Mr. President, I want to, once again, state the situation.

It has been very well stated by the Republican leader. The simple fact

is, we, as members of the minority, requested the right to offer an

alternative to the proposal of the majority. That is not an unusual

event in the Senate. In fact, it is the purpose of the Senate to debate

different approaches.

What we asked as an alternative was very simple, straight forward

language. Let me read it again. It simply stated:

All this language says is that whether you agree with the President

or whether you disagree with the President, whether you support a

commitment of more troops or you don't support a commitment of more

troops, once the troops are on the ground in the fight, we are going to

give them the financial support, the logistical support, the equipment

that they need in order to protect themselves and pursue their mission

effectively.

Members do not have to support the President to support this

language. It is not designed to state the President is right or the

President is wrong. It is simply language designed to say that an

American soldier deserves the support of the Congress of the United

States. That is an elementary responsibility of this Senate.

The fact that the Democratic leadership will not allow Members to

vote on this simple statement of support for American troops is a

transgression on the purposes of the Senate, which is to express itself

relative to the actions of our soldiers in the field and how we will

support them.

It is literally impossible to address the debate on Iraq without

addressing the most fundamental issue, which is whether our troops are

going to be supported when they are asked to defend us in the field.

The idea that we can decouple the support for the troops from the issue

of policy is absurd on its face, and the position of the Democratic

leadership that we should not address the issue of supporting the

troops when we address the issue of whether the tactics being pursued

by the military commanders in the field are correct--which doesn't

happen to be the responsibility of Congress; that is the responsibility

of the commanders--is by nature inconceivable, inconsistent, and simply

not defensive.

In fact, it is so absurd on its face that I would simply quote the

national commander of the American Legion, Mr. Paul Morin, who says:

That is what this is about: whether the Democratic leadership takes

the truly indefensible position that in a debate on the issue of Iraq,

we do not discuss the support for the person we are asking to go out

and defend this Nation.

What this really comes down to is very simple. This resolution would

have received broad bipartisan support in this Senate. That is because

there are very few Members in this Senate--I would guess virtually

none--who don't believe that our obligation as a Senate, as a

legislative body which funds the military, that our obligation is to

give the soldiers in the field what they need in order to defend

themselves and carry out their mission.

So rather than have a vote on our amendment which would have received

a large majority in this Senate--much

larger than the proposal put forward as their proposal--they decided

not to have a vote at all. Then they claimed that we were responsible

for slowing the process.

How inconsistent and indefensible is that statement: I don't have the

votes; therefore, I will not allow a vote to happen. But it is your

fault that I am not allowing the vote to happen. Really? That only

makes sense if you happen to be a true partisan and believe this debate

should be a partisan debate.

Somehow my language has been described as ``partisan,'' and the other

language has been described as ``bipartisan,'' but the other language

has fewer votes than my language. No, this is not true. It is simply a

fact that the other side of the aisle does not wish to put their

membership in a position of voting for a simple resolution that calls

for the support of our troops.

That is an unfortunate statement on where the Democratic Party is

today relative to support for the efforts of soldiers in the field. It

is hard for me to conceive that there are folks within the community of

interest in Washington who feel so strongly about their dislike for the

President or his policies that they are unwilling to go on record in

support of the soldier who is fighting for us on the streets of

Baghdad. But that is the essence of the problem. That is why we are not

going to have a vote in the Senate. It is not that the Republican

membership has in some way stalled this process. The Republican leader

has gone out of his way, he has gone well beyond what many in our party

believe maybe we should have done in trying to be accommodating to the

insistence of the Democratic leadership that there be no opposition to

the one item that they want to bring to the Senate floor.

In my experience in the Senate, when something is brought to the

floor of the Senate as controversial as the discussion of how we pursue

a war and a war policy, there are going to be a lot of amendments. But

the Senate leadership, under the Democratic leader, has said, no, not

only will there not be a lot of amendments, there will only be one

amendment from our side, and we on the Democratic side will pick the

amendment on the Republican side that they can offer, and we will let

them offer that but nothing else.

The Republican leader, in an attempt to be responsive, said, OK, if

there are only going to be two amendments, we will pick the amendment.

And the amendment will simply say that whether you support the

President, whether you support his policies, at least you can say you

support the troops, the soldiers who are asked to go out and protect

America and walk the streets of Baghdad.

But that was a bridge too far for the Democratic leader, a bridge too

far for the Democratic membership because they did not want to take

that vote even though that would have been a bipartisan vote and would

have received significantly more votes than the Democratic proposal.

I don't think there should be any confusion about why we aren't

having a vote. We are not having a vote because more people would vote

for my amendment than would vote for their amendment, and they don't

want to embarrass their membership by having to have them vote for my

amendment even though there is nothing controversial about it, unless

you consider supporting troops in the field, giving them what they need

to fight and defend themselves, to be controversial.

It is an ironic situation. I thank the Republican leader for having

offered me the opportunity to bring this amendment forward and for

making it fairly clear that we as a membership are willing to be

reasonable; that we only ask for a vote on something that we think is

important while they ask for a vote on something they think is

important.

I yield the floor.