Mr. President, we will hear a lot, today and this week, of

phrases such as ``last best chance,'' ``refuse to endorse an

alternative plan,'' ``Iraq is a central front of the war on terror.''

Virtually no one subscribes to any of those three points--all of the

experts who have given testimony, the Iraqi Study Group, the plans that

have been put forward that are real alternatives.

The President has not put forward a plan. He has put forward a

tactic, a tactic that most experts, including his own military, think

will make a plan for success less likely to be able to be arrived at.

No one in this Senate, at least in this debate, at least from my

perspective, is calling for us cutting and running--none of that. I

hope we keep our eye focused, our eye on the ball.

The Senate is today taking a first step toward a bipartisan effort to

prevent the escalation of a war in Iraq and to adapt a strategy for

Iraq for leaving Iraq without leaving behind chaos.

The first step is to debate and vote the resolution offered by

Senator Warner and reintroduced by Senator Levin and me as a bill. That

says the Senate disagrees with the President's plan to send 17,500 more

American troops into the middle of a city of over 6.2 million people in

the midst of a civil war, because what we are afraid of is that the

Senator from Texas may be right; this may make things so bad that

everyone will conclude there is no more chance of succeeding.

We have vital interests in that region. I am afraid this policy, this

tactic of the President, is going to be a self-fulfilling prophesy. The

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

allow a debate to start. That is what this is about. All they have to

do--there will be other resolutions brought up; they are able to be

brought up--all they have to do is take issue with this. They can stop

the debate by getting 41 votes. But they can actually engage in debate

and try to defeat the notion, when the message of this resolution is:

Mr. President, stop. No more escalation, Mr. President.

Everyone from the Iraq Study Group to the Biden-Gelb plan, to every

other plan that has been put out there says the way to get the Iraqis

to reach a political solution is to begin to draw

down American forces. No one, including General Petraeus, whom I know

fairly well, suggests there is a military answer. A political solution

is required. So to my colleagues who are thinking about trying to block

the 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 women in uniform and their

families. And that the Senate would not even debate, much less vote, on

the single most urgent issue of our time would be a total forfeiture of

our responsibility.

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

have a duty to debate and vote on our overall strategy in Iraq. And we

have a duty as Senators to speak out and say where we are.

Three weeks ago, Secretary of State Rice came before the Foreign

Relations Committee and presented the President's plan. Its main

feature is to send more troops, increase the total number of troops,

and send them into Baghdad in the middle of a sectarian war.

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

ranged from skepticism, to profound skepticism, to outright opposition.

That pretty much reflects the reaction all across the country.

So Senator Hagel joined me and Senator Lugar and Senator Snowe. We

sat down and wrote a resolution to give Senators a way to vote what

their voices were saying, for we believe the quickest and most

effective way to get the President to change course is to demonstrate

to him that his policy has little or no support across the board,

Democrats and Republicans.

After we introduced the resolution, the distinguished ranking member

of the Armed Services Committee, Senator Warner, came forward with his

resolution. The bottom line of the resolutions is the same: Mr.

President, don't send more Americans into the middle of a civil war.

There was one critical difference. As originally written, the Warner

resolution left open the possibility of increasing the overall number

of troops in Iraq, when in fact the Iraq Study Group and others said we

should be declining to get action from the politicians in Iraq.

We believe that would have sent the wrong message. Not ramp up;

again, to draw down, redeploy forces remaining in Iraq. And the best

way to make that clear to the Iraqi people is to let them know we are

not going to be there forever, as the President said. And they must

begin to make the hard compromises necessary for a political solution

that virtually everyone agrees is necessary to end this war.

So we approached Senator Warner to work out our differences, and I am

very pleased to say we succeeded in doing that. The language Senator

Warner removed from his resolution removed the possibility that it

could be read as calling for a troop increase. With that change, we

agreed to support his resolution. And I do.

When I first spoke out against the President's planned surge before

the New Year, I made it clear I had one objective: I hoped to build and

demonstrate bipartisan opposition to this plan because it was the

fastest way to turn the President around. And that is exactly what we

have done.

Now we have a real opportunity for the Senate to speak clearly. Every

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

or disapproves of the President's tactic to send more troops into the

middle of a civil war.

The debate we will have is important, but the debate is as important

as the vote. And I hope the American people carefully listen. I predict

they will hear very few colleagues stand up and support the President's

plan to send more troops into the middle of a civil war. Listen to the

voices. Listen to the voices as well as the votes.

Just as important as what we are voting against is what we are voting

for. This bill, similar to the Biden-Hagel-Levin-Snowe provision, makes

three things clear.

First, Iraq needs a political settlement. Second, the United States

has to work with other regional powers. And third, the mission of our

forces should be confined to counterterrorism, training, and

maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq.

Mr. President, how much time do I have remaining?

I will continue, Mr. President.

As I said at the outset, this is the first step, this rejection of

the President's increase of more troops into Iraq into the middle of a

civil war. But it can set the foundation for everything that follows.

If the President does not listen to the majority of Congress and the

majority of the American people, we will have to look for other ways to

turn this surge around.

Even if we succeed in this effort, we still need to turn our overall

policy around. We need a strategy that can produce a political

settlement in Iraq. That is the only way to stop the Shiites and the

Sunnis from killing each other and to allow our troops to leave Iraq at

an appropriate time without trading a dictator for chaos.

But 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. And if we attempt to hide behind procedure and delaying tactics, I

believe the American people will not be very happy. They get it. The

question is, Do we?

Are you for or against the President escalating this war in Iraq? I

am against it. I believe the majority of Members on both sides are as

well. We should vote on that.

I yield the remainder of my time.