We all know that we will expect a report from General Petraeus in September. This is not the time to alter the policy we established about 2 months ago. I agree with Senator MCCAIN about that. We can talk about it. We can do those things. But is it the right thing to jeopardize this bill over other issues—over the issues relating to Iraq?

Let me say a couple of things. The fundamental debate we are having here with regard to our Iraq policy, when you boil it down to basics, is whether to reverse the policy we established in May.

That was a decision by an 80-to-14 vote to fund the surge in Iraq, after having voted on it in April. We had another vote back in May, and we funded this operation through the fiscal year, through September 30, if not longer—at least through September 30. And we affirmed and confirmed General Petraeus as the commander of that surge by a 99-to-0 vote. He is a fabulous commander, and he received a bipartisan, unanimous vote in the Senate. That is what we decided, after great debate.

Now, what I will say to my colleagues is this: A great nation has to conduct itself as such. We are not able to flip-flop around week after week and change our minds every few weeks based on this or that event. If a serious situation occurs, we can change our mind at any time. But great nations are more akin to great battleships. They do not dart around similar to a speedboat. They set their course and have to justify it carefully before they act. Once they act, they need to stay that course, subject to any changes that occur.

So what I would say is this: I am worried we are doing what some political consultants would like to see Democratic leadership do and talk about the war because they think that is politically beneficial. We ought to be talking about those soldiers we have committed out there, placed in harm's way, who are, this very day, walking the streets of Baghdad and Al Anbar Province and Tikrit and Mosul, executing the policies we voted 80 to 14, in May, to send them to do. We voted 99 to 0 to send General Petraeus.

At that time, we made clear to him we expected a report in September. I think that is what we are about here, and we ought to be about, that we would go forward—and always subject to our constitutional responsibilities to make any changes that are required—but go forward to allow the general to carry out the surge we told him to carry out.

This surge, let me say to my colleagues, has only reached its full effort—what?—2 weeks ago when the last brigade reached Iraq. So we only reached full capacity of that surge a few weeks ago.

We know it is difficult now. They said: Well, the bombings are occurring outside Baghdad now. Why is that? Well, it is a given that it is tougher for them in Baghdad, so they have gone outside Baghdad to do bombings. What does that suggest? I would suggest that would lead us to conclude the work in Iraq, in Baghdad itself, has already made progress. Indeed, if the capital city of Iraq, the biggest city, cannot maintain order, it is difficult to see how we can have a political settlement all of us wish to occur.

General Petraeus has taken the case to the enemy. He is moving forward aggressively and making military progress. The difficulty—and we all know it—is that the Government of Iraq is not performing at the level it needs to perform. This is a matter we are not able to deny. I know when I traveled to Iraq with Senator LEVIN—and when I was there more recently with Senator BEN NELSON of Nebraska—we raised the importance with the Iraqi people and the Iraqi leaders of having a functioning government.

Senator LEVIN has strongly believed and consistently argued that one way to get them to perform is to threaten to pull out our troops. I have come to believe their failure to perform cannot be altered by threats to pull out troops. I wish it could be. I wish we could do it that way. But it is more difficult than that.

So they are struggling, and I do not know whether they can pull this Government together. I certainly hope so. But I will tell you one thing. Progress is being made in a number of different areas militarily. This gives me some hope they can pull this Government together. That is where we are at this point. I do not see any other way to analyze it, honestly, to the American people. That is what I say to them as best I can.

I believe our military is performing magnificently. I believe the Government in Iraq continues to have serious problems in effectuating the kind of stability and reconciliation they need to effectuate so we can have a better capability of reducing the troop levels we have in Iraq today.

Now, the way this deal went down—and we voted to send General Petraeus there. We talk about making reports back to us. I remember distinctly in the Armed Services Committee, when he was up for confirmation, I asked General Petraeus did he believe we could be successful in Iraq. He said: Yes, sir, I do. General Petraeus had been there when the initial invasion occurred. He commanded the 101st Airborne in Mosul. He came home for, I think, less than a year and went back to take over the training of the Iraqi military. He then came back, wrote the Department of Defense manual on how to defeat an insurgency operation—the very project he executes—and the President has asked him to go back to Iraq to execute a strategy to defeat the insurgency that is going on in that country at this time.

So I asked him, would he tell the American people and the Congress truthfully whatever the situation was when he was there? He previously said this was a difficult but not impossible task he was taking on. He said: Senator, you can count on it.

I asked Secretary Gates, the Secretary of Defense, at a hearing: Secretary Gates, will you tell the American people if this military effort in Iraq cannot succeed and we ought to do something else? He said: Yes, sir, Senator. I feel that is my responsibility as Secretary of Defense.

I will say to you, my colleagues, let's not flip-flop around here every week with another amendment trying to set another strategy, written by a group of us sitting in air-conditioned offices, when we have some of the best military minds this Nation has ever produced, with great depth of experience—by the way, General Petraeus has his Ph.D. from Princeton and was No. 1 in his class at the Command and General Staff College. He is over there right now, and we have it set for him to come back and go through a very deep and serious evaluation of what has happened, where we are, and where we need to go in the future.

So it is all right. I know we are going to have people talk about strategy and alteration in our policy. But I think, in truth, it would be more responsible for us to pass this Defense authorization bill, which will make the lives of our military men and women far better, will make our Defense Department more effective, and will give us a better chance of being successful in Iraq. We need to pass this bill. We will be coming back in September, no doubt, for a very serious debate on how we go from here in Iraq. That is where we are, in my opinion.

I respectfully disagree with some who see it otherwise, who think they have divine strategy—reading a few newspaper articles, I guess, and talking to a few folks and going to Iraq once or twice; I have been there six times—and trying to come back and formulate a policy. I do not think that is wise right now. I urge our colleagues not to go in that direction.

I will take one brief moment to say I respect my colleague from Virginia, Senator WEBB. I recognize the goals and the desires reflected in that amendment—his belief that soldiers ought to have guaranteed time of deployments passed by statute by the Congress of the United States. But I do not agree. I think this is a very significant amendment. I believe it is an amendment that alters the traditional power of the President as Commander in Chief. I think it could put us in very difficult circumstances in the future.

I urge my colleagues to remember the amendment is not limited to Iraq, it covers any military activities we get involved in, in the future, any war now or series of wars we may find ourselves in, in the future. War is very difficult, indeed.

I remember our former colleague, Senator Strom Thurmond, I think at age 40, volunteered to go in the Army.