majority of the American people, we will have to look for other ways to change his policy. But this is a very important first step.

Also, I would like to take a moment to present what I believe are the principal findings of our 4 weeks of hearings, over 50 hours, if I am not mistaken, of hearings in the Foreign Relations Committee. While no unanimous prescription has emerged, there is remarkably broad consensus on three main points: First, American troops cannot stop sectarian warfare in Iraq, only a political settlement can do that; the second point of consensus, we must engage in intensive regional diplomacy to support the settlement among Iraqis; third, the U.S. military should focus on combatting terrorists, keeping Iraq's neighbors honest, training Iraq's troops—not on policing a civil war. Indeed, combat troops should start to redeploy as soon as our mission is narrowed.

Those three points were overwhelmingly agreed upon by an array of the most well informed foreign policy experts, both military and civilian, that we have arrayed before that committee in a long time.

Since a political settlement is so critical, we have examined this issue in detail. We have looked at the benchmarks the President has proposed—on oil law, debaathification reform, constitutional reform, and provincial elections—but the divisions are so deep and passions run so high now in Iraq we may be beyond the point where such modest measures can stabilize Iraq.

I believe, and have believed for some time, something much broader is necessary, something much bolder is necessary. Les Gelb, the chairman emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations and a former Defense Department official, and I put forward just such a proposal 9 months ago. It is premised upon our conviction that the heart of the administration's strategy—building a strong central government—will, in fact, not succeed. As a matter of fact, in the testimony we heard, most pointed out where countries have been drawn by the slip of a pen by world leaders after World War I and World War II—the Balkans, Iraq, and many other places we could name—there have basically only been two models that have brought stability: A straw plan, a la Saddam, or a Federal system, a la the Iraqi Constitution.

The reason a strong central government will not work, although desirable, is there is no trust within the Government, no trust of the Government by the people of Iraq, no capacity of the Government to deliver services, no capacity of this new Government to deliver security.

In a sense, it is understandable. Indeed, we must bring Iraqis' problems and the responsibility of managing those problems down to local and regional levels where we can help the Iraqis build trust and capacity much more quickly and much more effectively.

We have proposed that the Iraqis create what their constitution calls for: three or more ''regions'' they call them—not republics—three or four more regions consistent with their constitution. We call for Iraq's oil to be shared equally with a guarantee that the Sunnis get their share and have some international oversight to guarantee it. We call for aggressive diplomacy—which, again, most every witness called for, including the Iraq Study Group—we call for aggressive diplomacy in the creation of a contact group consisting of Iraq's neighbors and the major powers in the world, including large Islamic countries to support a political settlement.

We believe we can redeploy most, if not all, of America's troops from Iraq within 18 months under this plan, leaving behind a small force in Iraq or in the region to strike at terrorists, the jihadists, the al-Qaidaists, keeping the neighbors honest, and training Iraqi forces. The time has demonstrated this plan is more relevant and inevitable than it was even the day we put pen to paper and set it out 9 months ago. It takes into account the harsh reality of self-sustaining sectarian violence; it is consistent with Iraq's Constitution; and it can produce a phrase used by a New York Times columnist in describing our plan. It can produce ''a soft landing'' for Iraq and prevent a full-blown civil war that tears the country apart and spreads beyond its borders.

I might also add, as people have come to understand, what I am calling for is not partitioning, not three separate republics; what I am calling for is what the Iraqi Constitution calls for: decentralization of control over security and local laws with the central government having responsibility for the Army, distribution of resources and currency and other things that a central government must do.

As that has become clearer and clearer, some of the most powerful voices in the American foreign policy establishment have come forward to suggest it makes sense.

Secretary Kissinger told our committee yesterday:

> I'm sympathetic to an outcome that permits large regional autonomy. In fact, I think it is very likely this will emerge out of the conflict that we are now witnessing.

Former Secretary of State Albright said:

> . . . the idea of the . . . constitution of Iraq as written, which allows for and mandates, in fact, a great deal of regional autonomy, is appropriate.

James Baker, former Secretary of State, coauthor of the Baker-Hamilton commission report told us that there are indications that Iraq may be moving toward three autonomous regions, and ''if it is, we ought to be prepared to try and manage the situation.''

Time is running out. We are going to have as a consequence of the compromise reached between the Biden-Levin resolution and the Warner resolution, now known as the ''Levin-Warner whoever else is attached to it'' resolution—we are going to have for the first time a full-blown debate in the Senate.

I hope the administration will be listening. I suggest we are coequal—Congress, along with the President—in deciding when, if, how long, and under what circumstances to send Americans to war, for shedding America's treasure and blood.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 10 minutes in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

Mrs. MURRAY. Thank you, Mr. President.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise this morning to talk about the health care proposals President Bush mentioned in his State of the Union Address last Tuesday. For too long, our working families and our businesses have really struggled with rising costs and shrinking access, and Washington, DC, has virtually ignored that health care crisis.

Now, with Democrats in control of Congress, the President is finally bringing some ideas to the table and saying he wants to be part of the solution. Well, I want to thank him for joining the debate, and I hope he is serious about working with us to address the challenges that have only gotten worse over the past 7 years. There may well be valuable ideas in his proposals. I want to get more details than we heard in just the State of the Union Address because there may be areas on which we can agree.

However, I have to say, from what I have seen of the President's plan so far, I do have some serious concerns that his initiatives will undermine the employer-based health insurance system; may push people into the risky and expensive individual insurance market; may fail to provide coverage for our most vulnerable; and may divert funds for the health care safety net to experimental programs.

My first concern is that the President's proposal will jeopardize the employer-based health insurance system. The most stable form of health insurance for America's working families today is through their employers. Mr. President, 155 million Americans receive health insurance today from their employers.

One of the primary reasons why employers offer health insurance to their workers is because those benefits are

excluded from taxable income. But the President's proposal, as I hear it, would take away that incentive by putting all forms of health insurance on an equal playing field. Even if employers choose not to drop health care coverage, they may be forced to do so in the future as the healthiest employees drop out of their employers' plans. If insurance becomes unaffordable, employers may be forced to stop offering health care benefits. I think many of my colleagues agree with me that we should be strengthening the employer-based health insurance system, not taking steps that will jeopardize it.

Secondly, I am very concerned that the President's proposal will push people into the individual insurance market. Today, when workers cannot get coverage through their employer, they need to purchase health insurance in the individual insurance market. But as any small businessman or self-employed woman will tell you, the individual insurance market today is not a good alternative to employer-provided coverage. In many States, insurers can cherry-pick applicants to avoid enrolling those with high health needs, or insurance companies can sell different policies to high- or low-risk individuals. If you have a chronic disease such as diabetes—or even any health problem—good luck getting reasonably priced, comprehensive coverage in the individual market today. Any proposal to increase access to health insurance should support the ability of Americans to receive affordable and comprehensive coverage, not force people into expensive, barebones insurance plans.

Third, I am troubled that the President's proposal will not increase access to health insurance for the uninsured. We have 46 million uninsured men, women, and children in this country today. That is a staggeringly high number, and those people face daily challenges trying to avoid getting sick and going into debt when something unexpected happens. Every day, I hear from people in my home State of Washington who struggle to pay for their health care costs. Unfortunately, the President's proposal will not help those people because they do not pay enough money in taxes to benefit from this tax deduction he is proposing. That really makes me question whether the President's plan will actually reduce the number of uninsured Americans.

Finally, I am very concerned that the President's plan will further chip away at our health care safety net because it would divert critical Medicaid dollars into an experimental grant program. Now, we do not have a lot of details yet, but it appears he is proposing to use Medicaid disproportionate share hospital payments to give States the ability to experiment with health care reform. Those DSH payments keep the doors of our public hospitals open. Public hospitals are the foundations of our communities. They not only provide emergency care, but they train our doctors, they support rural health care, and they are the first lines of defense against pandemic flu or bioterror attacks. I am very concerned that his proposal could seriously jeopardize my State's Medicaid funds and, therefore, undermine those critical services.

I want to give an example of how these proposals could exacerbate the worst parts of our health insurance system.

Last week, I received a letter from my constituents Alice and Michael Counts. They live in Vancouver, WA. Their son Wesley was diagnosed with a kidney condition at age 16. Their family's personal health insurance insisted that his kidney disease was preexisting, and the insurer refused to pay for the medical tests that diagnosed his condition. His parents appealed to our insurance commissioner, and they won, but the insurer raised its rates far beyond the reach of a self-employed individual. So later, when Wesley was going through dialysis and a kidney transplant, his employer dropped insurance coverage because it had become too costly.

Throughout all these medical and financial ups and downs, Wesley has worked and has now graduated from Clark College. Thankfully, his parents have been able to help him navigate a health care system that failed him.

Wesley's parents wrote to me, and they said:

> We would rather pay higher taxes that give everyone affordable health care than live with the fear of losing everything through catastrophic illness.

Wesley's story shows just how risky the individual market is and how people with serious health problems can be severely affected when an employer is forced to drop coverage. No patient—no one—should have to live in fear that their next dialysis treatment will not be covered by insurance.

What Wesley deserves—and what all Americans deserve—is access to affordable, dependable, comprehensive health care. The President's plan does not guarantee that. It does not even come close. It just makes the health insurance market more unstable and more risky and leaves more people like Wesley vulnerable. He deserves better than that. I think all Americans do.

So, as I said at the beginning of my statement, I welcome the President's attention to the health care crisis we are facing in this country. Last year, on the Senate floor we devoted 3 days—3 days—to health care. The President probably spent even less time talking about health care. So this is an improvement. We desperately need a serious and a very thoughtful debate about how we increase access to health insurance.

My colleagues and I have put forward a number of good ideas about how to increase access to health care. One of the first things we can do is reauthorize and strengthen the State Children's Health Insurance Program—that is the SCHIP program—that provides quality health care to millions of uninsured children. Congress should give States the funding and the flexibility to cover more of our kids.

Secondly, we have to fund community health centers so they can continue to provide quality health care to our uninsured.

Third, I agree with the President, we should help States devise new ways to increase access to health care. My home State of Washington, like a lot of States, is working on innovative initiatives to expand coverage. But we can accomplish this in ways that do not chip away at the foundation of our public hospitals.

Finally, we can expand health insurance for small businesses and the self-employed by creating Federal and State catastrophic cost pools in ways that will help us lower costs and still protect our patients.

I look forward to working with Chairman KENNEDY and Chairman BAUCUS and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and the President on real health care reform. There are people like Wesley across the country in every one of our States who are crying out for change, and we owe it to them, in this body, to finally make the progress that is long overdue.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

POWER OF CONGRESS TO IMPOSE CONDITIONS ON APPROPRIATED FUNDS

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to discuss the powers of Congress under the Constitution to impose conditions on the funds appropriated by Congress, conditions on the President of the United States in carrying out his responsibilities as Commander in Chief. This, of course, is a major subject confronting the United States at this time as to what our continuing policy should be in Iraq, and there is considerable controversy as to what that policy should be.

The President has come forward with the proposal to add 21,500 troops in Iraq.

That has been questioned in many quarters in the Congress of the United States, both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and by the American people. The election results last November were generally regarded as a repudiation of our activities in Iraq. The military personnel who have come forward to testify in recent days before the Armed Services Committee and the witnesses before the Foreign Relations Committee have a similar view that major mistakes have been made in Iraq. But there is also a generalized consensus that once there, even though we found no weapons of mass destruction—had we known Saddam did not have weapons of mass destruction, it is doubtful Congress would have authorized the use of force—we cannot pull out and leave Iraq destabilized. The question is, how to do it.