Mr. President, I would like to speak briefly on what is a

roiling debate not only in the Senate but across the country and that

is the President's policy with respect to Iraq. There are countless

reasons the American people have lost confidence in the President's

Iraq policy, but chief among them has been the administration's

insistence on making promises and assurances about progress and victory

that do not appear to be grounded in the reality of the facts. We have

been told we would be greeted as liberators. We have been promised the

insurgency was in its last throes. We have been assured again and again

that we are making progress and that the Iraqis would soon stand up so

we could stand down and our brave sons and daughters could start coming

home. We have been asked to wait, we have been asked to be patient, and

we have been asked to give the President and the new Iraqi Government 6

more months and then 6 more months after that and then 6 more months

after that.

Now, after the loss of more than 3,000 American lives, after spending

almost $400 billion after Iraq has descended into civil war, we have

been promised, once again, that the President's plan to escalate the

war in Iraq will, this time, be well planned, well coordinated, and

well supported by the Iraqi Government. This time, we didn't have to

wait to find out that none of this seems to be the case. Already,

American military officials have told the New York Times that there is

no clear chain of command between Iraqis and U.S. commanders and no

real indication that the Iraqis even want such a partnership.

Yesterday, Prime Minister al-Maliki, the person whom the President said

had brought this plan to us, the man who is supposed to be our partner

in chief for this new plan, told foreign journalists that if the United

States would only give his Army better weapons and equipment, our

soldiers could go home.

The President's decision to move forward with this escalation anyway,

despite all evidence and military advice to the contrary, is the

terrible consequence of the decision to give him the broad, open-ended

authority to wage this war back in 2002. Over 4 years later, we can't

revisit that decision or reverse some of the tragic outcomes, but what

we can do is make sure we provide the kind of oversight and constraints

on the President this time that we failed to do the last time.

I cannot in good conscience support this escalation. It is a policy

which has already been tried and a policy which has failed. Just this

morning, I had veterans of the Iraq war visit my office to explain to

me that this surge concept is, in fact, no different from what we have

repeatedly tried, but with 20,000 troops we will not in any imaginable

way be able to accomplish any new progress.

The fact is that we have tried this road before. In the end, no

amount of American forces can solve the political differences that lie

at the heart of somebody else's civil war. As the President's own

military commanders have said, escalation only prevents the Iraqis from

taking more responsibility for their own future. It is even eroding our

efforts in the wider war on terror as some of the extra soldiers will

come directly from Afghanistan where the Taliban has become resurgent.

The President has offered no evidence that more U.S. troops will be

able to pressure Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds toward the necessary

political settlement, and he has attached no consequences to his plan

should the Iraqis fail to make progress. In fact, just last week, when

I repeatedly asked Secretary Rice what would happen if the Iraqi

Government failed to meet the benchmarks the President has called for

and says are an integral part of their rationale for escalation, she

couldn't give me an answer. When I asked her if there were any

circumstances whatsoever in which we would tell the Iraqis that their

failure to make progress means the end of our military commitment, she

could not give me an answer. This is simply not good enough. When you

ask how many more months and how many more dollars and how many more

lives it will take to end the policy that everyone now knows has not

succeeded, ``I don't know'' isn't good enough.

Over the past 4 years, we have given this administration every chance

to get this right, and they have disappointed us many times. But

ultimately it is our brave men and women in uniform and their families

who bear the greatest burden for these mistakes. They have performed in

an exemplary fashion. At no stage have they faltered in the mission

that has been presented to them.

Unfortunately, the strategy, the tactics, and the mission itself have

been flawed. That is why Congress now has the duty to prevent even more

mistakes and bring this war to a responsible end. That is why I plan to

introduce legislation which I believe will stop the escalation of this

war by placing a cap on the number of soldiers in Iraq. I wish to

emphasize that I am not unique in taking this approach. I know Senator

Dodd has crafted similar legislation. Senator Clinton, I believe,

yesterday indicated she shared similar views. The cap would not affect

the

money spent on the war or on our troops, but it would write into law

that the number of U.S. forces in Iraq should not exceed the number

that were there on January 10, 2007, the day the President announced

his escalation policy.

This measure would stop the escalation of the war in Iraq, but it is

my belief that simply opposing the surge is not good enough. If we

truly believe the only solution in Iraq is a political one--and I

fervently believe that--if we believe a phased redeployment of U.S.

forces in Iraq is the best--perhaps only--leverage we have to force a

settlement between the country's warring factions, then we should act

on that. That is why the second part of my legislation is a plan for

phased redeployment that I called for in a speech in Chicago 2 months

ago. It is a responsible plan that protects American troops without

causing Iraq to suddenly descend into chaos. The President must

announce to the Iraqi people that, within 2 to 4 months, under this

plan, U.S. policy will include a gradual and substantial reduction in

U.S. forces. The President should then work with our military

commanders to map out the best plan for such a redeployment and

determine precise levels and dates.

Drawing down our troops in Iraq will put pressure on Iraqis to arrive

at the political settlement that is needed and allow us to redeploy

additional troops in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the region, as well

as bring some back home. The forces redeployed elsewhere in the region

could then help to prevent the conflict in Iraq from becoming a wider

war, something that every international observer is beginning to worry

about. It will also reassure our allies in the gulf. It will allow our

troops to strike directly at al-Qaida wherever it may exist and

demonstrate to international terrorist organizations that they have not

driven us from the region.

My plan would couple this phased redeployment with an enhanced effort

to train Iraqi security forces and would expand the number of our

personnel--especially special forces--who are deployed with Iraqis as

unit advisers and would finally link continued economic aid in Iraq

with the existence of tangible progress toward reducing sectarian

violence and reaching a political settlement.

One final aspect of this plan that I believe is critical is it would

call for the engagement by the United States of a regional conference

with other countries that are involved in the Middle East--particularly

our allies but including Syria and Iran--to find a solution to the war

in Iraq. We have to realize that neither Iran nor Syria wants to see

the security vacuum in Iraq filled with chaos, terrorism, refugees, and

violence, as it could have a destabilizing effect throughout the entire

region and within their own countries. So as odious as the behavior of

those regimes may be at times, it is important that we include them in

a broader conversation about how we can stabilize Iraq.

In closing, let me say this: I have been a consistent and strong

opponent of this war. I have also tried to act responsibly in that

opposition to ensure that, having made the decision to go into Iraq, we

provide our troops, who perform valiantly, the support they need to

complete their mission. I have also stated publicly that I think we

have both strategic interests and humanitarian responsibilities in

ensuring that Iraqi is as stable as possible under the circumstances.

Finally, I said publicly that it is my preference not to micromanage

the Commander in Chief in the prosecution of war. Ultimately, I do not

believe that is the ideal role for Congress to play. But at a certain

point, we have to draw a line. At a certain point, the American people

have to have some confidence that we are not simply going down this

blind alley in perpetuity.

When it comes to the war in Iraq, the time for promises and

assurances, for waiting and patience is over. Too many lives have been

lost and too many billions have been spent for us to trust the

President on another tried-and-failed policy, opposed by generals and

experts, opposed by Democrats and Republicans, opposed by Americans and

even the Iraqis themselves. It is time to change our policy. It is time

to give Iraqis their country back, and it is time to refocus America's

effort on the wider struggle against terror yet to be won.