Madam President, I will vote today to bring up a

resolution for debate that would disapprove of the President's policy

of escalation in Iraq.

Last November, the American people sent a clear message to their

representatives in Washington. With their votes, the American people

said they wanted a change in direction with regard to the war in Iraq.

Unfortunately, the White House--and its defenders in the Senate--has

ignored that will and fought to keep this day from happening for as

long as they could.

We may fail to get the required number of votes to debate this very

simple resolution. And even if we do get enough votes, I realize that

this resolution may not force a single change to this country's policy

in Iraq. I realize that it may not bring the Shiites and Sunnis closer

to peace, nor will it bring a single soldier home from this war.

But for the first time in the 4 years of this long, hard war,

Democrats and Republicans can join together to express the will of the

people who sent us here.

That is why today's vote must be only the beginning, and not the end,

of a long-overdue debate on how we plan to exit Iraq and refocus our

efforts on the wider war against terror. If more stalemate and inaction

follow this resolution, it truly will be a meaningless gesture. It is

now the responsibility of every Member of this body to put forth a plan

that offers the best path to peace among the Iraqis so that our brave

soldiers can finally come home.

Recently, I introduced the Iraq De-Escalation Act of 2007. This plan

would not only place a cap on the number of troops in Iraq and stop the

escalation, it would more importantly begin a phased redeployment of

U.S. forces with the goal of removing of all U.S. combat forces from

Iraq by March 31, 2008--consistent with the expectations of the

bipartisan Iraq Study Group that the President has so assiduously

ignored.

The redeployment of troops to the United States, Afghanistan, and

elsewhere in the region would begin no later than May 1 of this year,

toward the end of the timeframe I first proposed in a speech more than

2 months ago. In a civil war where no military solution exists, this

redeployment remains our best leverage to pressure the Iraqi Government

to achieve the political settlement between its warring factions that

can slow the bloodshed and promote stability.

My plan allows for a limited number of U.S. troops to remain as basic

force protection, to engage in counterterrorism, and to continue the

training of Iraqi security forces.

And if the Iraqis are successful in meeting the 13 benchmarks for

progress laid out by the Bush administration itself, this plan also

allows for the temporary suspension of the redeployment, provided

Congress agrees that the benchmarks have actually been met and that the

suspension is in the national security interest of the United States.

The U.S. military has performed valiantly and brilliantly in Iraq.

Our troops have done all that we have asked them to do and more. But no

amount of American soldiers can solve the political differences at the

heart of somebody else's civil war, nor settle the grievances in the

hearts of the combatants.

It is my firm belief that the responsible course of action for the

United States, for Iraq, and for our troops is to oppose this reckless

escalation and to pursue a new policy. This policy that I have laid out

is consistent with what I have advocated for well over a year, with

many of the recommendations of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, and

with what the American people demanded in the November election.

When it comes to the war in Iraq, the time for promises and

assurances, for waiting and patience, is over. Too

many lives have been lost and too many billions have been spent for us

to trust the President on another tried and failed policy opposed by

generals and experts, Democrats and Republicans, Americans and many of

the Iraqis themselves.

It is time for us to fundamentally change our policy.

It is time to give Iraqis their country back.

And it is time to refocus America's efforts on the challenges we face

at home and the wider struggle against terror yet to be won.