Madam President, today, the Senate has an opportunity--and

a responsibility--to begin to end the escalation of the war in Iraq and

to start us toward a new strategy for leaving Iraq without leaving

chaos behind.

Our responsibility is to debate and vote on the resolution passed by

the House of Representatives that says that Congress disapproves of the

President's plan to deploy more than 20,000 additional American combat

troops to Iraq.

The question before us today is whether a minority of Senators will

even allow the debate to start. That is what we are about to vote on.

To my colleagues who are thinking about trying to block debate, let

me say this: Iraq dominates our national life. It is on the minds of

tens of millions of Americans. It shapes the lives of hundreds of

thousands of our men and woman in uniform and their families.

That the Senate would not even debate, much less vote on, the single

most urgent issue of our time, would be a total failure of our

responsibility.

We have a duty to debate and vote on the President's plan. We have a

duty to debate and vote on our overall strategy in Iraq. We have to

demonstrate the courage of our convictions.

Last month, Secretary of State Rice presented the President's plan

for Iraq to the Foreign Relations Committee. Its main feature is to

send more American troops into Baghdad, in the middle of a sectarian

civil war.

The reaction on the committee, from Republicans and Democrats alike,

ranged from skepticism to profound skepticism to outright opposition.

And that pretty much reflects the reaction across the country.

Every Senator should be given a chance to vote whether he or she

approves or disagrees with the President's plan to send more troops

into the middle of a civil war.

The debate I hope that we will have is as important as the vote.

I predict the American people will hear very few of our colleagues

stand up and support the President's plan to send more troops into the

middle of a civil war. Listen to those voices.

Some minimize the significance of a nonbinding resolution. If it is

so meaningless, why did the White House and the President's political

supporters mobilize so much energy against it? Why is a minority of

Senators trying to prevent the Senate from talking about it?

Opposing the surge is only a first step. We need a radical change in

course in Iraq.

If the President won't act, Congress must.

But Congress must act responsibly. We must resist the temptation to

push for changes that sound good but produce bad results.

The best next step is to revisit the authorization Congress granted

the President in 2002 to use force in Iraq.

We gave the President that power to destroy Iraq's weapons of mass

destruction and, if necessary, to depose Saddam Hussein.

The WMD were not there. Saddam Hussein is no longer there. The 2002

authorization is no longer relevant to the situation in Iraq.

Legislation I'm working on would repeal that authorization and

replace it with a much narrower mission statement for our troops in

Iraq.

Congress should make clear what the mission of our troops is: to

responsibly draw down, while continuing to combat terrorists, train

Iraqis and respond to emergencies.

We should make equally clear what their mission is not: to stay in

Iraq indefinitely and get mired in a savage civil war.

Coupled with the Biden-Gelb plan that offers the possibility of a

political settlement in Iraq, I believe this is the most effective way

to start bringing our troops home without leaving a mess behind.

But for today, my message is simple: the American people want us to

debate Iraq, the most important issue of our day. They expect it. They

demand it.

If we try to hide behind procedure and delaying tactics, the American

people will hold us accountable.

They get it. The question is: do we?

Madam President, again, today we have the opportunity to do something

we have not done on the floor of the U.S. Senate in the last 4 years;

that is, to actually debate Iraq. This is the first opportunity we are

going to have to do that. I know a number of people say: This is not

binding, so why are we doing it? If it doesn't matter, why is there

such an effort to keep us from talking about it, an effort to continue

to fight us in being able to do this?

Madam President, I say to my colleagues that if we fail to invoke

cloture here, we are not permitted to debate this issue, and I don't

know what it says to the American people about what we are all about. I

don't know whether anybody has noticed, but the American public is

seized with this issue. It is the issue. It is the issue everybody is

discussing at the kitchen table. It is the issue every man, woman,

husband, wife, mother, and father with someone in the National Guard or

in the U.S. military is talking about. It is the issue. The Senate is

being silenced on it, even being prevented from debating whether we can

talk about making a simple statement that: Mr. President, you are

wrong; don't escalate this war.

The truth is, our voices, quite frankly, are as important as our

votes. The President will find, if we have a full-blown debate on the

floor of the Senate, there are precious few people on this floor who

think he is handling this war correctly. Instead of escalating the war,

we should be drawing down our forces. I predict the American people

hear, as I said, very few of our colleagues talking about what a good

idea this is, what the President has in mind. So to echo the comments

made by my colleague from New York, if, in fact, we are precluded from

even debating the issue of whether we oppose the President's escalation

of the war, surely you are going to see more coming to the floor.

I have been working with the Senator from Massachusetts and others on

a

piece of legislation that would literally rescind the President's

authority--the authority we gave him to go to war in the first place--

and redefine the mission very narrowly.

Look, there is going to be a lot of discussion, whether we debate

today or not, on Iraq. There is going to be a lot of discussion about

what to do next. It will range from cutting off funding, to capping

troops, to a number of other proposals. The truth is, we are being

presented with a false choice up to now. We are either told we have to

stay the course and escalate the war or the other choice is to bring

our troops home and hope for the best.

The truth is that none of this will matter. We are going to have to

bring everybody home if they don't get a political solution in Iraq.

There is only one: a federal system. Listen to what their Constitution

says. Even the National Intelligence Estimate, the estimate of all of

the intelligence agencies, says--and I am paraphrasing it--that the

Sunnis have to accept regionalism and the Kurds and Shias have to give

the Sunnis a bigger piece of the action in order for them to do that.

I point out to everybody, when civil wars begin in other countries,

there are only a few things that stop them: One side wins and there is

carnage; two, an occupying force stays there indefinitely; or, three,

you end up in a situation where they have a federal state.

The President should get about the business of pursuing not a

military solution here but a political solution. He should be calling

an international conference, getting all of the parties in a room, as

we did in Dayton, convincing our allies and the region that the only

outcome that has any possibility of surviving is the federal state, as

their Constitution calls for.

I conclude by saying that the American people expect--quite frankly,

I think they demand--that we start to intelligently debate this subject

rather than doing it by way of talk shows and Sunday appearances on TV.

We should be debating on this floor.

I yield the floor.