Mr. President, I rise today to support the resolution

on which I hope we will have an opportunity to vote. As we hear this

debate, it is a good debate that should move forward. I hope we will

actually get to vote on the resolution.

I am amazed at some of our colleagues who would suggest that this

debate shouldn't even take place. The Senate, the greatest marketplace

of ideas, the clash of ideas, should be the place in which one of the

most momentous issues facing the Nation should have the opportunity for

those 100 Senators, elected by their constituencies across the country,

to come and not only debate but cast a vote so that the American people

know which way the Senate intends to lead on this question of changing

the course in Iraq.

What we seek to do is put forward a new direction and a clear plan

for Iraq--a clear plan that is very different than the President's

current plans to escalate the war in Iraq. We have a plan that, if

effectuated, would end the war in Iraq.

Our plan is relatively straightforward and says: One, our troops

should leave Iraq by March 31, 2008, with a small number remaining to

help with security and counterterrorism.

Those who say we shouldn't have any date because the enemy will

outwait us, we see that Sadr's militias have already retracted, that

they are already willing to spend the time to wait until it is

propitious to strike.

Two, we should start the process of leaving within 120 days.

Three, our troops' mission should immediately change to the priority

of training--priority of training--Iraqi security forces, focusing on

counterterrorism.

I heard some of our colleagues talk about that element of al-Qaida in

Anbar Province. Well, that is 5,000 or so. We have roughly 140,000

troops, and 140,000 U.S. troops could certainly take

care of 5,000 elements of al-Qaida in Iraq and protecting U.S.

personnel in Iraq. Or we should take all these steps as part of a

comprehensive diplomatic plan, working with Iraq's neighbors and our

allies to bring stability to Iraq.

I support this plan. I would like to see it be much more than a goal.

I would like to see it move more along the lines of a mandate. I

support the plan because it matches the goals of the Iraq Study Group,

a bipartisan group that met unanimously, agreed upon all of its

recommendations, and who said that U.S. combat forces should leave Iraq

by the end of March 2008.

I know some of my colleagues have mentioned comments made by

Democrats in previous statements. Well, I would point out that this was

a bipartisan group and it had prominent Republicans on it, such as

former Secretary of State James Baker, Lawrence Eagleburger, Ed Meese,

Sandra Day O'Connor, and Alan Simpson. They all came to the conclusion,

as we have in this resolution, that, in fact, our goal should be to

have our troops out by March of 2008.

I support the plan because it transitions the mission for our troops,

instead of keeping them fighting in the middle of a civil war. I

support the plan because it sets a clear timeframe for our troops to

leave Iraq. In my mind, unlike the way in which our opponents in this

regard pass a negative light on a timeframe, I think a timeframe is the

most powerful element to achieve success in Iraq. It is only by setting

a clear timeframe for our troops to leave that Iraqis will have to take

the responsibility for security in their country and to work out their

political power struggles.

Some of these hearings that I have been part of in the Senate

Committee on Foreign Relations, you hear how so much of the struggle

among Iraqis is about political power. Is it the mission of the U.S.

troops, the sons and daughters of America, to sit in the crossfire as

people are pursuing political power? I think not.

Unless we have the Iraqis understand this is not an open-ended

commitment, they will never make the hard choices, compromises, and

negotiations necessary for a government of national unity, if that is

possible. They will never get there so long as they believe we will

shed the blood and our national treasure in an unlimited fashion. It is

only by setting a clear timeframe for our troops to leave that Iraq's

neighbors will start to take responsibility for ending the chaos inside

of Iraq.

Right now, that violence hasn't reached the tipping point for them to

get Iraq's neighbors involved. Ultimately, it is not in their national

security interest to have the conflict spill across their borders and

have Iraq disintegrate, but they do not yet feel the pressure to do

this. By setting a date certain to leave, we create a new incentive for

Iraq's neighbors to help quell the violence.

It is only by setting a clear timeframe for our troops to leave that

the international community will take its responsible and necessary

role in Iraq. Right now, the international community sees this as

America's war. Once we make it clear we will not be there permanently

or indefinitely, they, too, will have an incentive in getting involved

to help preserve security in a region that is incredibly important to

them, much closer to Europe than the United States. By setting a clear

timeframe for our troops to leave, we actually motivate Iraq's

neighbors and the international community to take the steps necessary

to stabilize Iraq.

Let me be clear, for my friends who are saying we shouldn't vote for

this resolution. They say we shouldn't try to micromanage the war. No

one is trying to micromanage a war. There is a constitutional

responsibility by Members of the Senate to act as a legislative body. I

say the era of blank checks, both in lives and national treasure, is

over. They say don't micromanage the war. Well, you have had a blank

check under this administration. You have rubberstamped everything they

have wanted, with virtually no oversight, until this new Congress

started. That is not the responsible exercise of the Senate. They say

slow bleed. How about the endless bleeding going on now?

Let me take a moment to talk about the President's plan to escalate

the war and stay there without any timeframes that bind. First, let's

be frank. I simply don't believe the recent escalation of troops in

Iraq is a temporary surge. I believe it is a long-term escalation. Even

General Petraeus has said we are in it for the long haul, and that, to

me, is undefined.

I wish this administration would be honest with the American people

and the Congress about the total cost of the escalation and the total

number of troops needed for the escalation. I sit as a member of the

Budget Committee, and we had the Deputy Secretary of the Department of

Defense, Mr. England, testifying in a hearing. I said to him: If the

chairman would put you under oath, would you say that the $5.6 billion

that you want in addition for the escalation of the war would be the

total amount; the total cost? He told me: Yes, even if I was under oath

it would be roughly that amount. Of course, depending on the needs of

the commanders. And then that weekend--that weekend, after the

hearing--the administration said they needed another $2 billion. They

needed $2 billion more over a weekend? That is not a small amount of

money that he didn't know about. We are also told the administration

will need more troops, and there may be additional billions added to

the supplemental. Each time we ask, we get a different answer. I, for

one, would like a clear and honest answer for the total number of

troops and the total cost of the troop escalation.

Staying indefinitely in Iraq isn't in the national interest or the

national security interest of the United States. Our troops are caught

in the middle of a civil war they can't solve. Adding more troops will

only put them more directly in the middle of an Iraqi fight. Keeping

our troops there or adding more troops is trying to solve a political

problem with a military solution.

I have heard General Pace and others in the past say: You know, we

have to get the Iraqis to love their children more than they hate their

neighbors. That is a powerful truism. We have to get the Iraqis to love

their children more than they hate their neighbors. That, however,

cannot be accomplished by military might. That is accomplished by

reconciliation measures. That is accomplished by confidence- building

measures. That is accomplished by revenue sharing. That is accomplished

by power sharing. It cannot be accomplished at the point of a gun. It

cannot be accomplished at the point of a gun.

Staying there would only continue to empower and embolden Iran, a

country that has turned out to be, by many experts who have testified

before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, one of the biggest

winners in our war with Iraq. Staying in Iraq actually keeps the Iraqis

from making the hard choices, compromises, and negotiations necessary

to achieve a government of national unity.

Frankly, what we hear from the other side doesn't make sense to me.

They talk about victory. What is the definition of victory? Is it when

the President landed on the aircraft carrier, fully decked out, and

said, ``Mission accomplished''? Is it the many times we have heard the

administration say, victory is right around the corner? How many lives,

how much national treasure, what victory are we talking about? They

talk about benchmarks for the Iraqis, but they set no consequences.

Benchmarks without consequences are simply aspirations, nothing more.

Victory. How many lives must we lose? How much more money must we

spend? How long will we be in this war under a plan without end of the

President? I believe it is long past time to change the course in Iraq.

That is why this vote to allow us to move forward, to allow us to have

a final vote on changing the course in Iraq and laying out a plan that

can create the best possibility for victory in Iraq is essential, and

that is what I hope we will do between today and tomorrow.

Finally, in the time it takes me to finish my remarks this afternoon,

the United States will have spent over $2 million on the Iraq war

today. Our Nation spends over $8 billion a month in Iraq. We spend $2

billion a week in Iraq. We spend $280 million every day. And the loss

in money pales, pales in comparison to our Nation's loss of our best

and our brightest, with almost 3,200 lives lost in the conflict and

over 24,000 who have been wounded.

I visited them again this past weekend in New Jersey at the Veterans

Hospital at Fort Dix. I listen to the stories they tell me, especially

now as they face challenges in this part of their life. I know that may

be another subject matter, but it is something for which we have to be

responsible. A grateful Nation does not just say they are grateful, a

grateful Nation takes care of those who serve their country, in how we

treat them in their health care, how we treat them in their disability,

and how we treat their families, for those who commit the ultimate

sacrifice on behalf of the Nation. The stories I heard from those

soldiers do not indicate a grateful Nation.

I didn't vote for the Iraq war when I was in the House of

Representatives. I believe that was one of the most important votes I

ever cast. I don't support the President's escalation of the war. I was

in the minority when I voted against the war in 2002, and there were

those who said voting against the war would be political suicide. Even

with that knowledge, I put my seat in the Congress on the line because

my conscience told me this was simply not the right thing to do.

In a speech about the war, the President said the following:

The President added:

That plan did not succeed. The man speaking wasn't President Bush but

President Richard Nixon, and the war he spoke of was not the war in

Iraq but the war in Vietnam. It is painful to hear the similarities

between what was said by the President of the United States in that

conflict and the one in which our Nation is currently ensnared. It is

even more painful to see an administration and a President similarly

disconnected from the American people.

In soaring speeches, President Bush, the Vice President, and

Republican allies invoke the ``will and courage'' of the American

people. They say, if the American people would have the ``will and the

courage'' to persevere in Iraq, then we can succeed militarily. This

administration fails to understand this war is not just about will and

courage, it is also about wisdom and clarity of judgment, traits that

have been sorely lacking in this administration.

No one should doubt the will of the American people. In fact, they

expressed their will last November, a point that seems to elude many

Members of this Chamber. The American people have the will, they have

the nerve. What they no longer have is patience with this

administration and the continued failed policy in Iraq, and they are

losing patience with Members of this body.

It is time for the Senate to take a stand against the President's

failed plan in Iraq and to vote for a new plan, a new plan and a new

course to end the war in Iraq.

I urge my colleagues to support the ability to move ahead, to have a

final vote, and then I urge them to support the resolution that would

lead us out of the war in Iraq, that could give us the greatest

opportunity for victory, that would give the greatest opportunity for

the Iraqis to make the hard choices, compromises, negotiations for a

government of national unity, and in doing so would honor those who

have served their country with courage, with valor, and with

distinction.

I yield the floor.