country needs to pursue these international negotiations. We

will report back at a later time. America must remain vigilant and

ready to use force if necessary, and Congress should not take the

threat of military action off the table.

I want to spend a little time talking to Senator Menendez, the chair

of the committee. I want to talk to other Senators who are trying to

work something out on their own, and I will do that.

Leaders in Damascus and Moscow should understand that Congress will

be watching these negotiations very closely. If there is any indication

this is not serious--that it is a ploy to delay, to obstruct, to

divert--then I think we have to again give the President the authority

to hold the Asad regime accountable. So it is our determination not to

let Asad's atrocities go unanswered. How we answer is a question we

will continue to pursue. But it is very clear that we wouldn't be where

we are today--even my friend, the junior Senator from Kentucky, today

said the reason we are having the possibility of a deal is because of

the President threatening force.

It is interesting. Asad has even denied, until just recent hours,

ever even having had chemical weapons. So it is in Syria's power to

avoid these strikes, but that will require swift and decisive action on

the part of the Asad regime to relinquish these weapons. We need a

diplomatic solution to succeed, but saying we want one doesn't mean it

will happen. So he must quickly prove the offer to turn over Syria's

chemical weapons is real and not an attempt to delay.

All eyes are on the Russian President, President Putin. We all know

he was formerly head of the KGB. We all know about the KGB. He is the

President of that very big country. We are also grateful that even

though relations aren't perfect with Russia, they are OK--so much

better than they have been prior to the breakup of that massive

country, the Soviet Union.

We hope Russia is a productive partner in these negotiations. Any

agreement must also assure it is possible to secure these chemical

weapons in spite of the ongoing civil war, to keep those stockpiles out

of the hands of terrorists.

In short, I am happy we have some conversations going to see if this

can be resolved diplomatically. I certainly hope so.

I apologize to my counterpart, the Republican leader, for taking so

much time.

I yield the floor.