Mr. President, I rise today to voice my strong support for

the motion to invoke cloture to proceed to S. 574 so the Senate can

undertake a full, vigorous, and honest debate on the future course of

American policy for the war in Iraq.

As we speak about and debate the war, let us never forget our troops

in battle, those troops in battle on the streets in Baghdad, in Anbar

Province, or other areas of Iraq. We also remember, as we debate this

issue, their families and their sacrifice. Finally, today, and in all

the days we debate this critically important issue to our country, we

honor the sacrifice of those soldiers and marines who gave, as

President Lincoln said at Gettysburg, ``the last full measure of

devotion to their country.'' We pray for them today and always, and we

pray for ourselves that we may be worthy of their valor.

At this time in the Senate we are confronted with two simple

questions: First, does the Senate agree with President Bush's plan to

escalate our military involvement in Iraq by deploying some 21,000 more

troops? Second, will the Senate vote tomorrow to allow debate to go

forward?

Just those two questions confront us today and tomorrow. There will

be further debate about our policy in Iraq in the weeks and months

ahead, but for the next few days it is those two questions.

As I have stated before, I oppose this escalation, but I also support

debating it. The grave question of war must always be--always be--the

subject of vigorous debate, especially in the Senate. As a Senator from

the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a State that has lost 150 young men

and women in combat, I have a solemn obligation to speak out about the

escalation.

Many of these brave Americans from Pennsylvania come from small towns

such as Rockport and Connellsville and Beaver Falls, and from cities

such as Bethlehem and Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. I have an obligation

to speak out against those policies that only increase the likelihood

that even more of

Pennsylvania's sons and daughters will die or be grievously wounded on

behalf of a flawed strategy.

I had hoped, like many in this Chamber, we could have moved forward

with the debate on Iraq 2 weeks ago. The American people don't

understand why the Senate isn't debating this war when all of America

expects us to do so. Perhaps a rare Saturday vote will help this body

realize the importance as this debate moves forward.

We owe it to the troops, their families, and to those who have loved

and lost someone dear to them in this war to debate our Iraq policy and

to clearly express our opposition to the President's escalation. The

American people have clearly voiced their strong support and their

desire for their elected representatives to address this issue. The

elections last November turned in large part on the failure of the

previous Congress to engage in adequate oversight of the administration

and ask the tough questions when it came to the execution of the war.

Debating is essential to good oversight.

We know that recent polls conducted across America reveal Americans

consider the war as one of the two most important problems facing our

Nation. An overwhelming 63 percent of respondents in a recent national

poll expressed concern that the Senate had been unsuccessful to date in

attempts to hold a debate on the war in Iraq. We have an obligation to

act, and that begins with a full debate.

S. 574 is short but eloquent. It respects and honors our troops who

are serving or who have served with distinction in Iraq, and it

communicates our disapproval of the President's escalation of the war.

It mandates--mandates--additional reporting requirements so there is

transparency with regard to military, political, and diplomatic

operations in Iraq. This resolution deserves our support because it

sends the right message to the President to change course in Iraq.

In the first 5 weeks of this new Congress, as a member of the Foreign

Relations Committee, I have listened carefully to more than 25

witnesses over the course of a dozen hearings, some 50 hours of

testimony from generals and other military experts, diplomats and

foreign policy experts, the cochairmen of the Iraq Study Group, and so

many others. I have asked tough questions, and I have listened to

statements and questions from my colleagues, some of whom have had

decades of experience in foreign affairs and the oversight of military

operations. After all these hearings, I am even more certain that this

escalation is the wrong strategy.

The National Intelligence Estimate--we know it by the acronym NIE--

released in January on Iraq's prospects for near-term stability paints

a dire picture. The unclassified version describes a growing sectarian-

based polarization, ineffective security forces with questionable

loyalties, and an all-but-certain rise in communal violence in the

coming months. The National Intelligence Estimate clarifies that Iraq's

violence today is primarily driven by ``the self-sustaining character

of Iraq's internal sectarian dynamics.''

Reading the key judgments of the NIE, I can only conclude that

political reconciliation between the respective leaders of Iraq's

varied populations is the best way and probably the only way to reduce

the violence and to begin to create a stable state that is not a threat

to its neighbors. Escalating military conflict by inserting additional

U.S. troops in Iraq is not the answer.

As Chairman Biden remarked during the Foreign Relations Committee's

deliberations on a related resolution, this effort is not inspired by a

desire to embarrass or isolate President Bush. Rather, it is an attempt

to demonstrate to the President that his approach is flawed and will

not result in the outcome he seeks. The President is still searching

for a military solution when, in fact, it is time for a political

solution led by the Iraqis themselves. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-

Maliki himself declared last November, ``The crisis is political, and

the ones who can stop the cycle of aggravation and bloodletting of

innocents are the politicians.''

What we need is not just a political strategy; we need sustained and

vigorous diplomatic engagement that I would argue has been lacking. The

President and his senior officials have failed to make the case that

the so-called new way forward in Iraq is, in fact, new or promises

significant changes needed to achieve real victory. Instead, the

President's escalation strategy risks repeating mistakes already made.

It inserts more American troops into the crossfire of growing sectarian

conflict, and it ignores the urgent need to reorient the mission of

U.S. forces in Iraq toward those objectives which offer our best chance

to leave behind a secure and stable Iraq.

In spite of all the rhetoric from the White House in recent weeks, I

believe, and many in this Senate believe, that the President's policy

is more or less more of the same: Stay the course. The United States

today has approximately 137,000 troops in Iraq, growing by the day and

by the week. Sending an additional 21,000 troops will not fundamentally

change the current dynamic in Iraq.

The reality is that more American troops is not the answer in Iraq.

General Abizaid, the outgoing U.S. Central Command commander, testified

in November that the unanimous opinion of his top subordinates was that

more American troops would only perpetuate the dependence of Iraqi

troops and would not offer a positive solution. No matter how many

troops we send, they cannot provide lasting security on the streets of

Baghdad or other Iraqi cities. Only fully equipped, trained, and

dedicated Iraqi military and police forces--those who do not pick and

choose sides among sectarian groups--only they can provide the type of

permanent security that will enable the Iraqi political and civilian

life to emerge and the nation to embark on a path to reconciliation.

We heard from former Congressman Lee Hamilton during our Foreign

Relations Committee hearings. He noted in his testimony before that

committee that the money, time, and attention we are devoting to

escalating the level of U.S. forces in Iraq must not detract from what

should be a primary mission for the United States: training Iraqi

security forces to enhance their capability to take the lead and allow

U.S. forces to redeploy out of that country.

Congressman Hamilton and so many others have placed the primacy on

the question of training. Instead, by adopting the President's

strategy, I fear we are sending an additional 21,000 troops without a

more focused mission and lacking a solid plan to accomplish it.

I fear we are still investing too much trust in the Maliki

government, a regime that has failed to demonstrate it is acting on

behalf of all Iraqis and may be focused only on one sectarian group. I

fear American forces will continue to serve as a bull's-eye target for

those resentful of a prolonged U.S. occupation in Iraq. In short, I

fear, and many in this Senate fear, we are sending more American men

and women into Iraq without a new blueprint for victory and without the

essential political, diplomatic, and international groundwork required

to succeed.

The President has based his troop escalation on the hope--the risky

hope, I would argue--that this time the Maliki regime will carry

through on its commitments and deliver the required Iraqi forces to

help U.S. forces secure neighborhoods throughout Baghdad and, more

important, then remain to allow reconstruction to proceed and normal

life to return. Yet the record is not encouraging. In Operation

Together Forward, Prime Minister Maliki had pledged six battalions, but

only two were sent. Some of those Iraqi units suffered subsequent

serious attrition rates. Many of those forces have been infiltrated by

the very sectarian militias they are now being asked to disarm.

We are already seeing troubling signs in the initial stages of this

latest escalation. The New York Times, January 22, the Washington Post,

USA Today, and so many other news articles which I will not repeat here

today have talked about the problems with Iraqi security forces showing

up late or not showing up at all, not serious about their mission, not

trained, not focused, and frankly not helping enough in terms of

helping American forces. Americans are dying because of that

incompetence. The fact remains that it is very difficult to rely on

Iraqi forces when you have to ask them to deploy outside of their

normal areas of operation and their ethnic strongholds.

I also retain real doubts when the President insists that this time,

this

time it will be different, that Mr. Maliki now means it when he says

Iraqi forces will truly crack down on all troublemakers, whether they

are Shia or Sunni. The Government of Iraq has promised repeatedly to

assume a greater share of security responsibilities, disband militias,

consider constitutional amendments, and enact laws to reconcile

sectarian differences and improve the quality of essential services for

the Iraqi people. Yet, despite those promises, little has been achieved

by the Iraqis.

Moreover, I am skeptical of this escalation of U.S. troops because we

have seen it before. We have seen it before, tried over and over again.

Operation Together Forward in 2006 represented a similar escalation;

12,000 additional U.S. troops were introduced into the city of Baghdad,

only to see U.S. and Iraqi casualties spike considerably without a

sustained reduction in sectarian violence. We have seen similar efforts

to ``flood the zone'' with additional U.S. troops in places such as

Fallujah and Ramadi, only resulting in temporary gains. If more troops

have not worked in the recent past, why should we have any reason to

believe it will work this time?

I am concerned, as are so many others, about the dual-chain-of-

command concept that is being introduced as part of this escalation.

Recently, Prime Minister al-Maliki's commander in the region and the

capital itself has been trying to carry out part of this strategy. At

the same time, there will be a separate or parallel U.S. command headed

by MG Joseph Fil, Jr. Both commanders will have ultimate control over

their own national troops, but this ``partnered'' command could create

serious complications if there are disputes between U.S. and Iraqi

military forces over specific operations. A unified chain of command is

one of the hallmark principles that have long governed deployment of

U.S. forces abroad.

Finally, I oppose this escalation strategy because I fear it will

only exacerbate the longstanding strains on our Nation's military

overall. Seven years ago, President Bush declared that his predecessor

was leaving office with a military in decline. He alleged that the

previous administration had not adequately funded our Armed Forces

while simultaneously deploying those forces in excessive engagements

around the world. It is one of the most tragic ironies that this

President is himself now stretching our military to a genuine breaking

point, as he pursues a misguided strategy in Iraq.

The Washington Post recently published an important article

documenting the impacts of this proposed troop escalation. According to

the Post, the Army and Marine Corps already lack thousands of necessary

vehicles, armor kits, and other equipment needed to supply the extra

forces. Diverting 21,000 troops from other essential missions around

the world will only further deteriorate the readiness of our overall

ground forces, making it more difficult to respond quickly and

decisively in the event of other military contingencies, and raise the

likelihood of greater U.S. casualties.

Our Nation's military is facing a genuine crisis. The war in Iraq has

exacted a heavy toll--in casualties, first and foremost, but also in

terms of combat equipment that undergirds our fighting men and women.

Our National Guard and Reserve troops in particular are paying a heavy

price. Army data shows that the Army National Guard units today

only have, on average, 40 percent of their required equipment--40

percent. National Guard combat brigades are being involuntarily

mobilized, and reservists are being sent back to the command theater on

a repeated basis.

Representative John Murtha, a decorated marine from my home State of

Pennsylvania, painted a distressing picture of our military's

readiness--or I should say lack thereof--during recent testimony before

the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. As he noted:

Chairman Murtha then went on to cite recent House testimony from a

senior Pentagon official that our country was threatened because we

lacked readiness at home.

I welcome, as so many do, the President's intention to expand our

military--permanently elevating the Army and Marine Corps' Active-Duty

ranks over the next 5 years. But that is only a long-term solution. Our

current forces are badly overextended, and an escalation in strategy in

Iraq will only worsen that condition. Our Nation faces growing

challenges around the world. We must ensure that our military forces

receive adequate training, are fully equipped, and retain the necessary

flexibility to quickly respond to contingencies wherever they may

arise. Pouring more troops into Iraq does not make those requirements

any easier to meet.

Just listen to the bipartisan Iraq Study Group on this matter:

The Iraq Study Group goes on to say:

So says the Iraq Study Group.

For all these reasons, I am proud to stand here today in support of a

bipartisan effort to send the President a message that the troop

escalation in Iraq is the wrong choice for our Nation. Instead, our

Iraq strategy should emphasize a new direction, encouraging Iraqi

leaders to make political compromises that will foster reconciliation

and strengthen the unity of the Government, laying the groundwork for

an improved security situation, and redeploying our military forces in

Iraq so they can focus on maintaining that nation's territorial

integrity. We also must deny al-Qaida and other terrorists a safe

haven, conduct counterterrorism operations, promote regional stability,

and, most important, train and equip Iraqi forces to take the lead in

security and combat operations. The President's escalation strategy of

throwing more U.S. troops into Iraq's burgeoning civil war undercuts

and detracts from each of these objectives: A campaign of escalation is

incompatible with securing a new and better direction in Iraq. For

those who argue that supporting this resolution only offers criticism

but does not offer specific alternatives, I urge you to listen to what

I and others have said in these days and what we will say in the next

couple of days especially.

We have heard from the opponents about what this all means. I will

not go into their opinions today. But I will say this: Every Member of

this Chamber in both parties honors our troops, no matter which way we

stand on escalation. We honor their sacrifices--the sacrifices they and

their families make on a daily basis. But we must examine--we have an

obligation to examine our national policies which we are asked to carry

out and to be supportive of or in opposition to. If we disagree with

the broad strategic direction in which the President is taking our

Nation, it is our duty to speak out. To remain silent or passive in the

face of an approach we believe is misguided and not in the national

interests is an abdication of the responsibilities of our offices.

Our military forces and their loved ones have paid a heavy price for

this mission in Iraq. As I have noted before, at least 150

Pennsylvanians have given their lives, with hundreds more suffering

from serious and lifelong injuries. PFC Ross A. McGinnis of Knox, PA,

was one of those killed in action. He was 19 years old. He died of

injuries on December 4, 2006, after a grenade was thrown into his

vehicle in Baghdad. Private McGinnis has been nominated by his

commanders for the Medal of Honor. He was manning the gunner's hatch

when a grenade was thrown into his humvee. He could have jumped out to

save himself, but he threw himself on the grenade to save the lives of

his crew members. We must always remember this debate we must have must

not have a focus on abstract policy matters. This has real implications

for our men and women in the Armed Forces. We cannot forget the lessons

and the life of Private McGinnis or any of the more than 3,000

Americans who have died during this conflict. Our troops are deserving

of our support and the support of all the American people.

Mr. President, I conclude with this: A troop increase will only

endanger more young Americans in Iraq without any clear hope of

success. For that reason, I support honest and open debate on the

merits of the President's plan and an opportunity for the Senate to

declare its views. I will vote to allow this important debate to

proceed, and I will vote in favor of S. 574.

I yield the floor.