Madam President, we all know it is rare for the Senate to

hold a Saturday vote, but the issue before us is too important to wait.

There are challenges facing America today, but there is no greater

challenge facing America today than finding a new direction in Iraq.

Every Senator in this Chamber has a responsibility and an obligation

to say whether they support or oppose the President's plan to escalate

the war. Yesterday the House of Representatives acted, 246 to 180, no

escalation. Now it is the turn of this body, the Senate, to give advice

to the President that he is wrong in sending tens of thousands more

American soldiers to a civil war in far away Iraq.

In a few moments, a vote will occur on a straightforward resolution

which simply states that we support our troops and oppose escalation of

the intractable Iraq war. My colleagues on the other side of this

Senate Chamber, colleagues who blocked an Iraq debate last week, have a

choice to make. Do they intend to join the American people in opposing

more of the same in Iraq or do they intend to continue to give the

President a green light to escalate the war? Let the debate proceed.

Let the Senate express its views on the issue of our time.

This month, the Iraq war has cost the lives of three American

soldiers every day, putting us on pace for the bloodiest February since

the war began. It is threatening our Nation's strategic interests and

risking our Nation's security. Today, America has lost 3,133 soldiers

in the streets and highways of a place called Iraq.

We have seen tens of thousands more wounded. The war has

strained our military and depleted our Treasury of almost $500 billion.

The Iraqis are dying at a rate of 100 a day in a vicious sectarian

civil war. Two million Iraqis have left their own country.

By every measure, the administration's failures have put us into a

deep hole in Iraq. Yet the President's new old plan--escalation, more

of the same--won't get us out of the hole. It will only dig the hole

deeper.

Our generals, the Iraq Study Group, and the Iraqis themselves have

told us that escalation will only make Iraq worse, intensify our costs,

and require even greater sacrifices from the American troops, many of

whom are being sent to Baghdad today without the proper armor and

proper equipment and the training they need.

On this issue--escalation, more of the same--the Senate must speak.

The Senate, on behalf of the American people, must make it clear to the

Commander in Chief that he no longer has a rubberstamp. We must show

the American people that the Senate heard their message last November

7, and we, as Senators, are fighting for a new direction for the

134,000 troops already in Iraq and the 48,000 additional troops the

President would send.

The Senate owes as much to these soldiers, sailors, airmen, and

marines. We must proceed with this debate and change the course of a

war that has raged going into 5 years now.

I know some would like to cloud the debate. I know some would like to

delay the debate. I know some would like to have a different debate. I

know some would like to have no debate. Most of the Republican minority

wishes to protect President Bush from an embarrassing vote. They are

trying to divert attention from the issue at hand. They would like to

turn the Senate into a procedural quagmire. They want to hide behind

weak and misleading arguments about the Senate's rules or a Senator's

right to offer amendments. These arguments are diversions.

Today's vote is about more than procedure. It is an opportunity to

send a powerful message: The Senate will no longer sit on the sidelines

while our troops police an ugly civil war in a nation far away. The

issue before America today is escalation. The issue before the Senate

today is escalation. That is why the Senate's responsibility must be to

vote on escalation and whether the so-called surge is supported or

opposed.

This is the choice: More war or less war. I applaud the courage of a

few hardy Republicans who will vote cloture and allow this vote to

occur.

As I said, most of the Republican minority wish to protect President

Bush from this vote. They intend to vote for what is best for their

political party. But as President John Fitzgerald Kennedy said,

``Sometimes party loyalty asks too much.''

Today in the Senate, Republican party loyalty asks too much. In the

Senate this Saturday, this February 17, today is the time for Senators

to vote for openness, for transparency, to show their constituents in

all 50 States: Do our Senators support or oppose sending 48,000 more

United States soldiers and marines into the darkness of Iraq?

During the week we heard speeches about supporting our troops. The

best

way to support the troops is to ensure they have a strategy that will

let them complete their mission so they can come home. We need a new

direction in Iraq. Escalation is not the answer. More of the same is

not the answer. The answer is to tell the President: Not more war but

less war.

I urge my colleagues to vote cloture and thus vote to change course

in this bloody war now raging 7,500 miles from this Senate Chamber and

our beloved United States Capitol.

I yield the floor.