Mr. President, to my colleagues, my constituents, and

the American people, I rise today to absolutely say without any

equivocation that I do support the Warner-Biden-Levin resolution on

Iraq opposing the escalation of our troops. I also stand in the Senate

to say: We were robbed! We were robbed of our ability to be able to

vote on this resolution!

The American people, on November 7, sent a message to Congress and to

the President of the United States: Change the tone in Washington,

change the direction in Iraq, and change the priorities of this Nation.

We, on this side of the aisle, got the message. The other side does not

seem to have. This parliamentary maneuver to block a vote on the

Warner-Biden-Levin resolution, to allow us to vote up or down on

approving the escalation, shows that it is the same old tone. Please,

let's give the process a chance.

Second, it also robs us of the ability to begin to express our vocal

support for changing the direction.

This bipartisan resolution is a first step. It is not going to be the

last word in bringing our troops home safely and swiftly. The Warner-

Biden-Levin resolution affirms clearly and unequivocally a commitment

to our men and women in uniform: Congress will not abandon you while

you are in Iraq and when you come home. We stand by our troops.

However, this resolution says ``no'' to the President's reckless plan

to escalate troop presence in Iraq. The bipartisan resolution insists

that the Iraqi Government stand up for its own people to provide

security, services, and an agreement on oil revenue sharing.

I am not new to this position. I never wanted to go to war in the

first place. I was 1 of the 23 who voted against this war on October

11, 2002--4 years ago. I will never forget it. I didn't believe the

administration's arguments then, and I

don't believe them now. I opposed giving the President unilateral

authority to launch a preemptive attack. I said the United States had

to exhaust its diplomatic options. I encouraged the administration to

stick with the U.N., to let the U.N. meet its responsibility to deal

with the Saddam threat. I said we should not go on our own.

The day of the vote, I was so filled with apprehension about the

course of the war, about the course we were embarking on, I said in

this Senate that we don't know whether our troops will be greeted with

flowers or landmines. Well, now we know. That mission did not get

accomplished. I called the 72 families in Maryland who gave their lives

and made the ultimate sacrifice. I know what is going on out there with

the families. I also know when we got to Iraq there were no weapons of

mass destruction, but the destruction happened, and it happened fast.

No one can ask more of our troops. They are brave. They are

courageous. They have fought valiantly. But after 4 years of fighting,

where are we in Iraq? Well, the United States, went to war with Iraq,

but right now we are at war within Iraq. Saddam is gone, but we are

still there. And we are mired in a civil war between different ethnic

and sectarian groups.

I have stated what I am against, but let me state what I am for. I am

for the Warner-Levin-Biden resolution. I salute the leadership who

produced it: John Warner, a decorated war hero, former Secretary of the

Navy, chairman of the Committee on Armed Services when the Republicans

were in control, a distinguished person, and a man of great comity and

civility--no one more compassionate about America's security than John

Warner; Joe Biden, chair of our Foreign Relations Committee; Carl

Levin, an expert on the Committee on Armed Services and now the

chairman. They put their heads together and they came up with this

resolution, and to a man--and this woman supports them--the Senate

opposes the President's plan because we think it is reckless.

The bipartisan resolution says the objective of overall U.S. strategy

in Iraq should be to encourage Iraqi leaders to make political

compromises, to foster reconciliation, and strengthen the unity

government. This is what I consider essential.

The resolution says the primary objective of our military strategy

should be to maintain Iraq's territorial integrity--fancy words for

protecting the border; deny the terrorists a safe haven--yes, but they

weren't there in the first place; promote regional stability; promote

counterterrorism; train and equip the Iraqi forces. We have been doing

it for 3 years. Guess what? They have not been showing up! And the

other day when they were supposed to show up for a battle, 55 percent

of them showed up in Baghdad. Gates, our new Secretary of Defense,

said: Isn't this improvement? Last year, they didn't show up at all. It

is their war and they are not showing up. Why should we show up for

their war when they have a 50-percent attendance rate? What is wrong

with this thinking?

As much as possible, the current U.S. military operations should be

confined to these goals. We show up, they don't. Something is really

wrong with this picture.

The bipartisan resolution calls for the United States to engage the

nations in the Middle East to develop a regionally and internationally

sponsored peace and reconciliation process. That is what we should be

doing. The resolution says it should not be an open-ended commitment or

unconditional. Sure, there should be benchmarks, but benchmarks with

enforcement capability.

I do support this resolution because it makes clear to our men and

women in uniform that Congress will not abandon them. It explicitly

says that Congress should not take any action that will endanger U.S.

military forces in the field. Whether on the battlefield or on the

homefront, our troops deserve the best.

Also, the latest intelligence shows that Iraqi leadership has to make

difficult changes. The solution in Iraq requires a political solution

from the Iraqis--not military muscle--from the Americans.

There are parts of this resolution with which I don't agree. They

call it an augmentation; I call it escalation. I oppose the calls for

the vigorous operations at Anbar until there is greater clarification.

There is no doubt that al-Qaida is operating in Iraq. But when I voted

4 years ago, al-Qaida was not there; they were in Afghanistan. Why

didn't we stick with Afghanistan and really clean their clock? Now the

President wants to send more Marines to Anbar to fight al-Qaida when we

should have been in Afghanistan, catching Osama bin Laden.

We do need a way forward in Iraq. The Iraq Study Group gave us 79

recommendations as a way to go forward. Surely the President of the

United States could have found 50 for us to sit down at a table, talk,

and work together for the good of our country, the good of our troops,

and the good of peace in the Middle East. Seventy-nine recommendations

and they have all been cast aside. The Iraq Study Group calls for

diplomatic and political efforts, a change in their primary mission to

move our troops out of Iraq responsibly. They gave us a way forward

that they believe could have gotten our troops out by the first quarter

of 2008. Let's give those 79 recommendations at least a forum to be

debated and discussed and acted on.

Where do we go from here? I will tell you where I think we ought to

go. First of all, we ought to have a vote on the Warner-Biden-Levin

resolution. If they do not want to give us that, give us a vote on the

McCain resolution to vote to approve this escalation. One way or the

other, that is our constitutional duty.

The President says he does not need congressional consent to be able

to do this reckless escalation. But he sure does need congressional

advice. And my advice is, let's send in the diplomats before we send in

more troops. We need a robust diplomatic strategy to match our robust

military strategy. We need to make it clear that the Congress will not

abandon our troops in the field, and we will not abandon them when they

come home. Look at this President's budget; we are abandoning our

troops. This whole escalation--sure, they talk about money for the

21,000, but it takes another 20,000 to support them. They don't walk

their talk. They don't put the money in the budget.

Then we have our troops coming home. You look at the President's

budget on Veterans Affairs--not only have they lost the records, they

have lost their way at VA. We are not equipped to deal with Iraq and

Afghanistan veterans coming home. They have horrific, permanent wounds

of war, and we have a weak, unreliable funding system. You can't just

support the troops with yellow ribbons. You have to put the money

behind it. How about putting the money behind it when they come home?

They need us. And they need us not only with words; they need us with

deeds in the budget process. And I don't see it.

Now, we also need to make it clear to Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki

that he has to start to act. Speaking of showing up, I saw they could

not get a quorum in the Iraqi Parliament. Only 50 percent of the troops

show up, their own Parliament doesn't show up, but we show up with

21,000 more troops? The Prime Minister must meet benchmarks.

Let me conclude by saying that a great American military should not

be a substitute for a weak Iraqi Government. Neither Congress nor the

American people will abandon our troops, but the best way to support

our troops is not to send more in harm's way.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the remaining time for

Senator Kennedy be reserved.