Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Virginia whom I

think has been unbelievably thoughtful, unbelievably patient and

courageous in this effort. I had the privilege of traveling with him to

Iraq, together with Senator Stevens. I could see the thought that he

was giving then to the ways in which he was visually perceiving that it

wasn't working the way it was promised. There is no stronger advocate

for our Armed Forces. There is nobody who understands the military

better, having just finished a tour as the chair of the Armed Services

Committee. I really think the administration should bend over backwards

to listen to this Senator who speaks with a voice of great

reasonableness. He is greatly respected in the Senate. I thank him for

his courage, for being willing to stand up on this issue.

The Congress, all of us, come here with a new responsibility in a

sense. The last election could not have been more clear. People all

across the country registered their disapproval of the policy that was

being executed in Iraq. In fact, the Iraq Study Group report was

awaited with enormous anticipation by everybody as an opportunity to

bring everybody together and think this through anew and find a way to

get a legitimate, across-the-aisle, Republican/Democrat, joint effort

in the best interests of our country. I regret to say that the best

efforts of former Secretary of State Jim Baker; the former Attorney

General, Chief of Staff of the President, Ed Meese; another former

Secretary of State, Larry Eagleburger; a former leader in the United

States Senate and moderate from the State of Wyoming, Al Simpson; and a

former Secretary of Defense, Bill Perry--just to name a group of those

who were on the Iraq Study Group--that their efforts were just cast

aside. Every recommendation they made was left on the sidelines.

Today we find the President adopting a policy which runs counter even

to the advice of his own generals. Rather than listen to the advice,

they change the generals and they put people in who would pursue a

different policy. General Casey comes back, General Abizaid departs,

and the policy goes on.

This institution has a solemn obligation to vote on this issue. It

should not be procedurally delayed, and it should not be played around

with. The fact is, the American people asked us to accept

responsibility for something for which we already have some

responsibility because we voted as an institution to empower the

President to be able to send troops to Iraq, though many of us who

voted for that resolution never voted for the President to abuse the

power he was given by ignoring diplomacy, rushing to war, and

forgetting to do the planning that they had promised they would do.

Our troops have done their duty. Our troops have served with

remarkable courage under the most difficult circumstances. They have a

right, together with the American people, to expect that this Congress

does its duty. That does not mean avoiding a simple vote. If you are in

favor of sending the troops, you have an opportunity tomorrow to

register that vote, say you are in favor, stand up and be counted; if

you are opposed you should vote no--as the House will do in a short

period of time.

Whatever procedural games are played on the floor of the Senate will

never erase the perception by the American people of the responsibility

that we ought to be exercising. They understand that this is the time

and this is the place and they expect us now to execute our

responsibility. We owe it to the troops. For all those who come to the

Senate floor and talk about supporting the troops, responsibility for

the troops, what would be fair for the troops, don't demoralize the

troops--there is nothing more demoralizing, I will tell you, as a

former troop myself, than having a policy that doesn't work; sending

you out on missions which don't have the kind of purpose that you

believe can succeed. You send these guys out in these vehicles, waiting

to be blown up by an IED, knowing as they hold their breath that they

don't have an adequately armored vehicle to be able to withstand it,

and they go out and come back and turn to each other and say: What did

we accomplish? What did we do? Did we secure a territory? Did we change

minds? Did we actually hold onto some advantage gained by driving

through a city in that kind of a dangerous situation?

Sending an additional 20,000 of our troops in the middle of a raging

civil war is not a sensible policy on any

number of levels. I believe, as a matter of larger strategy, raising

the stakes by sending 20,000 additional troops and saying at the same

time, publicly, ``This is it, this is our big move, if this doesn't

work we don't know what,'' is an unbelievable invitation to those who

make mischief to make more mischief. And what's more, the very people

who keep saying, ``Don't set a date, don't set a timeline,'' set a

timeline on this very deployment because they have come to us and said

this is only going to be for a few months. So they announce a timeline

on the very escalation that they say is supposed to make the difference

and advertise: If you are one of the bad guys, just wait those 3

months. That is what they can do, knowing it is only 3 months.

I think there is a smarter strategy. I think there is a better way to

be successful in Iraq, and it involves holding Iraqis accountable and

setting legitimate benchmarks for what they ought to be doing. It is

incredible to me that some people on the other side would obstruct a

debate on the most fundamental issue confronting our country today. We

are sent here to be a great deliberative body, and they don't want to

deliberate. They don't want to make a decision. They think somehow they

can just walk away and avoid responsibility for voting on the question

of this escalation.

The majority leader has said they will have every opportunity to vote

on that in a short period of time. Every amendment they want to bring

they will have an opportunity to bring. We can have, in the meantime, a

real vote on Iraq.

Since the end of last month when we started talking about talking

about Iraq, 60 American troops have died in Iraq. There is a fellow by

the name of Kevin Landeck, whom I just learned yesterday was killed on

February 2 by an IED. Kevin Landeck comes from Wheaton, IL. He was a

member of a Ranger unit over there. I have a wonderful photograph, a

digital photograph on my computer of Kevin and a bunch of his other

troops standing on a stairwell celebrating Christmas. The Christmas

stockings are all hanging from the stairwell. I am proud that our

office--Mary Tarr in our office particularly--has led an effort to help

send packages to those troops regularly. Our office sends them boxes

full of goodies, at Christmastime particularly--the stockings.

Sadly, Kevin has given his life in the ultimate act of patriotism, a

courageous young man, admired by his fellow soldiers. That happened

during the time that we couldn't even debate this issue on the floor of

the Senate, during a time that the Senate avoided its responsibility.

We have every right to expect that the people who were elected to

protect Kevin Landeck and the rest of those troops get this policy

right--for their parents, for them, and for all of us.

I believe the only way we are going to do that is, ultimately, to be

able to set a target date which gives the President the discretion to

keep troops there to complete the training. What other purpose is there

to be there? We give the President that discretion. We give him the

discretion to leave troops necessary to chase al-Qaida. We give him the

discretion to be able to leave troops necessary to protect American

forces and facilities. What other purpose would there be, after 4

years, to have us there but to finish the training of the Iraqis and to

provide an emergency buffer against Iran and others?

But you don't need to be on patrol in Baghdad, carrying the brunt of

a civil war on a daily basis in order to provide that. You can be over

the horizon. You can be deployed in garrison. You can be rear deployed.

There are any number of ways to protect American interests in the

region, and I am tired of our colleagues on the other side suggesting

that a policy that clearly advantages America's position in the region,

changes the dynamics, shifts responsibility to the Iraqis, and

ultimately protects our troops is somehow a policy of abandonment. It

is not. It is a policy for success. And it is to be measured against

the current policy, which is an invitation to more jihadists.

Our own intelligence agencies are telling us we are building the

numbers of jihadists. We are inviting more terror. The world is more

dangerous. Iraq is less united. Iran is stronger. Hezbollah is

stronger. Hamas is stronger. This is a failed policy, and when a policy

is failing, day after day, leaders have an obligation to stop and get

it right.

I believe that requires us to have a summit, bring the nations

together to solve the issues between the stakeholders and ultimately

resolve what our troops are powerless to resolve. A civil war is a

struggle for power. We have to resolve that at the diplomatic and

negotiating table.

So I strongly believe it is not enough for Congress simply to go on

record opposing the President's reckless plan. Congress has an

obligation to provide a responsible exit strategy that preserves our

interests in the region, retains our ability to protect the security of

the United States, and honors the sacrifice our troops have made.

Eight months ago in the Senate, 13 of us stood up against appeals to

politics and pride and demanded a date to bring our troops home, to

make Iraqis stand up for Iraq and fight a more effective war on terror.

But while we lost that roll call, I still believe it was the right

policy to put in place, to demand accountability, and to leverage

action.

Now, I am more convinced than ever that a combination of serious,

sustained diplomacy and the enforcement of benchmarks for progress by

the Iraqi government, leveraged by a 1-year deadline for redeployment

of U.S. troops, is the best way to achieve our goal of stability in

Iraq and security in the region.

That is why I will again introduce legislation that offers a

comprehensive strategy for achieving a political solution and bringing

our troops home within 1 year. We have to find a way to end this

misguided war, and I believe this legislation is the best and most

responsible way forward.

Let me emphasize that this strategy does not mean abandoning Iraq in

1 year: in fact, it gives the President the discretion to leave the

minimum number of U.S. troops necessary to complete the training of

Iraqi security forces, go after terrorists, and protect U.S. facilities

and personnel.

This 1-year deadline is not arbitrary. It is consistent with the Iraq

Study Group's goal of withdrawing U.S. combat forces from Iraq by the

first quarter of 2008--it's consistent with the timeframe for

transferring control to the Iraqis set forth by General Casey, and the

schedule agreed upon by the Iraqi government itself. Even the President

has said that, under his new strategy, responsibility for security

would be transferred to Iraqis before the end of this year. It is the

opposite of arbitrary. The President has said it, our generals have

said it, the Iraq Study Group has said it.

Some say those of us who oppose the President's failed policy in Iraq

do not offer an alternative--nothing could be further from the truth.

This legislation offers a comprehensive military and diplomatic

strategy that incorporates key recommendations of the Iraq Study

Group--including many that some of us here have long been advocating--

to provide us with the best chance to succeed: holding a summit with

all of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria--creating an

international contact group--enforcing a series of benchmarks for

meeting key political objectives--shifting the military mission to

training Iraqi security forces and conducting targeted counterterrorism

operations--and maintaining an over-the-horizon presence to protect our

interests throughout the region.

It is time for Iraqis to assume responsibility for their country. We

need a timetable which forces Iraqi politicians to confront reality and

start making the hard compromises they have resisted thus far. Instead,

they are using America's presence as a security blanket. Americans

should not be dying to buy time for Iraqi politicians hoping to cut a

better deal. We should be working to bring about the compromise that is

ultimately the only solution to what is happening today in Iraq. And

Iraqi politicians have repeatedly shown they only respond to

deadlines--a deadline to transfer authority, deadlines to hold two

elections and a referendum, and a deadline to form a government.

Without hard deadlines, our best hopes for progress in Iraq have been

repeatedly dashed. When Prime Minister Maliki took power in May,

General Casey and Ambassador Khalilzad said the new government had 6

months to make the political compromises necessary to win public

confidence and

unify the country. They were right, but with no real deadline to force

the new government's hand, that period passed without meaningful

action--and we are now seeing the disastrous results.

In fact, for 4 years now, we have been hearing from this

administration that progress is right around the corner. We have been

hearing the Iraqis are near a deal on oil revenues, that they are

making progress towards reconciliation--but we still haven't seen any

results.

That is why we must give teeth to the benchmarks agreed upon by the

Iraqi government for national reconciliation, security and governance.

Meeting these benchmarks is crucial, but without any enforcement

mechanism, they are little more than a wish list. That is why this

legislation supports the Iraq Study Group proposal to make U.S.

political, military, or economic assistance conditional on Iraqis's

meeting these benchmarks.

A deadline is also essential to getting Iraq's neighbors to face up

to the realities of the security needs of the region. None of them want

to see Iraq fall apart. That should be the basis for cooperation in

stabilizing Iraq, and yet a sense of urgency has been lacking. This

deadline will make clear the stakes and hopefully focus their minds on

helping the Iraqis reach a political solution.

We cannot turn back the clock and reverse the decisions that brought

us to this pass in Iraq and the Middle East. We cannot achieve the kind

of clear and simple victory the administration promised the American

people again and again even as Iraq went up in flames. But we can avoid

an outright defeat. We can avoid creating the chaos we all say we want

to avoid. We can avoid a victory for our adversaries by taking a clear-

eyed approach to identifying specifically what we can and cannot

accomplish in Iraq.

With a new Congress comes a new responsibility: to get this policy

right. That starts with preventing the President from going forward

with this senseless escalation. And it has to end with an exit strategy

that preserves our core interests in Iraq, in the region, and

throughout the world. Only then will we have honored the sacrifices of

our troops and the wishes of those who sent us here. Only then will we

have done our duty.