Madam President, yesterday, an overwhelming, bipartisan

majority in the other body--reflecting the clear will of the American

people--voted to oppose President Bush's decision to escalate the U.S.

troop presence in Iraq. That vote was preceded by 4 full days of debate

on the resolution. But here in the Senate, the Republican minority

refuses to allow us even to bring a resolution to the floor for debate.

My office has been flooded with phone calls and e-mails from Iowans.

The overwhelming majority of them are upset with the President's

escalation plan. But they are also upset that the Senate is being

obstructed. They simply cannot believe that Republican Senators are

blocking debate on the No. 1 issue before our Nation, the No. 1 concern

on the minds of the American people.

In a nutshell, callers are saying that Republican Senators have a

right to support President Bush's war in Iraq. Republican Senators have

a right to embrace his escalation of that war. But they do not have a

right to block legitimate debate in the Senate on whether that

escalation is wise or appropriate. They do not have a right to silence

the voices of tens of millions of Americans--an overwhelming majority--

who have had enough of the quagmire in Iraq.

People in Iowa--and, I suspect, across the country--are saying that

the election last November was a referendum on President Bush's war.

Voters spoke loudly and clearly: They want our troops out of the civil

war in Iraq.

The American people thought that their elected leaders in Washington

heard this message. But they realize, now, that the Republicans simply

don't care about the results of the election. They are determined to

escalate the war. They are determined to prevent consideration of any

resolution expressing disapproval of that escalation.

As a coequal branch of Government, Congress has a duty to debate this

escalation. Out of respect for all our soldiers and Marines in Iraq--to

keep faith with them--we as Senators have a duty to ask: Does their

Commander-in-Chief have a credible plan in Iraq that is worthy of their

sacrifice? Is the President's plan to escalate in Iraq in the best

interest of the United States? Will the additional troops be sent into

combat with proper equipment?

Unfortunately, the answer to those questions--after nearly 4 years of

incompetence, bungling, and disastrously bad judgment by this

administration--is a resounding ``no.''

Frankly, the President's plan to escalate is not just deeply

disappointing, it is deeply disturbing. I am disturbed because Mr. Bush

refuses to learn, and he refuses to listen. The Joint Chiefs of Staff

unanimously opposed this escalation, as did our generals on the ground

in Iraq. The Iraq Study Group warned that there cannot be a military

solution to the sectarian chaos in Iraq, and said we should begin to

bring our troops home. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is on record

as opposing an increase in American troops. Most importantly, the

American people said loudly and clearly on November 7 that they want

our soldiers out of the civil war in Iraq.

But Mr. Bush refuses to listen to reason. Instead, he seems to listen

only to his gut--the same gut that got us into this misguided,

misbegotten war in the first place.

The President asserts that this latest escalation in Iraq is ``a new

way forward.'' But what he has proposed is not new, and it is not a way

forward. It is the same old ``stay the course'' policy--and it will

drag us deeper into the Iraqi quagmire.

The President has previously ordered three troop surges in Iraq, in

2004, 2005, and 2006. Just last June, he unveiled ``Operation Forward

Together'' to surge troops in Baghdad and secure the capital city. This

operation was supposed to be led primarily by Iraqis, with U.S. troops

in support. But the Iraqi forces never showed up.

Again and again, we have set goals for the Iraqi leaders. But there

have been no deadlines, no accountability, no consequences. And,

predictably, we have seen no positive results. The Iraqi leaders have

reneged on their promises to rein in the militias. They have refused to

compromise. And they have pursued their sectarian agendas with a

vengeance.

So let's not kid ourselves. The President's latest Iraq plan is just

a repackaging of his old, failed Iraq plans.

I am especially concerned about the impact of this escalation on our

troops and their families, and on the U.S. military overall. Army

brigades are supposed to be in combat for 1 year, and then have 2 years

back home to retrain and reequip. But they have only been allowed an

average of 1 year to regroup. And some brigades are now on their third

deployment in Iraq.

One reason why the Joint Chiefs opposed this latest escalation is

because of the deep strain on our combat forces. In December, the Army

chief of staff bluntly warned Congress that the current pace of combat

deployment threatens to quote-unquote ``break'' the Army. Meanwhile, we

lack resources to meet any other contingency, such as a challenge from

Iran or a flare-up on the Korean Peninsula.

Some supporters of the President's escalation claim that by debating

the President's conduct of the war in Iraq and the merits of his

escalation plan, we are somehow not supporting the troops.

I strongly disagree. I have complete confidence in our men and women

in uniform in Iraq. They have brilliantly completed the tasks they were

sent to Iraq to accomplish, and they did so despite a series of

disastrous decisions by their civilian leaders in Washington.

But as a veteran myself, I am angry at the way these brave men and

women have been misused and mistreated.

The President rushed them into combat without proper equipment, and

in insufficient numbers. He has insisted on ``staying the course'' with

a failed policy for nearly 4 miserable years. He has sent many troops

back to Iraq for a third and even fourth rotation, with insufficient

time to retrain and regroup. Now he insists on sending another 21,500

troops into the middle of a sectarian civil war in Baghdad and

elsewhere without properly armored Humvees and other essential

equipment.

Yet despite all of these acts of mismanagement and misfeasance--

directly jeopardizing the lives and welfare of our soldiers and

Marines--the President's supporters have the gall to say that anyone

who opposes this latest escalation somehow ``doesn't support the

troops.''

This would be laughable if it weren't so tragic and deadly. The

Senate has a duty to debate the proposed troop escalation. We have a

duty to speak up when we believe the President's policy is wrong, and

is likely to waste lives. We also have a duty to speak up for the

overwhelming majority of Americans, who oppose this latest escalation,

and who consider the entire war to be a tragic mistake.

At this point, the single best way to support the troops is to tell

President Bush: Four years of bungling, bad judgment, and

bullheadedness are enough. We have complete and total confidence in our

troops. But we have no confidence in your leadership.

During debate in the other body this week, Republicans repeatedly

charged that criticism of the President's escalation serves to

``embolden the enemy.'' And what exactly are these people saying? That

Senators are supposed to stand silent like potted plants as this

administration sinks us even deeper into the Iraqi quagmire?

Our enemies have indeed been emboldened. They were emboldened when

this administration allowed Bin Laden to escape capture at Tora Bora.

They were emboldened when this administration took its eye off the

terrorists in Afghanistan, and diverted our military and intelligence

assets to a reckless invasion of Iraq. They were emboldened when

President Bush taunted the insurgents in Iraq to ``bring it on,'' and

they successfully did just that. They were emboldened when the

President pledged to get Bin Laden ``dead or alive,'' and failed to do

so. They were emboldened when the greatest army in the world was

allowed to get bogged down in a civil war in Iraq and on January 10,

when another 21,500 troops were ordered to deploy to Ground Zero in

that civil war.

Let's be clear: Our enemies have been emboldened by Mr. Bush's

repeated, catastrophic mistakes, not by anyone's criticism of those

mistakes.

The only true way forward in Iraq is to set a timetable for

redeployment of U.S. forces. Only this will give the Iraqi leaders the

incentive to resolve their differences and take responsibility for

their own future.

As GEN George Casey, our commander in Iraq, told the Senate Armed

Services Committee: ``Increased coalition presence feeds the notion of

occupation, contributes to the dependency of Iraqi security forces on

the coalition, [and] extends the amount of time that it will take for

Iraqi security forces to become self-reliant.''

Mr. Bush has it exactly backward. He has said that as the Iraqis

stand up, we will stand down. The truth is that the Iraqis will only

stand up when it is clear that the U.S. troops are leaving.

By redeploying our troops to strategic locations elsewhere in the

Middle East, we will be able to refocus our efforts to destroy the

terrorists who attacked us on September 11, 2001, and who continue to

threaten us. Redeployment would free up U.S. forces to combat the

resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Other troops would be

available to help respond to terrorist threats not just in Iraq, but

also in Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, and elsewhere.

The proposed troop escalation in Iraq is not a way forward; it is a

way deeper into a tragic quagmire. This is not in our national

interest. It is not in the interest of the long-suffering Iraqi people.

And it is certainly not in the interest of our troops, who will be in

the crossfire of a vicious civil war.

The conflict in Iraq cannot be solved militarily. It can only be

solved through political compromise and reconciliation in Baghdad, and

through aggressive diplomatic engagement with Iraq's neighbors and

across the Middle East.

It's time for a truly new course in Iraq. And, to that end, I urge my

colleagues to vote for cloture, and to allow the Senate to debate this

important resolution.

Madam President, I yield the floor.