Mr. President, at this moment across the Rotunda, not far

from here, in the House of Representatives, there is an ongoing debate

about the war in Iraq. It has been 2 or 3 days of debate with Members

each allowed 5 minutes to express their feelings about this war. It is

historic. It happens rarely that that procedure is used, almost always

in cases involving war. I have been through it as a Member of the House

of Representatives and can recall the sleepless nights that led to

votes on questions of war. You know that at the end of the day, if the

decision to go forward on a war is made, people will die.

Many decisions we make on the floor of the House and Senate have

little consequence, some are purely ceremonial, and some just deal with

money. But when it comes to war, it is a matter of life and death. So I

am sure every Member of the House of Representatives, regardless of

their feelings about this war, has thought long and hard about what

they are saying. They have taken this matter very seriously because

they understand that America is taking this very seriously.

We have lost over 3,100 of our best and bravest soldiers, men and

women who have gone off to war with parents behind and families crying,

wondering if they will return safely. Unfortunately, they did not, some

of them. There are some 23,000 or 24,000 who have returned with serious

injuries. Some are minor, but some are very serious, such as

amputations and blindness, traumatic brain injuries and many other

injuries that will haunt these soldiers for a lifetime as they try to

return to normal life.

We have spent a lot of money on this war, over $400 billion. As we

labor with this new budget, we see the result of the decision to go to

war. From the monetary side, it shortchanges America in terms of what

we desperately need. Whether we are talking about additional medical

research, help for education, money to schools that need a helping hand

to make No Child Left Behind work, assistance for families to have

health insurance and health protection, this war has been costly to

America. For those who believe the money would have been better spent

right here at home, that a strong America begins at home, there is a

serious concern about when this war will end and what the ultimate cost

will be.

We know our military is much different today than when we invaded

Iraq. It was an invasion this President decided to make without

provocation and, frankly, without evidence that there was any serious

threat against our country. Having made that decision, having gone

overseas and lost these lives and brought back so many injured

soldiers, we understand now we live in a different Nation. We live in a

Nation where we watch, sadly every day, evidence of violence in Iraq,

evidence of innocent people being killed on their streets, and

unfortunately our own soldiers are caught in the crossfire of their

civil war.

In the last election, the American people were finally given a chance

to speak about this war, and they said: We want a change. We don't want

this to continue. We don't want to continue to lose these brave

soldiers or continue to spend this money. They elected a Congress which

was given the charge of moving us in that new direction. For the first

time in a long time, Democrats control both the House and the Senate.

In the Senate, it is a very scant margin. On a good day, it is 51 to

49.

Those who know the Senate, know that important measures take 60

votes. In order to achieve passage, we need bipartisan cooperation. We

need to reach across the aisle and find common ground. We have tried to

do that. In some respects, we have been successful. We have passed

bipartisan ethics reform to deal with some of the issues of integrity

that have haunted this Chamber and the House of Representatives over

the last several years. We have passed a minimum wage increase at the

Federal level for the first time in 10 years--something long overdue.

We even passed a spending bill to finish this fiscal year, to try to

mop up some of the unfinished business from last year's Congress, which

left town with many appropriations bills unresolved.

The one issue we have not addressed in the Senate, the issue now

being debated in the House of Representatives, is the war in Iraq. We

feel--many of us on the Democratic side and some on the Republican

side--that we should have this debate. We owe it to the American

people. Members should stand up and state where they are, what their

position is, and what they think we should do as a Nation. I know if

this debate took place, it would be important not just for this

institution but for the country to know we came here understanding our

responsibility.

Two weeks ago, we offered to the Republican side of the aisle an

opportunity to debate the very fundamental question raised by the

President's new plan for Iraq. The President has proposed another

21,000 American soldiers in combat mode going into Iraq to join the

130,000 already there. We know that 21,000 combat soldiers would

require at least the like number of support troops, so it is a

substantial escalation of the war to add 42,000 or 44,000 American

soldiers to the 130,000 already there. Many of us think it would be a

serious mistake. We question whether escalating this war, sending more

troops into harm's way, is any way to bring it to an end.

We have tried it before unsuccessfully. Additional troops, as good as

they are, cannot overcome the ravage of a civil war. Unfortunately, we

have learned that we suffer more casualties every time we send our

brave soldiers and marines and airmen and sailors into this conflict.

So we tried 2 weeks ago to start the debate, to let Members stand and

say whether they support the President's escalation of the war or

whether they oppose it.

Most Americans have an opinion. In fact, overwhelmingly they say it

is a bad idea. When asked, they can give a yes or no as to whether they

support the President's escalation. We offered to the Republican side

of the aisle not just a yes or no but their answer to our criticism of

the President's escalation. We said we would stand by two separate

Republican resolutions to be offered on the floor. One Republican

resolution, sponsored by John Warner, Republican of Virginia, critical

of the escalation of the war, was supported by most Democrats,

including myself. The other, offered by Senator John McCain, a

Republican of Arizona, supports the President's position on the war.

I think it would have been a spirited debate, an important and

historic debate, but the Republicans rejected that. They wanted more.

They wanted more resolutions brought to the floor. They didn't want us

to focus on the very fundamental issue at hand. They wanted to bring in

other issues, such as funding for the war, support for the troops, and

so many things that were not at issue, were not what we were

discussing. So we tried to keep the focus on the basic issue: Should we

escalate the number of troops committed to this war?

We had what we call a cloture motion, which means closing down debate

on a certain issue. A cloture motion would say we are going to move to

the debate on the war in Iraq. We called that cloture motion, and it

failed. As I said, we don't have 60 votes on this side of the aisle. We

need help on the other side of the aisle. Only two Republican Senators

said we will join you in calling for a debate on the Warner resolution

and a debate on the McCain resolution. Two Republicans stepped forward.

The rest said: No, we don't want that debate.

Well, an odd thing happened. After that vote, many of the Senators

had Senator's remorse, I call it. It is a version of buyer's remorse.

They wished they had cast another vote. Within days, they started

coming to the floor and saying, that isn't what we meant to say. We

didn't want to say stop the debate on Iraq. We believe there should be

debate on Iraq. Yes, they said, we voted to stop the debate on Iraq,

but we didn't mean to stop the debate on Iraq.

They were so transparent. They were twisted in knots. They came to

the floor repeatedly, seven or eight of them. They sent letters to the

leadership. They had press conferences, and they talked to anyone in

the hallway, saying they had made a mistake and they wanted to return

to the issue. So we gave them that chance today. We gave them that

chance. We said: Let us return to the issue, let us debate the issue on

the floor of the Senate as they have done it in the House, and let us

also add to that another Republican opportunity for the McCain

amendment, which supports the President's position. We would have,

again, a basic vote on a fundamental issue, fair and square. What did

the minority leader from Kentucky do? He objected. He didn't want to

engage in that debate. That is truly unfortunate. While the House of

Representatives is deeply engaged in a debate of historic moment,

important to everyone across this country and particularly to our men

and women in uniform, unfortunately, the minority objected. They don't

want to engage in a straight up-or-down debate on the fundamental

issue.

The argument they make is, we have many other things we want to talk

about when it concerns Iraq. We may want to talk about funding for

Iraq. We may want to talk about the ability of Congress to cut off

funding--all of these issues. And we have said to them, that is all

well and good, we will give you the chance to do it. As soon as this

debate is finished on the escalation of troops, the President's

proposal, we will immediately, within hours, move to the next issue,

the 9/11 Commission recommendations, open to amendment, and then you

can offer whatever amendment you care to on the issue of Iraq.

So it wasn't a matter of foreclosing the debate, it was a matter of

saying: Let us focus the first part of this debate on an up-or-down

question on the President's escalation of the war. You can vote, as the

House is about to, saying this is a bad policy or you can support

Senator McCain, who believes that sending more troops is the right

policy. They rejected it.

So now we have been forced to a position, which I am not happy with,

but which we have to accept, and that is we have to call another

cloture vote, another procedural vote, another attempt to move us to a

debate stage. That vote is going to occur, as presently scheduled, on

Saturday afternoon. It will be a historic vote as well because, once

again, the Republican minority will have a chance to join us in

starting the national debate on Iraq in the Senate.

The question is: Will they support this effort this time? I hope they

will. I hope they will come on Saturday, as inconvenient as it may be

in their personal schedules, and join us in voting for cloture. If they

will, if we can bring 60 votes forward to close down debate on the

procedural aspects and move forward on the real debate about Iraq, it

is a good thing for America. If they continue to hold to this position

that they are going to protect this White House from any possibility of

embarrassment, that they are going to somehow stop the Senate, which

has a reputation as the great deliberative body on Capitol Hill, if

they are going to stop the Senate from the debate on Iraq, it will be

at the expense of this institution and, more importantly, at their own

expense.

The American people, whatever their position on this issue, expect us

to stand up and debate it and to say where we stand. We will find on

Saturday how

many of the Republican Senators answer the rollcall; how many come and

how they vote.

We know that as inconvenient as it may be for these Senators to

return on Saturday, as tough as it may be for many of them to get back,

it can't be any tougher than the assignments we give to our soldiers

and sailors and marines and airmen to put on the uniform of our United

States of America and to defend our country and to risk their lives

every day.

So I hope our colleagues will be with us on Saturday. I hope they

will join us in moving forward on this debate.

I can recall the vote that led us into the war in Iraq as if it were

yesterday. It was a time just weeks before an election. There was

almost a feeling of hysteria across this country about the possibility

of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Condoleezza Rice, who was then

Security Adviser to the President, suggested the possibility of

mushroom-shaped clouds. All sorts of fears were engendered in a

population still very wary after 9/11. It was not an easy vote because

there had been a buildup, this drumbeat of support for invasion. And

the day came in October when it occurred. There were 23 of us who voted

no, one from the State of Rhode Island on the Republican side and 22

Democrats voting no. At the time, it was not an easy vote. I look back

on it now as one of the most important votes I ever cast.

There comes a time when Members of the Senate have to face

responsibility and face a vote. There will come a time when the

Republicans have to face a vote on Iraq. They cannot protect the

President and the White House indefinitely and forever.

I had a great friend from the State of Oklahoma, a Congressman by the

name of Mike Synar. I have told this story many times, and I mention

his name because I don't want him to be forgotten. He passed away in

1996 from a brain tumor. But Mike was one of a kind. He just could not

stand Members of the House of Representatives who were unwilling to

face tough votes. He used to get up in our caucus over there and get

the floor, and we knew what was coming when people were whining and

complaining about facing a controversial vote or controversial debate.

He was right. Whether you are on this side of the aisle or that side

of the aisle, you better be prepared to face a tough vote and an

important vote, and nothing is more important than a war, a war which

has so many of our great soldiers with their lives on the line as we

stand in the safety of this Capitol Building.

I hope my colleagues on the Republican side will reconsider their

position. They cannot stop this debate. It is going to occur. It is

occurring across America in family rooms, in offices, in schools, in

restaurants. Everywhere you turn, in the streets, in the shopping

centers, it is occurring. It is going to occur right here on the Senate

floor. They cannot hold back the tide. It is building against them.

That tide is going to push them over, and we are going to bring this

issue to a debate on the floor. We owe it not only to the men and women

in uniform, we owe it to the people who were kind enough to give us a

chance to serve in the Senate.