Madam President, this vote on cloture to cut off debate

involves a conflict between two important principles: (1) obtain

fairness for the Senate Republican minority on having our resolutions

and amendments debated and voted upon, and (2) debating and voting on

the approval or rejection of the President's plan to add 21,500 troops

to the U.S. force in Iraq.

At the outset, it must be emphasized that there is unanimity that no

preceptive action be taken by Congress to exercise our ``power of the

purse'' to cut off funds that would in any way endanger our troops.

In response to the majority leader's use of the Senate rule to ``fill

the tree,'' which precludes any Republican alternative resolutions, I

voted against cloture to cut off debate on the Levin amendment on

February 5. The procedure to ``fill the tree'' is contrary to the basic

Senate practice of allowing Senators to offer amendments or alternative

resolutions, unlike the House of Representatives, which customarily

precludes such latitude.

On February 14, I introduced an amendment to rule XXII to stop the

``filling of the tree,'' citing vociferous objections by Senators Reid,

Durbin and Dodd to similar Republican action in the 109th Congress when

Republicans held a majority.

Although it is very important for the minority to exercise its rights

to stop abusive majority practices, it is my judgment that this must

yield to the dominant principle of debating and voting on the future of

U.S. policy in Iraq. Let's move on. We Republicans can exercise our

rights of retaliation in the immediate future on other majority action

to reign in such majority abuse.

In my view, it is most important that the Senate speak out on Iraq.

If we continue to debate whether there should be a debate while the

House of Representatives acts, the Senate will become irrelevant. To

paraphrase the Roman adage: ``The Senate should not fiddle while Iraq

Burns.''

The American people have a right to know the Senate's judgment on

this most important issue of the day, and our constituents have a right

to know and evaluate the judgment of each Senator.

Accordingly, I am voting for cloture to end the debate so we can move

ahead.