Mr. President, I am dismayed at where we now stand.

Last fall, the people of the United States sent a message to the

President of the United States that the current course of his war in

Iraq is deeply misguided and that bold, new solutions are called for.

The President failed to listen. Yesterday, the Senate, this historic

institution, was prevented from speaking.

What we say in this historic Chamber about our course in Iraq, and

even more what I hope we will do in this Chamber to correct that

course, are among the most urgent concerns of the community of nations.

It matters to millions of Americans who have already raised their

voices in concern at a strategy lacking in foresight and cratered with

flaws. It matters to millions more souls throughout the world whose

lives, whose hopes, whose futures depend on American leadership and

authority.

But we are silenced as a Senate, silenced because yesterday, on the

single most important issue facing America today, on the issue that has

cost more than 3,000 young Americans their lives, tens of thousands

more their limbs and livelihoods, and countless families their well-

being--on the issue where this President has squandered so much of our

national Treasury and national good will--the Senate was silent. It was

silenced by a parliamentary maneuver.

The people we represent deserve better from us. As you know, I am new

to this body, but each time I step through these doors, I bring with me

the hopes and expectations of thousands of Rhode Islanders I have heard

who know it is time for a new direction in Iraq. Tired of a President

who has failed to listen and failed to learn, last November, they

joined millions of their countrymen and voted for change.

Whenever I think of these men and women, I am filled with an enormous

sense of responsibility. They trusted me to hear their voices and to

make sure the Senate hears them too. So I speak today. I share Rhode

Island's conviction that it is time for a change of course. Our troops

and their families

have made countless sacrifices, and our choices in this Chamber must be

worthy of them.

The situation in Iraq is dire, rife with sectarian conflict that can

only be resolved by Iraqi political cooperation, not by American

military force. A broad consensus has emerged from senior military

commanders to the bipartisan Iraq Study Group and throughout the

American people that our best course would be to begin to redeploy

American troops out of Iraq. Instead, the President has insisted on a

costly strategy of escalation that would send more of our soldiers into

harm's way. I believe that to be a terrible mistake.

It is my deeply held conviction that in order to create the best

environment for real change, the President must announce, clearly and

unequivocally, that the United States plans to redeploy our troops from

Iraq. That announcement would change the dynamic, enhancing our

national security position in Iraq, in the Middle East, and throughout

the world in three important ways.

First, a clear statement of American intent to redeploy forces from

Iraq would eliminate the Iraqi insurgents' case that we are an army of

occupation. It would eliminate it once and forever. The Iraqi

population's nationalist sentiment would no longer be engaged against

us. The Iraqi people don't want us there, and a majority of them

consequently believe it is acceptable to kill American soldiers. That

is not an environment in which we can gain likely success.

Second, without a buffering American presence, the world community

would understand it must face the consequences of the Iraq situation.

Other nations in the region and elsewhere around the world would be

motivated to take a more active role to work together to bring peace

and stability to the region. Now, for all intents and purposes, we are

alone.

In particular, Arab nations, facing the risk of a pan-Arabic, Sunni-

Shiite conflict igniting in Iraq, must then assume greater

responsibility for averting such an outcome. Under current U.S. policy,

these Arab countries have little incentive to help calm the conflict or

reduce the violence. Any incentive they have is buffered by America's

role as the peacekeeper and offset by the cost, in so many eyes, of

even associating with the United States.

Third, Iran presently gains immensely from fomenting violence in

Iraq. Keeping America bogged down in a civil war in Iraq undermines

critical U.S. policy objectives, including the effort to work

effectively with the international community to address the serious

threat posed by Iran's nuclear weapons program. The threat of American

redeployment changes that calculation for Iran. The advantages Iran

currently enjoys from bogging America down in Iraq would diminish or

evaporate.

Some argue--we hear it right in this Chamber--that to fail to support

this President's judgment is to fail to support the troops. Never mind

the manifest and repeated flaws in that judgment: Misjudgment on

weapons of mass destruction; misjudgment on when the mission was

completed; misjudgment on the risks, costs, and demands of occupation;

misjudgment on the wisdom of de-Baathification; misjudgment that the

insurgency was in its last throes; and now misjudgment on whether there

is civil war. There has never been a record of error, failure, and

falsity similar to it. Now, the unfortunate fact is the President's bad

misjudgments and failed diplomacy leave us few good options.

Changing the Iraq dynamic can set the stage for an aggressive

international diplomatic effort to restore security in Iraq and combat

terrorism worldwide. An intense diplomatic effort, with the parties

thus motivated by the prospect of American redeployment, is our best

remaining real chance for success. It will also staunch the hemorrhage

of two critical American assets: Our international standing and our

national Treasury--and most importantly, it will bring our troops home.

Without such a change in the dynamic, we are likely to remain trapped

there, seen by many as more provocative than helpful, a great nation

ensnared. For the safety of our troops, the stability of the region and

the security of our Nation, that must not happen.

The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating. It undermines our

national security by hurting our troops and their families, by

diverting our attention from al-Qaida and other critical threats, and

by degrading our military capability for other actions. The Iraq

quagmire demands a new strategy that is both bold and realistic. If we

lead boldly, sensitively, and firmly on the diplomatic front, if we

speak, again, in realities instead of slogans, if we build consensus

instead of polarizing nations, we can restore America's prestige,

leadership, and good will. The President's escalation does not help

achieve these goals, and yesterday the Senate had the opportunity to

say so. We did not. We were silenced--silenced by parliamentary

maneuver.

The Senate has been called the world's greatest deliberative body.

Let us deliberate. The debate over our course in Iraq echoes all over

the world, from world capitals to the kitchen tables of middle

America--everywhere except this silenced Chamber.

Mr. President, I call on my colleagues on the other side of the aisle

to stop the stalling and allow this body to deliberate. Ultimately, the

free and unfettered clash of ideas that a real Senate debate represents

is exactly what our troops in Iraq are fighting for.

Let us, in this historic Chamber, not undermine their sacrifice with

our silence.

For my part, it remains my view that announcing our intent to bring

our soldiers home will help us start down the long road toward renewed

American strength and leadership in the region and in the world. It is

a critical journey, and it is long past time to begin.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.