Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I rise today to speak on behalf of thousands of Rhode

Islanders who have talked with me about the need for a new direction in

Iraq and the need to bring our troops home.

I speak on behalf of the veterans' families who traveled here to

Washington to speak to me about their memories of war and the need for

this one to end.

I speak on behalf of the brave men and women serving in Iraq who have

sacrificed so much and whose families anxiously await their return.

I speak on behalf of mothers I met who felt they had to buy body

armor for their sons and daughters headed for Iraq because they could

not trust this administration to provide what was needed.

The Senate may have been muzzled in recent days, but Rhode Islanders

certainly have not been. More than 2,000 of them have reached out to my

office in frustration, in anger, and in concern--and in the hope that

this new Democratic Senate will listen to them and hear them, as this

administration will not.

I want to share some of what they have written me:

Mr. President, Michael was a 23-year-old Army sergeant from Newport,

killed in an IED blast in Anbar Province last November.

The letter continues:

Mr. President, these voices will not be unfamiliar to anyone in this

body. In every State, we have heard similar voices. You have heard them

in Colorado, Mr. President. My friend, Senator Sanders, has heard them

in Vermont. People all across America are speaking to all of us, and it

is time for us to listen and to show that we have heard and to start to

bring our soldiers home.

The President has not heard these voices. He wants to send tens of

thousands more troops to Iraq. He calls this a surge. We consider it a

grave mistake.

Tomorrow, our vote can stop the parliamentary maneuvers that have

stalled us, and this great deliberative body can begin to debate the

most pressing question of this day.

Let's talk for a moment about that question. The other side wishes to

debate every question, any question--any question but the escalation by

this President of our troops in Iraq by over 21,000 men and women. But

this question we want to debate is not a question selected by Democrats

for political reasons. It is possible here to choose self-serving

questions and to force a debate on those questions just to make a

political point. But we have not done that.

This question, whether to escalate the war in Iraq, is not an

invention of the Democratic Party. It is not an invention of the

Senate. It is President Bush, who proposed to send tens of thousands

more troops into harm's way and to escalate this conflict, who has

presented this question. This question is what was presented to us by

President George W. Bush, and by him alone, and it is the pressing

question of today.

For weeks, we on this side of the aisle have emphasized and

reemphasized our strong commitment to having a real debate--a debate to

a vote--to telling the American people where we stand and to casting

our votes on the precise question the President of the United States

has presented to America. But we have been impeded, obstructed,

maneuvered away from this critical question.

The other side argues that to dispute this President's judgment is to

fail to support the troops--even though that judgment has failed the

troops and has failed our country and has left us with few good

options.

But that is a false choice, Mr. President. And this hour demands

better of this institution.

There are ways to accomplish the change America demands, and that

reason and good conscience dictate. For instance, I believe that rather

then send a single additional American soldier into the sands and

marshes of Iraq, this President can announce clearly and unequivocally

that our troops will be redeployed from Iraq and will soon come home.

The most powerful motivating force at our country's disposal today is

the prospect of our redeployment out of Iraq. Let me repeat that. The

most powerful motivating force at our country's disposal today is the

prospect of redeployment out of Iraq. Using this power wisely, deftly,

and thoughtfully would accomplish three critical objectives that, as I

have said, would make great strides toward security in Iraq and

stability in the region.

First, a clear statement of our intent to redeploy our troops from

Iraq would eliminate the sense there that we are an Army of occupation.

This in turn would quiet the nationalist sentiment of the Iraqi people,

now aroused against us. Many Iraqis are now so opposed to our presence

they think killing American soldiers is acceptable.

Second, without America's intervening presence, the world community

would have to face directly the consequences of the situation in Iraq.

The prospect of our departure would compel the world to take a more

active role to work together with America to bring peace and stability

to the region. We

cannot continue as we are now, in every meaningful way completely

alone.

Third, Iraq's neighbors will be obliged to assume greater

responsibility for averting the risk of a Sunni-Shiite conflict

igniting in Iraq and spreading beyond Iraq's borders. Without us in

Iraq as a police force for a civil war, neighboring nations will have

an enlivened incentive to avert a wider war.

Finally, the Bush administration's preoccupation with Iraq leaves us

weakened in our capability to address other obligations around the

world, from the changing situation in North Korea, to the ongoing

battle for Afghanistan, to the serious threat posed by Iran's nuclear

program.

Mr. President, these are serious matters, and they deserve the

serious and sustained attention of the Senate. I hope tomorrow's vote

will allow us to bring this question that attention.

Mr. President, I will support that vote tomorrow. I ask other

Senators, who hear our fellow Americans' genuine and sincere concern

about our national interest, will do the same.

I will support not only the resolution disapproving of the

President's escalation plan and supporting our troops, but also other,

stronger measures that will follow, and that will continue to put

pressure on this administration to finally bring our troops home.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

I yield the floor.