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FACE THE NATION

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GUESTS: Senator CHRIS DODD (D-CT)
Foreign Relations Committee;
2008 Presidential Candidate

Senator TRENT LOTT (R-MS)
Minority Whip

JOHN HARRIS
Editor in Chief, The Politico

MODERATOR: BOB SCHIEFFER - CBS News

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***FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, war and politics. Barack Obama makes it official he is running as Congress ties itself in knots over what to do about the war.

Senator BARACK OBAMA: I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for president of the United States of America.

SCHIEFFER: Obama's announcement came in Springfield, Illinois, where another presidential candidate with little experience, Abraham Lincoln, threw his hat in the ring. Obama's already zoomed toward the top of the polls, but can it last? We'll hear what he told "60 Minutes" correspondent Steve Kroft. Then we'll turn to Christopher Dodd, a man who's spent more than two decades in the Senate and also wants to be president. Is Washington experience like his a plus or a minus at a time when America is caught in an unpopular war?

And what of the war? Will Congress try to influence war policy or should it? We'll bring in Senate Minority Whip Trent Lott for more on that. John Harris, the editor of The Politico, will join in the questions and analysis.

And I'll have a final word on a public health hazard, forgetting Valentine's.

But first, politics and war on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: Good morning again. Even the little-known governor Jimmy Carter had to win something--in his case it was the Iowa caucuses--to be taken seriously as a presidential candidate. Until then, he was just "Jimmy who?" But when Barack Obama made it official that he was running for president yesterday in Springfield, he was already near the top of the polls and among the favorites to get his party's presidential nomination. Why does he believe his campaign caught on? Well, he told Steve Kroft of "60 Minutes" it is because many Americans just no longer believe that their views are being heard in Washington.

(Excerpt from "60 Minutes")

Sen. OBAMA: And when you talk to the average voter, they feel completely disconnected from what's taking place. They don't think that anybody is actively looking out for their interests. And that, by the way, is not a view that is limited to Democrats or Republicans. It is a pervasive view across the board. And one of the things I hope this campaign can accomplish is to give people a sense that they are part of the process, that they are active and engaged and paying attention. Because one of the things I believe is that, when the American people are paying attention, good things happen. When they're not paying attention, they're cynical, they've withdrawn from the process, that's when a lot of mischief is done.

(End of excerpt)

SCHIEFFER: That entire interview is going to be heard later tonight on "60 Minutes." Here in our studio, Chris Dodd of Connecticut. He's been in the Senate more than two decades; he's also running for President.

Senator, when you see the Senate tied in knots like it is right now and can't even take a position on the war--this is clearly the number one issue to Americans all across the country--it does help you to understand why someone can sort of come out of nowhere and catch on, even like Barack Obama, just because he's a fresh face.

Senator CHRIS DODD (Democrat, Connecticut; Foreign Relations Committee; 2008 Presidential Candidate): Well, I agree with that. That's one of the reasons why about three weeks ago I offered a--some language which would require a real vote in the Senate either up or down of whether or not you wanted to endorse this policy of the surge. Last week we debated about debating. You've got--the American public has a very clear answer on where we think--where they think we ought to be going on Iraq. The president has a very clear direction. And we in Congress look like we're wringing our hands on the issue. And I say this with all due respect to the leadership, knowing the difficulty of trying to marshal 100 people in one direction, moving in one direction. But I thought we made a mistake by not having a real vote where there was real teeth into it with real accountability on the war in Iraq. And I think, frankly, we got ourselves into a mess here by competing sense of the Senate resolutions, which had no legal bearing at all, whatsoever.

SCHIEFFER: Senator, after being in Congress for more than what? About 25 years, I guess.

Sen. DODD: Yes. Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think your experience is an asset or a liability?

Sen. DODD: I think it's an asset. I really do. I think this has always been the case. I think experience matters to people. The stakes are very, very high right now for the reasons that you've mentioned and others, conditions here at home as well as abroad. I think people want to know that you have an ability to solve problems, that you can bring people together. Real leadership, it's had demonstrated proof of how to do that. And I've done that over 25 years, whether it was on the Family Medical Leave Act, the wars in El Salvador, dealing with litigation reform and the like, actually getting Republicans and Democrats to march in the same direction on critical issues before they--before the American people. And I think that's going to be very, very important to them as we go through this process. This is not a time for on the job training.

Mr. JOHN HARRIS (Editor in Chief, The Politico): Senator, about experience. You were first elected, before the Senate, I believe, for the House...

Sen. DODD: Yes.

Mr. HARRIS: ...in 1974. Barack Obama was in junior high school at the time. At the personal level, somehow, it must gall you that so many people are willing to let him jump to the front of the line. What does that say?

Sen. DODD: It doesn't gall me at all. In fact, he's a very attractive individual. I've gotten to like him very, very much in the two years he's been in the Senate. And he'll bring his own experiences to it, as he tried to articulate yesterday. And during this process over the next year--this is only February. The first caucuses and primaries will occur 11 months from now. There's a long time between now and then for people to take a look and assess these candidates based on what they have done, but also what they--what they plan to do for the country. What're their--what're the big ideas they'll bring to this debate? How're they going to bring people together to get us moving in the right direction both at home and abroad? And I look forward to that debate and discussion. We'll have our first, I think, sort of informal gathering in April, April 4th in New Hampshire. There'll be a number of these forums. We'll...

Mr. HARRIS: You'll go to all those?

Sen. DODD: The plan is to go to as many as we can. And, again, I hope we don't overdo it. I think we bore the American public if we are not careful about this. This is a lot longer than anyone else has ever been through this process before the first caucus or primary.

Mr. HARRIS: Let me follow up on what you said about Iraq. A lot of people opposed to the war, especially Democrats opposed to the war...

Sen. DODD: Right.

Mr. HARRIS: ...don't want resolutions, nonbinding resolutions from the Congress. They want the Congress to use the power of the purse to put an end to the war. What're you personally going to do to address that?

Sen. DODD: Well, one, as I said three or four weeks ago, offer a cap on the amount of troops there pending a reauthorization, an actual vote. I only got six or seven votes for that in the Foreign Relations Committee. And that's what I would have preferred, something like that that would've had some real teeth into it, that would've required some real accountability on the issue.

Mr. HARRIS: Why so few? Why so many people in your party so afraid to...

Sen. DODD: Well, because, I...

Mr. HARRIS: ...exercise the authority that they do have?

Sen. DODD: ...think, frankly, it's--well, I'll let other people explain their own views on this thing, but the idea was a sort of a process to get--if you could 70 or 80 people to agree to oppose the surge, that would have some value. The problem was I didn't think you were ever going to get that kind of

a vote here. None of these resolutions could garner barely 50 votes. And so we ended up sort of competing about debating over debating.

The next issue will come along on funding. And I believe Congress has got to step up to the plate here. We've got to answer the question about whether or not you're going to continue a policy that I think is causing us great harm both at home and abroad, all over the region, all over the world. And so clearly Congress is going to have to take a decision. Most people are afraid of a 30-second sound bite they may face in the next election, but frankly, kids are dying there. We're in deep trouble there. It's getting worse by the day. We need to stand up and be counted on this issue. And so then I'll be supporting a resolution that will cut off funding but not put our troops in jeopardy. That's really not the issue. I don't know a single member of Congress that wants to place a troop in jeopardy, but, clearly, many of us want to see a change in direction.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me just ask you this, Senator. Let's say that we do begin bringing the troops home, which is clearly what you want to do.

Sen. DODD: Clearly.

SCHIEFFER: The Republicans, the White House would say you're going to make a haven for terrorists in Iraq. What do you think Iraq would look like if we did draw down these troops?

Sen. DODD: Well, it can't be any worse than it is today. And it is becoming a haven in many ways. We need a change in direction. You're not going to get a change in strategy until we decide that this program run has to change. And I believe that's only going to come when Congress makes that decision. And frankly, there's a greater opportunity for us to get some stability in Iraq and stability in the region, start to draw people back into the process internationally than are presently willing to engage because of our presence there. Eighty percent of the Iraqi people think we're the cause for the chaos in the country. Sixty percent believe it's appropriate to shoot and kill Americans who're there. How do you sustain a policy when the very people we're trying to help are opposed to our being there?

SCHIEFFER: Do you believe that Congress will begin to attach amendments onto coming spending bills that will, in fact, cut off some of the funding?

Sen. DODD: I believe so, and I believe we'll be joined by some Republicans in the process. I know of no other way to do it unless the president changes his mind, which I would hope would be the case, and give us a new strategy here. Redeployment of these forces is absolutely critical. You cannot continue going down this road without some change. The change is only going to come if the president changes his mind or the Congress forces him to. Now, he could veto the legislation, but I think we've got to stand up and offer real legislation with real teeth and real accountability, or the American public are going to be very, very disappointed, to put it mildly.

Mr. HARRIS: You talk about regional stability. Just this morning in

Baghdad, there was a briefing that said there's a growing body of evidence that Iranian weapons are being used to kill US soldiers.

Sen. DODD: Right.

Mr. HARRIS: You had a tough exchange with Secretary Rice just this past week, I believe, in which you say the administration's not pursuing diplomacy adequately with Iran.

Sen. DODD: Right

Mr. HARRIS: What do you think should be done about Iran? Isn't this an authentic problem, that they are taking over?

Sen. DODD: No question. But the Baker-Hamilton report recommended we have--we end up having conversations with people--all the people in the region, including the Iranians and the Syrians. That's not because we like them. That's not because we want to do them a favor, but because it's in our interest to do it, much as Nixon had conversations with Mao Tse Tung, or Republican presidents did with Soviet leaders. You need to engage the people in the region if we've got some hope of solving those problems short of military conflict.

Now, I read the same report, but I'm also concerned about some of these reports coming out of intelligence analysts. We also had this week an inspector general's report about how we got into this mess in the first place when Doug Feith was doctoring the information. John Bolton tried to fire intelligence analysts because he didn't like the information he was getting to support policies. So I look at this with a degree of skepticism based on the record that these intelligence operations have provided us in the past.

But, clearly, Iran is a problem. There's no question about it. But they were going to be a problem under the present policy anyway. And it seems to me, until we engage them some way on a multiple of issues, including this one, it's only going to get worse. Baker and Hamilton were right. Diplomacy is not a favor to your enemy. It's how you extend your interest in the region. We ought to be doing more of it, not less.

SCHIEFFER: So you are skeptical about whether, in fact, these reports that Iran is doing this are true. Do you think, senator, that the administration is trying to lay the groundwork to attack Iran?

Sen. DODD: Well, it could be. There are certainly those...

SCHIEFFER: Really?

Sen. DODD: ...who I think are in favor of that. We've seen that in the past, that they would like nothing more than to build a case for that. Some of us call this, the year 2000, the year of Iran in a sense, and I'm worried about that. That's how we got into the mess in Iraq. That's why some of us supported those resolutions, because of doctored information. So I'm very

skeptical, based on recent past history, about this administration leading us in that direction. It worries me. It's not to say I'm not worried about Iran. I am worried about Iran, and there's steps that could be taken, I think, to try and change the direction they seem to be heading in. But I'm very nervous about what the groundwork being laid here as a premise for military action in Iran.

Mr. HARRIS: Senator, just a little bit of time left. I am curious about your relationship with your fellow senator, Joe Lieberman.

Sen. DODD: Yeah.

Mr. HARRIS: He is not backing your presidential candidacy, I understand. He...

Sen. DODD: Not yet, John.

Mr. HARRIS: Not yet. OK. All right. What is your relationship with these--with him these days?

Sen. DODD: Very good.

Mr. HARRIS: He sided with the Republicans in these crucial procedural votes last week.

Sen. DODD: Well, he does, and Joe has had a long-standing view on this--on this war, which he's held to. And he and I disagree about that. But we agree on an awful lot of other issues. He's a good senator, in my view. He's a Democrat, although he was elected as an Independent. He aligned himself with us in the Senate, and I'm quite confident he'll stay there.

SCHIEFFER: All right, well, senator we want to thank you.

Sen. DODD: Thank you, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: Good luck on the campaign. Thank you very much.

Sen. DODD: You bet, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: I'm sure we'll check in again with you. And we'll be back in just a moment with the Senate Republican whip, Trent Lott.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And we're now back with the Republican whip in the Senate, Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi.

Well, you heard what Senator Dodd just said, Senator Lott. He said he is now worried that the administration may be laying the groundwork, possibly, for an attack on Iran, and he cited those intelligence reports that a lot of these explosive devices in Iraq may be coming from Iran. What's your reaction to

that?

Senator TRENT LOTT (Republican, Mississippi; Minority Whip): I don't believe there's any basis for that. Obviously we're concerned about things that Iran has been doing and that their president has been saying, and these devices are very dangerous. We have indications, perhaps, they are coming from Iran, and I don't know all the details, I haven't had an in-depth briefing, but we do know they've become more deadly and that reasonably they're coming from Iran, and we should take actions to try to stop them.

SCHIEFFER: Well...

Sen. LOTT: You do that by interdiction, though. You don't do it by invasion.

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think that the administration is trying to make some sort of a case for a possible attack...

Sen. LOTT: I don't think so. I don't think so.

SCHIEFFER: ...down the line on Iran?

Sen. LOTT: I mean, if they--if they were trying to make a case, I'm sure they'd be talking about it a lot more aggressively. As a matter of fact, this report that indicated that these devices perhaps were coming from Iran actually got out before the briefings were given, even to members of Congress. It was leaked, in effect, to a reporter here in one of our major newspapers. So, I don't think that's true. Look, we...

SCHIEFFER: What--do you think we ought to be talking to Iran as Senator Dodd suggested?

Sen. LOTT: We are talking to them in a variety of ways. Just because you don't have a grand meeting doesn't mean you're not communicating. And I don't think that, you know, communication in a public way with Syria or Iran would make a huge difference. But, you know, you've got to deal with realities. Before you talk, some kind of indication you are going to talk. We are talking now to North Korea. They want to talk just with us. We said no. Now we got the six party talks going on, they seem to be making a little progress. Diplomacy is an arcane world that I guess you have to be in to really understand. But I don't think the American people ought to be concerned that some precipitous action is fixing to occur in Iran.

Mr. HARRIS: Senator, sometimes the Senate is an arcane world, at least to outsiders.

Sen. LOTT: Right.

Mr. HARRIS: You heard Senator Dodd just now, at a time when the American public is looking for a debate about the future of US policy in Iraq, instead they're getting the debate about debating. How can you be comfortable with

that, as a Republican leader, talking about Iraq in the context of closure resolutions and so forth, rather than a serious debate about what the US policy should be?

Sen. LOTT: That is inside baseball. But we want a debate, not a mandate. And I've been in the position of majority leader, where you have to decide how do you proceed, and I've learned the hard way you proceed by letting both sides have their say--a full debate--and offer different resolutions. You can't cut off the minority from offering one or more amendments. Senator McConnell, I thought, really worked aggressively to try to get this debate going forward. We had at least four or five resolutions that we would liked to have offered on our side. We agreed to cut it down to two, and then we were dictated to as to what that was going to be. But here, here's the point. That is inside Senate baseball. Should we have a full debate? Yes, we're ready to go forward.

SCHIEFFER: Well, then why don't you have it, Senator?

Sen. LOTT: Well, look--well, because...

SCHIEFFER: Because you can call it--wait, let me just...

Sen. LOTT: All right.

SCHIEFFER: ...ask this question. You can call it inside baseball, but after that debate came to a halt, every newspaper in the country that I--that I know about had a headline on the front page that said "Republicans block debate on Iraq war." Now, that can't be...

Sen. LOTT: And that was totally incorrect.

SCHIEFFER: ...a good thing. Well, how could...

Sen. LOTT: I don't know that I've ever...

SCHIEFFER: ...all of them have been wrong?

Sen. LOTT: Because we didn't block debate. Actually, the vote was to continue debate. Fifty-two United States senators in the United States in the last week talked and debated about the issue. But here's the point...

SCHIEFFER: And in the end, did nothing.

Sen. LOTT: Well, you know, the Senate's been in session six weeks, we voted on two major bills, not one of them has gone to the president for a signature. One of the lessons that should have come out of last year's elections was the American people want action.

SCHIEFFER: Well...

Sen. LOTT: They want us to step up and act on these issues, and yet we

haven't produced one solid result yet.

But here--I want to go back to the substance. All we were asking was that we have an opportunity to have an open debate, offer more than one resolution, but at least have a vote on whether or not we support funds for the troops that are in Iraq. Isn't that an important part of the debate? That's all it was really about. And we were told, 'No, no, no. We don't want you to have a vote on we support funds for the troops in the field,' because that would have been the top voting issue, and they--the Democrats did not want that. I believe the American people want us to support our troops with the funds when they are doing a mission, even if you don't agree with the details of the mission. That was the crux of the debate. You can argue about the debate over the debate, but the substance really did matter. And we're going to have that debate. We're ready to go forward now. But we're not going to be dictated to that you can't have a vote on an issue as critical as providing funds for the troops. I think Senator Dodd is principled and much more honest. He doesn't support some show and tell resolution, great sound and fury signifying nothing. He wants a real vote on, you know, capping and cutting off funds that are used in Iraq. That is a more honest debate, and one that will eventually become.

Mr. HARRIS: Let's go to the substance. You come from one of most conservative states, a lot of military people in your state.

Sen. LOTT: Sure.

Mr. HARRIS: Even in Mississippi, how much patience is there for continuation of the Iraq mission?

Sen. LOTT: There's no question that there are problems in Iraq. I don't want to diminish that at all. And I don't think that, you know, the president's always made the best case for what's happening there and what we should do. The people want us to, you know, get out of there in a reasonable way with victory, and victory is described as, you know, leaving a situation that doesn't just turn into chaos, and civil war and slaughters, and have the terrorists follow us back here to America. But there's no question that the people, even in my state, are saying, 'Wait a minute. This is not going well. You know, the status quo has got to change, and how many times do we have to send back our national guard troops?' They want a different situation, but they want a reasonable result. That's the difference. They're not willing to just say, 'OK, cap the troops, pull the troops out, come--or retreat back to the borders.' My question is, if you go to the borders, which way do you shoot?

Mr. HARRIS: Right.

Sen. LOTT: So.

Mr. HARRIS: I've got to ask you, in this procedural debate this week, there was a perception that you were saving the White House's bacon. They didn't necessarily save your bacon when you were in hot water back four years ago

over the Thurman matter. What gives with this new relationship you've got with the White House?

Sen. LOTT: I haven't always agreed with, you know, this administration's positions or some of the things that occurred. But I have a higher priority that people didn't elect me to get even, they elected me to try to do the right thing as best I can see how to do it. And when I agree with this administration, I will try to be helpful with the experiences I've had and the parliamentary procedures. If I disagree, I will speak up. And I have in the past.

SCHIEFFER: Senator, Senator Warner, your fellow Republican, former chairman of the Armed Services Committee, says that the resolution he wanted the Senate to vote on, and that is a resolution that just simply says, 'We do not agree with the president's decision to put more troops into Iraq.' He says he intends to offer that as an amendment to virtually everything that comes along here in the near future. How do you feel about that?

Sen. LOTT: That's fine. This issue is not going to go away. It may change, depending on events in Iraq.

SCHIEFFER: You won't to try to stop that?

Sen. LOTT: No, except that we want to make sure we have an alternative because we don't agree with his language. I mean, it's--he--we don't support the plan. Well, the plan is not just about a surge, the plan is also about making political progress, it's about economic opportunity. As a matter of fact, the famous Baker-Hamilton report said, 'We could, however, support a short term redeployment or surge of American combat forces to stabilize Baghdad.' Now, here's my problem with the Warner proposal and others that criticize this. What is your plan? And that's when a deafening silence falls in. The commander in chief has to provide leadership and direction, and he came up with a plan. I think we should give the plan a chance. It may be the last chance. Let's don't do anything to undermine it.

SCHIEFFER: All right. I'm very sorry. We have to leave it there. Thank you very much, Senator Lott, for coming by.

Sen. LOTT: All right.

SCHIEFFER: Thank you, John Harris, of thepolitico.com, the Web site that is about politics all the time.

I'll be back with a final word in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally, there is a threat to your health, if you're a guy out there, and so we offer this little poem as a warning:

Valentine's Day is next Wednesday, I hear.

So write it down 'cause I know this is true.
To forget Valentine is a felony crime
To every woman that I ever knew.

A good woman's love is the best thing there is,
But an old guy like me understands:
Forget Valentine and she'll turn on a dime.
You'll have a loon astronaut on your hands.

Late getting home, lamp shade for a hat?
They'll let it go once, maybe twice.
But no Valentine, hon,
I suggest that you run.
That butcher knife's ready to slice.

On a hill far away where the grass is so green,
Is the grave of a well-meaning guy.
Carved there on his stone that stands all alone,
Is a warning for all who pass by:

"Had I written it down, I wouldn't be here,
They wouldn't have needed this shrine.
Because I am the one, poor son of a gun,
The man who forgot Valentine."

I hope you'll take this to heart. We want you to have a happy Valentine, of course, but more important, we have the ratings to consider. We need you right there in front of the TV next Sunday for FACE THE NATION. We'll see you there.