Mr. President, on December 23, 1783, George Washington,

having successfully led the Continental Army to victory in the

Revolutionary War, appeared before the Continental Congress and

resigned his commission as commander of the Armed Forces.

It was a quietly pivotal action in the history of our young country,

an event so important in shaping the Nation that it is one of only

eight moments in our history deemed worthy enough of gracing the walls

of the Capitol rotunda.

A painting of Washington's historic act hangs not far from this

Chamber alongside more well known moments in American history such as

the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the Battle of Bunker

Hill.

The precedent that Washington set on that December day was as

revolutionary as it was clear: In the United States of America, the

power to make and execute war will be held not by the military but

instead by peacefully elected leaders sitting in a legislative body.

Washington understood that the will of the people--the will of the

American people--shall be the guiding hand of government, even on

questions of war and peace.

I wonder how President Washington would feel, I wonder what he would

say to each of us today. First, I think he would be very proud of what

has happened this afternoon in the House of Representatives, where they

came together, after lengthy debate, to state their opinions about the

most pressing issue of war, the war in Iraq. I am very proud that we

saw the House of Representatives vote 246 to 182 to say, first, that

they support the troops and, secondly, that they do not support the

escalation of the war in Iraq.

Regardless of how each person voted today in the House, they took

that vote. They were willing to stand up and be counted and give their

opinion. I believe the majority of the American people--and their will,

their belief--was represented in this vote today of 246 to 182.

What has happened in the Senate? Well, first of all, I commend our

majority leader, Senator Harry Reid, for his perseverance, for his

continuing effort to reach across the aisle with the minority leader to

find a way to do the same thing the House has done. He has put forward

numerous proposals, and, as late as yesterday, very simply and in a

straightforward way, offered us the opportunity to vote on a

resolution opposing the escalation and one that supports the

President's escalation. What could be more fair? What could be simpler?

Yet we continue to see the minority block the efforts to bring us to a

vote.

For over 2 weeks now, I have watched the Republican leadership engage

in legislative games and political posturing to avoid taking a vote on

the most pressing issue of our time, the war in Iraq. They say they

support it, but they will not vote on a resolution, up or down, whether

or not to support the President's escalation. I believe it is because

they do not like what they know the outcome will be if we are able to

have that vote. They have turned their backs on their responsibility to

the people who elected them and to our troops because they may lose a

vote.

Four years ago, 23 of us stood on the floor of the Senate and lost a

vote. It was a vote to go to war. It was a vote to give the President

the authority to go to war in Iraq. It was a tough vote. We knew we

were not going to win that vote, but we all--those for and against--

made a determination and voted because we are elected officials,

charged with overseeing the U.S. Armed Forces, and we had a

responsibility to voice our opinions for the record on the question of

war.

I have stood on the floor of the Senate time and time again to voice

my opposition to this President's proposals of escalation--more of the

same, calling it a different strategy, and yet doing the same thing

over and over again. Sending more Americans into combat without a

strategy for success will not improve the situation on the ground in

Iraq. And it will not bring our men and women in uniform home any

sooner.

Only the Iraqis can secure Iraq. Only the Iraqis can secure Iraq. We

have heard that from generals and military experts and the Iraq Study

Group and learned colleagues on both sides of the aisle. The American

troops cannot be seen as a substitute for Iraqi resolve. Why would we

go further down the path that has led us to this point? Why would we

repeat our previous mistakes and call it a new strategy?

Unlike the President, all of us and our counterparts in the House

will go home over recess and on weekends and face our constituents, our

neighbors. We see them and talk to them at church, in the line at the

bank, at our kids' schools, in the grocery store, and at countless

events and meetings as we travel throughout our States.

And we are here because they elected us to be their voice.

This is not Washington, DC's, war. We may set policy here, we may

make speeches here, and we may take votes here, this is America's war.

The men and women putting their lives on the line in Iraq every day

are from our smallest neighborhoods and our biggest cities, from farm

communities and factory towns, from places many of us have never heard

of and few of us will ever go. Flint, Howell, West Branch, Hemlock, La

Salle, Port Huron, Ypsilanti, Muskegon, Ann Arbor, Byron, Flushing, Bay

City, Canton, Paw Paw, Lake Orion, Saginaw, Sand Creek--these are only

some of the dozens of communities in my home State of Michigan that

have given up a son or a daughter to this war.

We sit in this historic Capitol and argue over whether we should

dignify this war with a simple vote, while these and other communities

across the country bury their loved ones, while high schools hold

vigils for alumni laid to rest too young, while churches comfort

parishioners who have lost sons and daughters and husbands and wives

and fathers and mothers.

We are the voice of these communities, of these towns and cities and

counties. We were elected with their sacred trust to come here, to

Washington, and to speak out for them, to make our mark for them on the

issues that face this country. There can be nothing more important than

the issue of war.

By continuing to stonewall a vote on this resolution, the Republican

minority has stripped all of America of their voice in this debate.

They have said to the people who elected us that this issue--the issue

of an escalation of war--is not important enough for their elected

representatives to consider.

Too often in the white noise of politics we lose sight of the

responsibility we bear. We get bogged down in the politics of

partisanship and lose sight of why we were elected. We owe it to the

American people to take this vote. This is the most serious issue of

our time. There is nothing more important or more pressing than our

Nation being at war. It is the responsibility of the Congress to engage

in shaping policy concerning the war on behalf of the American people.

Let me take a few moments to remind everyone what is really at stake.

While some posture and jockey for legislative position, lives are on

the line this moment and every moment the war goes forward. It doesn't

matter if you support or oppose the war. Anyone involved in slowing a

vote on this resolution should be ashamed. Our military has not failed

us at any turn in this endeavor. But we are failing them as a body by

failing to lead. What is at stake?

On January 21, the Grand Rapids Press published the following account

on the war in Iraq:

We are here because of that lance corporal. He and his comrades, the

men and women serving, deserve our best--our best judgment, our best

decisions, our best funding, our best strategy for them.

On November 16, 2006, the Detroit Free Press gave us this insight

into life on the ground in Iraq:

On January 5, the editorial page of the Flint Journal paid its

respects to one of Flint's fallen sons:

All of us have stories of the men and women who have served

heroically and lost their lives, men and women who have come home and

need our assistance now as veterans while in our hospitals and will

forever carry a remembrance of this war through lost limbs and other

health conditions. They deserve a vote on whether we believe this

strategy for them and their colleagues is the right strategy. They

deserve this. They expect us to stand up and speak out and work as hard

as we can to get it right.

Too often on the floor of this Chamber and too often in politics, we

use words such as ``bravery'' and ``toughness'' and resolve.'' We

describe votes as ``tough.'' We describe speeches as ``brave.'' The men

and women serving in combat know the real meaning of these words. They

go about their dangerous duty with the pride of professionals. They

live and work under the shadow of violence, never knowing what might be

facing them around the next corner, and they do it with stoic resolve

that reflects their character and their training. They do not have the

luxury of picking and choosing when and where to fight. They go where

their country sends them and stand shoulder to shoulder with their

brothers and sisters in arms and face whatever is thrown at them. What

we consider heroic, they consider doing their job.

Their sacrifices deserve and demand leadership, our leadership,

collectively. We owe to it them and to every person we were elected to

represent to vote on this resolution, to take a stand about how this

war will proceed. It is our job. It is time to stop stalling and face

our responsibility, a responsibility that pales in comparison to that

which is taken every day by our troops in Iraq.

I thank the Chair.