Mr. President, for the last few weeks, a bipartisan

group of Senators has worked to bring to the floor a resolution

expressing opposition to the President's proposal to increase American

troops in Iraq. In an effort to have an honest, thoughtful, and

productive debate, they put aside their differences, only to be run

over by partisan politics. I support the bipartisan resolution opposing

the escalation. I support an honest and open debate on a policy that

clearly needs to change. But I do not support what I saw take place in

this Chamber yesterday.

Our soldiers and their families have sacrificed too much to accept

the political obstructionism that is keeping this body from having a

debate on a most critical issue. Our troops have given so much, and

they deserve much more than what they got from the U.S. Senate

yesterday. The least we can do is to have this debate, and the best we

can do is to get this policy right for our troops.

I would like to thank those who worked on this resolution: Senators

Levin and Warner and Senators Biden and Hagel and others. Throughout

their careers, they have shown how much they care for the men and women

in uniform. In crafting these resolutions, they showed us that when

principled individuals from opposing parties care strongly about an

issue, politics doesn't always have to win out.

Unfortunately, some in this body still don't want to have a debate

about Iraq. It is long past time to have this debate. The American

people have called for it, our troops have earned it, and we should be

big enough to have it.

Over 3,000 American soldiers are dead, more than 20,000 have been

wounded in combat, over 2,000 have lost their limbs, and more than $350

billion of taxpayer money has gone to Iraq. Scores of Iraqis are killed

every day in what has essentially devolved into a civil war.

All across my State, I have heard a strong and clear message from

Minnesotans: Change the course in Iraq and push for the strategy and

solutions that will bring our troops home. We need a surge in

diplomacy, Mr. President, not a surge in troops. It is a message that

was echoed all across this country from Montana to Minnesota, from

Pennsylvania to Virginia. Unfortunately, there were those in this

Chamber yesterday who did not listen to that message, who would prefer

no debate. This bipartisan resolution expresses the strong opposition

of this body to the President's decision to stay the course and send an

additional 21,000 American troops to Iraq. I strongly support this

bipartisan resolution and implore my colleagues to allow this

resolution its due course.

The people of Minnesota, like their fellow citizens around the

country, recognize what is at stake in Iraq. Of the 22,000 troops

involved in the surge, nearly 3,000 are from Minnesota. As I have

traveled throughout our State, I have spoken with many families who

have paid a personal price in this war, and I think of them often.

I think of Claremont Anderson from Hoffman, MN, who would drive

hundreds of miles to attend public events in the last 2 years. I just

saw him and his wife Nancy this weekend; they braved 7-degree below-

zero wind chills to come to an event in Glenwood, MN. When I see

Claremont, any time anyone even talks about the war, he starts to cry.

That is because his son Stuart, an Army Reserve major, was killed in a

helicopter crash in Iraq.

I think of Kathleen Wosika from St. Paul, MN. Just last month, her

son, James Wosika, Jr., was killed while he was patrolling on foot in

an area near Fallujah. He was a sergeant with the Army National Guard

1st Brigade, whose current duty will be extended under the President's

escalation. Sergeant Wosika was the third member of his unit to die

within a 6-month period. He was the seventh member of the brigade to be

killed since their deployment last spring.

I also think of Becky Lourey of Kerrick, MN. That is near Duluth. She

is a mother of 12 and a former State senator. Her son Matt was killed

when the Army helicopter he was piloting went down north of Baghdad. I

watched this Gold Star mother, a woman who has adopted eight children,

comfort her grandchildren, hold her shaking husband, and stand tall for

hours in a high school gym in Finlayson, MN, where hundreds of people

came to gather for her son's memorial service.

Claremont Anderson, Kathleen Wosika, and Becky Lourey are parents

whose children made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country,

and they are among the many Minnesotans who told me without apology

they want to see a change of course in Iraq. They pray others will not

have to experience their pain.

Although I opposed this war from the beginning, I recognized that

many did support it. But 4 years later, we are now dealing with a

dramatically different situation. What we know now about the events and

facts leading up to this war has changed dramatically. The conditions

inside Iraq have changed dramatically. Our role there has changed

dramatically.

Last November, citizens in Minnesota and across the country voted for

a new direction in Washington. Americans made clear at the ballot box

they were tired of the politics-as-usual partisan bickering and that

they wanted a meaningful and bipartisan change of course in Iraq. To

the country's bewilderment, the President responded with a plan to

escalate the number of American troops in Iraq. That is not the change

in course the American people voted for. It is not the change in course

the Iraq Study Group recommended. It is not the change in course Iraq

needs to halt its civil war. It is not the change in course our

military forces deserve.

Distinguished Senators from both sides of the aisle are seeking ways

for this body to bring about the right kind of change. The bipartisan

resolution proposes a strategy that recognizes the facts on the ground

in Iraq. It incorporates many of the recommendations of the Iraq Study

Group.

For years, we have heard from administration officials, from military

officials, and from the Iraqis themselves that there can be no military

solution in Iraq. Stability can only be achieved through diplomatic and

political solutions. This resolution calls on the administration to

engage other nations in the region to create conditions for the

compromises between Iraqi Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds that will be

necessary for peace. Furthermore, the resolution calls on the

administration to apply pressures on the Iraqis themselves to stand up

and take responsibility for their country. By following the

recommendations of this resolution, the President would send a much

stronger signal to the Iraqis that we are not going to be staying

there indefinitely.

As of last Thanksgiving, this war has now lasted longer than World

War II, and after nearly 4 years of intensive military involvement in

Iraq, including more than 3,000 American deaths, we have to be focused

on reducing our troop presence in Iraq instead of putting even more

American service men and women in harm's way. Haven't we asked our men

and women to sacrifice enough?

Recently, at the funeral for a fallen soldier, I heard a local priest

say that our leaders have an obligation to do right by our children

when we send them to war. He said that our children may be over 6 feet

tall when we send them to war, but they are still our children. ``If

the kids we are sending to Iraq are 6 feet tall,'' he said, ``then our

leaders must be 8 feet tall.'' I would add that if these soldiers are

willing to stand up and risk their lives for our country, then those of

us in the Congress must be brave enough to stand up and ask the tough

questions and push for the tough solutions.

Claremont Anderson, Kathleen Wosika, and Becky Lourey are standing

tall. The parents I met with this weekend whose kids are supposed to be

coming home this month but are now staying much longer, they are now

doing everything to be brave and stand tall. The 400 members of the Air

Minnesota National Guard whose deployment ceremony I attended Sunday,

in Duluth, MN, they are standing tall. The teenage brother and sister

who will see not only their dad but also their mom be deployed in the

next 2 weeks, those two kids are standing tall. My friend Senator Webb,

who will speak with us momentarily and whose son is serving bravely, he

is over there and he is not afraid. He is standing tall. The injured

soldiers in the VA hospital in Minnesota recovering from traumatic

brain injuries and in their wheelchairs with their strength and their

spirit, they too are standing tall.

I would say to my friends across the aisle, by having an honest and

open debate on this war and on this resolution, we in Congress can also

and finally stand tall.

Our Constitution says that Congress should be a responsible check and

balance on Presidential power. Congressional oversight for Iraq policy

is long overdue. We have seen this bipartisan resolution and bipartisan

work challenging the President's proposal for an escalation of American

troop levels in Iraq. Even as Commander In Chief, our President does

not enjoy unlimited power. On behalf of the public, Members of this

body have a responsibility to exercise our own constitutional power in

a fairminded, bipartisan way, to insist on accountability, and to

demand a change of course. Ultimately, the best way to help our

soldiers and their families is not only to give them the respect they

deserve but also to get this policy right.

I hope that my friends across the aisle will see the merits of this

resolution and the urgency of having an open and honest debate on this

issue; our troops and their families deserve nothing less.

I thank the Chair.

Mr. President. I yield the floor.