Mr. President, recently in my home State of Vermont, the

Vermont State Senate, with a very strong vote, passed a resolution in

opposition to the war in Iraq and demanding that our troops come home

as soon as possible. It is appropriate our legislature has done that

because in Vermont we have paid a very high price for this war. In

fact, in terms of per capita loss, the State of Vermont is higher,

tragically, than any other State in this country.

In my home State of Vermont, and I believe all across this country,

the American people are deeply concerned about the war. They want real

debate here in Washington on the issue and, most importantly, they want

reaction. That is why I will vote for cloture on S.J. Res. 9 and why I

will then proceed, if I am allowed to, if the Republicans allow us to

cast that vote, to vote for this resolution.

Let me say a word about the resolution itself, which is very clear

and to my mind directly addresses the central concerns of the majority

of Americans who, in the elections last November, made it as clear as

they could that they want a new course in Iraq. They do not want more

of the same, they want a new direction.

The joint resolution we are debating backs our troops, it fully

supports our troops, but recognizes that circumstances in Iraq have

changed dramatically and most importantly establishes a goal of

removing U.S. combat troops by March 2008.

It requires the troop redeployment out of Iraq begin no later than 4

months after the legislation is enacted. The goal it sets of

redeploying most of our troops out of Iraq, March 31, 2008, happens to

be the very same date proposed by the bipartisan and well-respected

Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group. So this follows very closely the line

of thought of the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group.

It allows troops to remain in Iraq for three purposes: to protect

Americans still working on Iraqi reconstruction, to train the Iraqi

police and their military, and to engage in counterterrorism

operations.

In my view, President Bush's war in Iraq has been an unmitigated

disaster. It is a war many of us understood we should never have gotten

into in the first place. It is a war this administration was totally

unprepared to fight, where some people in the administration were

talking about how the Iraqis would be throwing flowers at our troops--

not roadside bombs but flowers--and that our troops would be coming

home after a ``cakewalk,'' in a couple of months.

That was what they were talking about. It is a war that unfortunately

and tragically has cost us terribly in terms of American blood. As of

today, we have lost almost 3,200 brave American soldiers, almost 24,000

more have been wounded. Let me tell you very clearly that the evidence

is overwhelming that tens of thousands more of these brave soldiers

fighting in Iraq are going to be coming home with post-traumatic stress

disorder or coming back home with traumatic brain injury. That is the

reality of what this war has cost us up to now.

This at a time when we do not have the funding to adequately take

care of our veterans, as we have seen at Walter Reed, at a time when

middle-class families cannot afford to send their kids to college, at a

time when this Nation has the highest rate of childhood poverty in the

industrialized world, at a time when hunger in America is substantially

increasing. This war, with the President's proposed increase, will cost

us some $500 billion and that price tag is going up by $8 billion every

month.

This cost is not only going to take money away from the pressing

needs of the middle-class and working families of this country, but it

is going to add to the $8.5 trillion national debt which this country

currently has.

This is a war that has caused unspeakable horror for the people of

Iraq--not just for our families who have suffered losses but for the

people of Iraq. People who had suffered so long

under the horrendous brutality of the Saddam Hussein dictatorship are

suffering even more today. We are looking at a nation in the process of

disintegration. That is Iraq today. There are estimates that hundreds

of thousands of Iraqis have been killed--some estimates go as high as

500,000--and almost 2 million Iraqis have fled their own country. In

fact, anyone in Iraq who has any money at all, anyone who is part of

the middle class, is trying to get out of that country as quickly as

possible, and about 8 percent of Iraqis have had to flee their own

country.

As I speak, President Bush is returning from a trip to Latin America.

Wherever he spoke, he encountered massive protests. In country after

country he discovered that people in Latin America hold our Nation in

extremely low esteem, largely because of his ill-advised decision to

invade Iraq and the disastrous way in which the Iraq occupation has

been managed. That is certainly true not just in Latin America, it is

true all over the world. How are we, as the most powerful military

force in the world, going to be able to lead the world in the very

important fight against international terrorism and Islamic extremism

when in country after country leaders do not want to identify with us

because of the policies of the President of the United States.

In the days immediately following

9/11, the world rallied around the United States when we were

grievously attacked; not just leaders but the huge majority of people

in nations all over the world expressed their support and expressed

their concern for the United States. They were on our side, not just

for reasons of compassion but understanding that we had to work

together as a planet, as a civilized world in addressing the attacks of

extremists and fundamentalists and terrorists. We had to work together

and the United States was prepared to play a leadership role.

Tragically, that reality is no longer the case. We are now held in

lower esteem internationally than ever before in the modern history of

America. That is not just a bad thing in the sense of our young people

going to Europe and finding out they are not respected or that our

country is not respected, it is a bad thing if we are serious about

trying to develop an international consensus to fight the very serious

problem of international terrorism.

Tragically, the Bush administration has refused to listen to the

American people who, in the national election this past November, made

it very clear they want a new direction in Iraq and they want this war

wound down. They did not vote for an escalation in this war, they voted

to wind down the war. This administration has not only not listened to

the American people, they have refused to listen to the thoughtful

suggestions of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group. This administration has

refused to listen to the advice of our military leaders in Iraq who

have told us that increasing troops from the United States would make

it easier for the Iraqi Government and military to avoid their

political and military responsibilities: Why make the hard political

decisions? Why make the hard financial decisions? You don't have to do

that. Uncle Sam is there to provide you with the troops. The American

taxpayer is there to provide you with the money. You don't have to make

those choices.

This administration has not only refused to listen to the American

people, to our military, to the Iraq Study Group, perhaps most

importantly they have refused to listen to the Iraqi people themselves

who, according to a number of polls, tell us very strongly they believe

that in the midst of all of the chaos, all of the horror that is taking

place in their country, they would be more safe, they would be more

secure if our troops left their country.

If President Bush will not listen to anybody, including the American

people, including former generals, including the Iraq Study Group,

including international public opinion, then it is up to Congress to

tell him it is time to move in a new direction in Iraq. In the 2006

elections, in my view, the people of Vermont and of this Nation told us

they wanted Congress to begin asserting its constitutional authority

over this war and that they wanted us to rein in this administration.

Most important, they told us they wanted us to begin the process of

bringing our troops home as soon as possible. As a Vermont Senator,

that is exactly the effort I intend to make. We must bring our troops

home instead of leaving them to be embattled referees of a civil war

that only the Iraqis--not our brave soldiers--can stop.

Iraq's Government and its military must step up and accept their

political and military responsibilities. As the Baker-Hamilton

commission said, that will only happen when we insist that the Iraqis

and not American troops are responsible for the future of Iraq.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.