Mr. President, tomorrow morning, the national debate on

the war in Iraq will continue on the floor of the Senate. The debate

has now reached the stage where we are talking about funding for the

war. This war, in its fifth year, has claimed almost 3,900 of our best

and bravest soldiers. Some 30,000 have been injured, more than 10,000

with amputations, burns, and traumatic brain injuries, serious injuries

that they will struggle with for a long time.

Earlier this week, I watched a television documentary. James

Gandolfini, who has been in many movies, television documentaries, and

shows, interviewed disabled veterans. I believe it was titled ``Alive

Day Memories.'' It was a story of how each of these disabled vets from

Iraq recalled the day when they believed they had been killed and their

lives lost but somehow survived miraculously. They are extraordinary

stories of courage, emotional stories about what they went through, and

heartbreaking stories about some of the injuries they brought home.

They were victims of traumatic brain injury--a young man with a video

showing him in his youth with all the strength and vitality one could

ask for, now struggling from a wheelchair to speak and to look forward

to a life where he can walk and be anywhere near normal; his mother by

his side holding his hand to calm him when the emotions overcame him.

There were amputees talking about returning home. Many of them

worried about whether they would be accepted. There were some

wonderful, heartwarming stories of families who stood by them through

this whole struggle and are with them even to this day.

There was a beautiful young woman who was a lieutenant in the Army in

her mid-twenties, red hair, as pretty as can be. A rocket-propelled

grenade went off right next to her. It blew off her right arm and right

shoulder. She showed extraordinary bravery in talking about what she

had been through and putting her life together, and then struggled for

words when she talked about whether she would ever have a family,

whether she would ever have a child who would look at her as a mother.

I watched that show and thought about my role as a Senator, and I

thought about this war. I was 1 of 23 who voted against it in the

Senate. It seems so long ago, 5 years. A vote that was at the time

politically hard, but a vote that I never ever questioned or regretted.

Now 5 years later, here we are still--still--with these stories, this

handful of stories we saw on the documentary just representing a small

percentage of the heroism and suffering of this war.

I have had the opportunity to speak with this President directly

about these men and women. I have talked with him about Eric Edmundson

from North Carolina, a young man, a victim of traumatic brain injury

who has become close to me through his family and visited with me just

this last week in my office in Washington. I have seen his family up

close, and I know the extraordinary love they have for their son and

father of their granddaughter. The sacrifices they have made for him,

his wife and baby daughter, are extraordinary.

We have a Capitol guide--I wish I knew his name, and I will make it a

point of finding it out--who makes a special effort to offer tours late

at night for disabled veterans from Walter Reed. I run into him in the

corridors after everybody is gone, and it is dark outside. He is giving

special, personalized tours to veterans and their families. He always

stops and introduces them and asks if we will pose for a picture. Of

course, it is the least we can do, and we agree to do it.

He came by last week to Senator Harry Reid's office and brought a

young man from New Jersey. I believe his name was Ray. Ray had his

young wife and beautiful little daughter with him, Kelsey. Kelsey was

about 16 months old, 17 months old. She was running everywhere. She was

just a bundle of energy and happy as could be, as her mother worried

she might break something.

Ray was in a wheelchair. He had lost both of his legs and lost a few

fingers on his left hand. He had served in Iraq. He came back and

considered himself lucky. He talked about what he was going to do from

this point forward. So many stories of bravery.

Tomorrow morning we will have a vote, and it will be our chance to

speak as a Senate about this war. Some people will view it as just

another routine vote, predictable outcome, and be on with their lives

and head home for Thanksgiving. But for me, it is a chance, just a

small chance, to return to a debate which I know consumes the hearts

and minds of so many Americans.

I can't tell you how many people I run into, particularly the

families of these soldiers, who want this war to

end. I want to, too. And tomorrow we will have a chance to do that.

Tomorrow we will have two votes. Senator McConnell is going to try to

move a spending bill which will provide $70 billion for this war in

Iraq with no strings attached. He will hand over this money, if he has

his way, to President Bush, and we know what the outcome would be. The

war would continue unchanged until this President walks out of office

January 20, 2009. That is unacceptable to me, and I think it is

unacceptable to many in this Chamber.

We have to change this war. We have to start bringing these troops

home. We have to tell the Iraqis: We have given you as much time as you

could reasonably ask for to build your country and govern your country

and defend your country.

This morning's Washington Post has a front-page headline: ``Iraqis

Wasting An Opportunity, U.S. Officers Say.'' Wasting an opportunity. It

is an opportunity created by the lives and blood of our soldiers, those

who were there dying on the ground to give the Iraqis a chance, and our

military leaders have said they are wasting an opportunity.

If Senator McConnell has his way tomorrow, we will hand this

President $70 billion and say: Mr. President, more of the same; just

keep it coming. I will not be part of that.

There is a second choice. Senator Harry Reid, our Democratic majority

leader, will offer a chance to provide $50 billion to this President

with the understanding that within 30 days, American soldiers start

coming home in a meaningful way, with a goal that by the end of next

year, all of our combat forces will be out of Iraq. There will be some

remaining. It would not be a complete cutoff, but they will be there

for specific reasons--to fight counterterrorism and to protect

America's remaining civilian and military personnel, to train the

Iraqis with a limited responsibility because we put so much into this

so far.

I think that is the reasonable way to go. That bill we will vote on

will also say that the President cannot send military units overseas

until they are combat ready unless he certifies they are combat ready

or gives good reason why they do not have to be combat ready.

I have been there. I have talked with these soldiers. Fifteen months

is too long. We had a briefing just the other day from one of the

leaders in the Marine Corps. He conceded that point. Fifteen-month

deployments are too long to maintain the morale, to maintain the

readiness, to separate these soldiers from their families for 15

months. He said something that will stick with me.

He said: Can you imagine what goes through your mind when you are a

soldier on the ground in Iraq at Christmas, realizing you are going to

be there for another Christmas? That is what these soldiers are facing.

That is what this President has put us into, a situation where we have

pushed our brave men and women to the limit.

Oh, support our troops and love our soldiers. Well, I do. I want to

support our troops by bringing them home as soon as possible in an

orderly, responsible way. Not what Senator McConnell wants: to let this

President continue with 187,000 American soldiers currently on the

ground and no end in sight. That is unacceptable.

Some will say it is just another vote and nobody will notice. Maybe

that is so. But for those of us who believe very strongly this war

needs to come to an end, tomorrow morning is an opportunity. I hope the

American people who can follow this debate through C-SPAN, who can

follow our votes by referencing Congress on the Internet, will take a

look at that rollcall tomorrow morning and will judge which Senators

from which States want to change this policy in Iraq and see this war

come to an end. We will have our chance tomorrow morning. It is a

chance we should not miss.

For all those brave men and women who have served us so well in Iraq

and those who may be called tomorrow, we owe them a ``yes'' vote on the

Reid cloture motion tomorrow, and I will be voting that way.

I yield the floor.