Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of the Senator

from Massachusetts. I believe this matter is an important one. We have

troops in the field who are executing the policies we have asked them

to execute. We don't need to be using buzz words; we need to be talking

about truth and facts and trying to make the right decisions for our

country, and for the world for that matter.

I detect fundamentally in the Senator's comments and from quite a

number of others that they believe, as the Senator said, ``there is no

real way out,'' and, in effect, we have a doomed

policy that will not be successful. Therefore, we should withdraw now.

If that is the fact, I would agree we should withdraw now. So that is

why I think we need to analyze this very point.

Last fall, a lot of people were worried about what was happening in

Iraq. I certainly was. I visited Iraq in October. I visited Al Anbar.

It was a very troubling report we received from the marines. It caused

me great concern. Remarkably, Al Anbar region has shown, almost

overnight, tremendous progress.

But let's go to the facts. The Congress asked General Jimmy Jones and

his commission in May to independently evaluate Iraq when we did the

funding for the surge. General Jimmy Jones's report dealt with the

fundamentals we are facing. I asked him did he believe it was

realistically possible that we could be successful in Iraq. And he

said: Yes, sir. I asked him did a single member of his 20-member

commission believe that we were doomed to failure in Iraq, and he

looked around and asked his commission members, and none of them said

that was their view. They all believed we had a realistic chance of

success. I asked General Petraeus did he believe we had a realistic

chance of success in Iraq, and he said, yes.

So I guess what I would say is, some say we do not. I would say the

people--the generals who are leading the effort there--say we have a

realistic chance of success. The independent commission we sent over

there of 20 members unanimously believes we do. So I think we should

base our opinion on the best information we have. As for me, I have to

accept that.

I also factor into that rather dramatic improvements in the reduction

of violence in Iraq, where within Baghdad we have seen a 70-percent

reduction of civilian deaths and a 55-percent reduction of civilian

deaths across the country of Iraq. That is very significant. It is a

product of many different things. It is a product of the new strategy

as well as the new troops we sent there.

So I have to say to my friends and colleagues in the Senate: Yes,

this is a tough vote. Yes, we need to worry and agonize and think

carefully about the challenges we are now facing, and we need to make

rational decisions. Based on the information I have and the committee

hearings I have attended in Armed Services, my 6 visits to Iraq, I

think we should not precipitously withdraw. Well, they say, this is not

a precipitous withdrawal, it is a deadline, and that is going to make

the Iraqis do better. But it is not a deadline; it is a precipitous

withdrawal. I mean I just have to tell you, let's deal with facts.

The Levin-Reed amendment says the Secretary of Defense shall commence

the reduction of the number of U.S. forces in Iraq not later than 90

days after the enactment of this act. And then it says: The Secretary

of Defense shall complete the transition of the U.S. forces to a

limited presence and missions by not later than 9 months after the

enactment of this date. So this is basically a 9-month mandated

withdrawal in Iraq, whether it creates instability and problems in

places and puts our soldiers at greater risk or not. Unrelated to the

facts on the ground, it is an absolute, mandated withdrawal.

Now, if we were doomed to failure, maybe this is what we ought to do,

but I don't believe we are doomed to failure. I believe, as Senator

Lieberman said, there are a number of things that can cause us to feel

better, and General Petraeus has certainly infused our effort with more

leadership and effectiveness and purpose. His tactics utilizing

counterinsurgency principles seem to have made some real progress.

For example, he told us he is embedding his soldiers with the local

people and the local forces to an extraordinary degree, compared to

what we have done before. As a matter of fact, I asked him about that.

I said: What are you doing differently? He seemed to, I have to say,

appreciate the question because he had been asked so many other things.

But he is doing things differently, and he explained some of the things

he is doing. We are embedding our soldiers with their soldiers. They

are living with them. They are in the neighborhoods. As a result, we

are receiving more information, and the number of caches of weapons

that have been seized so far this year put us on a pace to double the

number of weapons and munitions seizures that we have achieved this

year, doubling the previous rate. He said in his mind that may have

something to do with the fact that attacks have been down and the

number of IED attacks have dropped 37 percent. He didn't overpromise or

declare that. He said it might have something to do with that, that we

are obtaining twice as many caches of weapons and seizing those as a

direct result of more and better information from the people of Iraq.

So I would also join my colleague, Senator McCain, who certainly

knows something about war firsthand, in concluding that the limited

presence mandated in this amendment, the Reed-Levin amendment, that

says that the mission of our forces that are left in Iraq can only be

for the following purposes: No. 1, protecting U.S. and coalition

personnel and infrastructure--base security, defending our bases--No.

2, training, equipping, and providing logistic support to the Iraqi

security forces; and No. 3, engaging in targeted--this is a legal

mandate--targeted counterterrorism operations against al-Qaida, al-

Qaida-affiliated groups, and other international terrorist

organizations. That is all they can do. As Senator McCain said, asking

this question: Are they going to wear T-shirts that say: I am an al-

Qaida, I am a Shia, or a Sunni terrorist; I am a Baathist warrior, and

we can only shoot at those--use force against those who wear the al-

Qaida T-shirts? This is not a practical, realistic directive to the

U.S. military. We are not capable of deciding how to deploy the forces

we have there. We are just not capable. This is a bunch of

politicians--that is all we are--doing our best effort to serve the

people. We don't have to be bound--I certainly agree--by a report from

a general or the President.

We can act if we choose to act. But we need to ask ourselves, are we

going to dismiss the testimony of our top generals and the independent

Jones commission about the progress that is being made and the

realistic chance of success that exists? In fact, I think it may be a

realistic fact that one reason Osama bin Laden is all over the

television apparently in the last few days is because he is getting

worried. The Sunni support area of Al Anbar in Iraq has turned against

him and his people, and they are fighting against him and have

devastated much of their capability in the Al Anbar region--a direct

change from what I was told last October when that was not occurring.

We are working with local police, local mayors, local tribal leaders,

and that is yielding progress to a degree we have not seen before in

Iraq. It appears to be a model that can lead us more successfully than

trying to meet with a bunch of politicians in downtown Baghdad and

trying to reach an accord that is going to affect something in Fallujah

or Samarra or Mosul. Washington, DC, can't affect Alabama or Nebraska

very well.

But this country is not capable of issuing orders that can impact

successfully the daily lives in these provinces and small towns. That

is a product of the new nature of that Government and the lack of

maturity it has. So we are using different tactics that seem to be

working.

Well, we have said our military is being damaged and our morale is

bad and we have real problems there. Certainly, we have had a

tremendous amount of our military personnel there, and they have

performed with the greatest professionalism. They are well trained,

well disciplined, well equipped, they know how to use the equipment

with which they have trained, and they are performing in a magnificent

way. They are at risk every day and they are doing their jobs

effectively.

For example, a few days ago, a group came to visit my office from

Alabama. They were called Veterans for Freedom. It was made up of

Alabama Army National Guardsmen and Army Reservists. I had the honor of

being an Army Reservist for 10 years. I never served in combat, but I

am honored to have been one of them. These are citizen soldiers. They

recently returned from being mobilized in Iraq. These soldiers were all

senior noncommissioned officers. They had demobilized and were back at

their civilian jobs. They asked for a couple days off to visit the

offices of Alabama's congressional delegation. They

had several messages for me. The first message was: We have to win this

battle.

The group truly believes the contribution their unit had made in the

war effort was measurable and positive. One of the guardsmen had been

wounded in an IED attack early in the deployment. Thankfully, he was

not seriously wounded and he returned to duty. He noted that by the end

of the deployment, IEDs were no longer a threat in his area of

operation. The message was simply their service had made a difference.

Another message to me was: We cannot afford to lose this fight by

simply giving up. I didn't make up that phrase--that a precipitous

withdrawal is equivalent to giving up. That is what four veterans of

Iraq told me they perceived we were considering doing. They urged us

not to do it. Certainly, Iraq cannot be another United States in a

short time, they told us. But it can become self-governing and self-

sufficient.

The group further stated it may be necessary for us to modify our

objectives in this fight, but please don't quit. The senior NCOs

finished by telling us they had at least one child, or spouse, on

active duty or serving as a reservist or Guard member. This was a

testimony--a form of saying to me they and their families believed in

what they were doing, even if it meant they have to go back to Iraq

again. After making this statement, they were quite polite. They

thanked my team for the time they had with us and the few minutes they

had to be heard. They came all the way up here to share that.

I say that because I am not hearing the kind of talk from the people

who are in Iraq serving our country now that I am hearing from the

politicians in Congress. I am not hearing that.

What about Jeff Emanuel, a former special operations veteran of Iraqi

Freedom? He wrote an article in the Washington Times recently. He

talked about the situation we find ourselves in today. The title of the

article is: ``Iraqis show courage. Can Congress do the same?''

My colleague from Massachusetts, I think, was a bit too dismissive of

the challenges faced by the Iraqi military police and the Iraqi

leaders. They have a very difficult challenge, I admit that. I

certainly admit that. I think this Nation cannot pour resources into

Iraq if we reach the decision it cannot be successful. We will have to

extricate ourselves no matter what.

But I have to tell you I don't see it that way right now. This is

what Mr. Emanuel said:

So they are hearing the talk here. It creates instability and

uncertainty for those who want to stand with us and help them to

prevail and create a good and decent government in Iraq, if they think

we may flee the country the next day. Mr. Emanuel says:

He goes on to say this is still a broken and unstable country. That I

do not doubt. Yet progress is inarguably being made, he said. He goes

on to note this:

He went on to note we must not break faith with those who have stood

with us and made their commitment.

We all are concerned about the situation in Iraq. The people I talk

to--the military people I talk to see us as having a realistic

possibility of helping to establish a decent government in Iraq--maybe

not the kind of democracy we would like to have seen but something that

can work, be a bulwark against an aggressive Iran and be a bulwark in a

hostile base against al-Qaida and the terrorists there, who could be an

ally to the United States. We have allies in the region. We have a base

in Qatar, Bahrain, and we have strong allies in Kuwait and other places

in the Middle East. We continue to have those and we will continue to

do so. But there is a danger, without a doubt, about an expansive Iran

and its leadership who seem to be disconnected from reality in many

different ways. Iran's President Ahmadi-Nejad declared a few days ago

that U.S. political influence was collapsing rapidly and said Tehran

was ready to help fill the power vacuum. He said:

That is from the Philadelphia Inquirer of August 29. So the

consequences of what we are doing are serious.

Let me address one more time a rapid precipitous withdrawal and what

it means as it is contained in the Levin-Reed amendment. Imagine you

are a military commander and you have 160,000 troops in Iraq. You are

told you have 9 months to withdraw everything but a token force to

train Iraqis and to protect your own bases and to chase individual al-

Qaida members and those associated with them. We are talking about more

than a brigade of 5,500 troops a month having to be pulled out. When

you have an area of responsibility that has been assigned to a military

brigade and you draw those down, then somebody has to assume the

responsibility for that territory. How do you do that? That takes time,

planning, and care. You can get in a withdrawal or a situation that

costs lives and will completely destabilize any progress that has been

made. The military commanders have told us it cannot be done. You

cannot draw down more than a brigade a month. That is a too fast pace.

Remember, it is a brigade that has an area of responsibility of

interfacing with American and coalition forces all around it, plus it

interfaces with local police, mayors, and tribal leaders, plus it

interfaces with the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police.

All of that is part of the responsibility and the relationship that

has built up. To precipitously pull out in 9 months all these forces

and draw them back to only a few bases and give them a limited

responsibility, is a huge, reckless idea that can only result in chaos,

confusion and unnecessary death and will destabilize Iraq, destabilize

the region perhaps, and cost more lives.

Why don't we listen to what our fabulous general, General Petraeus,

has said? He said: I understand we need to draw down these troops. I

plan to draw down troops in Iraq. That is certainly my goal.

I will say what I have said many times. The surge was a bitter pill

for me. I had certainly hoped that in 2006 we would be drawing down

troops, not having to increase troop levels. But that is what we voted

to do in this Congress by an 80-to-14 vote. We funded that surge, and

now we are getting a report on it.

He said: I have had success by reducing violence in Baghdad and in

the country. I am not going to replace a Marine unit that will be

departing within a few weeks. That will reduce the numbers. I will

bring a brigade home before Christmas and that will be another 5,000-

plus personnel. I will continue to draw down next year according to my

plan through the summer, and I believe I can achieve a 30,000 troop

reduction by next summer.

He said: In March, I will report to the Congress again, and I will

tell you what further reductions we can achieve, and I hope to be able

to announce further reductions.

That is the kind of withdrawal that is consistent with our ultimate

goal, to create a stable and decent Iraq in which the Iraqi Army and

the Iraqi police can assume more and more responsibility.

To me, the stakes are so high, the challenges and threats so great

that we ought not be driven by polling data. We ought to ask ourselves:

What is right for America? What is right for our soldiers? If they are

pulled out and this country falls because we acted recklessly, there

are going to be more morale problems than we can imagine in the United

States military. There are going to be some angry people. They are

going to be very disappointed in the Congress. They put their necks on

the line because we asked them to. They lost friends and have wounded

friends in this conflict, and then we up and jump away and undermine

all that effort. It is not going to be pleasant, either.

I say to my colleagues, I understand the purpose of this amendment.

It wants reduction in forces. It wants to see us less engaged in the

actual military operations in Iraq. We want to see more of that done by

the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi police, and that is what General Petraeus

wants. He has a plan to achieve that goal. This is a general who has

written a manual for the Department of Defense on how to defeat an

insurgency, a counterinsurgency manual. Let's give him that

opportunity. He is making progress so far. Let's do our duty and watch.

We are not bound by everything General Petraeus says. We are not

bound by everything President Bush says. Yes, we are an independent

body. We have individual responsibilities to make up our own minds. But

if we do this, let's do it right. Let's don't be flip-flopping around.

That is not worthy of a great nation. We cannot send troops in one day

and jerk them out the next. Let's follow through in this difficult

period and see if we can achieve that realistic chance of success that

all 20 members of the Jones commission reported they believe is

possible and as General Petraeus has told us he believes is possible. I

believe it is the right thing for America to reject the Levin-Reed

amendment.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.