Mr. President, I think it is clear that the American

people want the Senate to have a debate on this issue. There is no

doubt about that. I very much hope that enough Senators, when we vote

tomorrow, will vote to invoke cloture so we can do just that, have a

debate. I think for the Senate to not vote to invoke cloture would be

very irresponsible. I cannot for the life of me imagine why the Senate

would not conduct that vote. I very much hope when we have that vote

tomorrow that 60 Senators, more than 60 Senators vote in favor of

cloture so the Senate can address one of the most fundamental issues

that I think is on Americans' minds.

I was going to go to Iraq tonight because I wanted to see firsthand

what is going on. I wanted to talk to troops, talk to commanders. I

wanted to talk to not only the American personnel but also the Iraqis.

I wanted to determine, the best I could, the degree to which Prime

Minister Maliki and the Iraqis are able to stand on their own two feet

and do what they are supposed to do; that is, govern and run their own

country. I am not going to go over tonight, obviously. I want to be

here tomorrow and cast my vote so we can start debating. That is the

right thing to do.

Based upon what I see in the newspapers, what I see on television,

based upon the comments of my colleagues who have recently been to

Iraq, I am very disturbed. To put it simply, Iraq is a mess. It is a

mess because the United States, to some degree, started it by invading

the country and opened up Pandora's box and got the Shias and the

Sunnis and the Kurds all stirred up. Now they are fighting each other.

We did a good thing by toppling Saddam Hussein. That was the right

thing to do. But we did not think through the consequences. We did not

understand what we were doing as a country. We did not have an exit

strategy. We did not know what the consequences of occupation would be.

Certainly, the United States, with its very superior Armed Forces,

can very easily occupy Iraq--Baghdad. In fact, the occupation was

probably a little easier than many people anticipated. But when you go

back and talk to generals, talk to defense personnel, talk to analysts,

they all--many of them, many of them are very clear in saying that they

advised the Pentagon not to go ahead and do this until we knew what we

were doing once we got there. It would be a big mistake, many said, to

proceed unless we knew what we were doing.

Put simply, there was just no exit strategy. There was none

whatsoever. I have read so many reports and quotes of so many generals

advising us to not go into Iraq until we knew what we were doing that I

am appalled, frankly, at how unprepared the United States was when it

went in.

All Americans, if they have any second thoughts about that statement

I just made, they, too, would be appalled if they would read those same

statements. They are all in the record. They are all in the public

domain. I strongly urge people to read them and look at them.

The key here, as has been stated by the Senator from Virginia, the

senior Senator from Virginia, is: Can the Iraqis stand up on their own

two feet? It is my belief that they are not standing up on their own

two feet. Clearly, the continued civil war's death toll indicates that

Iraq is not taking control of the situation. There are so many reports

that the Iraqi Army is unfit and that they are not doing the job. There

are questions about how well it is trained or is being trained. Clearly

the answer is, it is not being trained. They are not doing a good job.

My view is it doesn't make much sense to throw more troops, a modest

number of more troops, at a failed policy. That is what it comes down

to. The Iraqis aren't taking care of themselves, and if they aren't

taking care of themselves, why should we take care of them? We have

lost so many American lives, so many Montanans, young men and women who

have been killed over there, and it makes no sense, in my judgment, to

keep doing this.

That is why I think we should vote on this resolution on Monday and,

secondly, why I think the resolution should pass. We should not

continue a failed policy. I don't know very many people who think the

policy is working. Most think it has failed. So let's, as the U.S.

Senate, make that statement.

What do we do now? If it has failed, what do we do? I don't think

anybody has a simple answer. There is no real silver bullet here. But I

do think we need to give the Iraqis a set date and say to them: We are

going to get out of here on this set date, and you need to know that.

My fear is, if we don't do that, they are just going to keep thinking

the United States is going to keep sending more troops and keep taking

care of them. It is human nature for them to do so, to think that. That

is why I believe we should give them a definite date we will start

bringing our troops home.

I also think we have to engage other countries in the region. We are

not doing a good job of doing that. This administration says: Well, we

can't talk to Iran; we shouldn't do that. We can't talk to Syria; we

shouldn't do that. I don't understand that. It seems to me, if you want

a solution, you have to talk to people. You have to talk to people who

are involved. We are talking to the Saudis, we are talking to the

Jordanians, the Israelis, and others in the region. That is good. But

two very key players are Iran and Syria.

In life, we talk to our friends, but we should also talk to our

enemies. We don't have to agree with our enemies, but we should talk to

them. When you start talking to people with whom you have

disagreements, after a while you learn there may be a common assumption

or two. After a while you might learn something that indicates there is

progress. There might be a little bit of daylight once you start

talking to somebody. You certainly aren't going to learn anything

unless you talk to them. The stakes are so high and the consequences

are so great, I strongly urge the administration to start talking to

people. So what if the public policy was that we were not going to do

that in the past. Don't be stubborn. Don't be too proud. Do what is

right.

Just try to talk to the people in the region so we can find some common

solutions.

I know it is not going to be easy. It will be very difficult. But I

know of no other alternative--no other alternative--but to give them a

date and say: we are out of here; by this certain date we are going to

start repositioning troops elsewhere in the region. We should tell them

that so they sober up more--not just Prime Minister Maliki but the

other principals in the country--and realize they have to start getting

their act together. As I said, we need to have some very serious

negotiations with groups in the region and also with countries in the

region so we can manage the situation as best we possibly can.

This is one of the most serious issues I have confronted since I have

been in the Senate in the last several years, and I commend my

colleagues for addressing it so seriously. It is the right thing to do.

But it is also the right thing to do to start debating this issue in

the Senate. I think we will be doing the country a great service if we

do.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.