Mr. President, I am glad we are discussing this issue. I

am glad we are on the floor of the Senate to discuss the war in Iraq. I

think this is an issue that is being discussed across America--over

coffee pots in offices, in doughnut shops in the morning, at schools,

in living rooms, and in churches. Everybody is thinking about this war,

as they should. Those of us who are fortunate enough to live in the

safety of America know full well that we have over 130,000 of our best

and bravest sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and

wives, risking their lives at this very moment in Iraq.

I have listened carefully to my colleagues from the other side of the

aisle as they have come to the floor, including the last two, Senator

Cornyn of Texas and Senator Martinez of Florida. I have the highest

respect for both of my colleagues. I count them as friends. I work with

them on many issues. I respectfully disagree with them on their views

on this war.

Senator Cornyn mentioned earlier he felt there should be a consensus

among Democrats about what to do with this war, that if we have 50 or

51 Members on the floor, we ought to have a point of view. I say to the

Senator from Texas that there are some things we agree on, on this side

of the aisle. For example, when there was a vote 10 or 11 days ago on

whether we should escalate the number of troops we are sending to Iraq,

whether we should follow the President's proposed plan to send anywhere

from 21,000 to 48,000 more soldiers into harm's way, 49 of 50 Democrats

voted no.

We were joined by seven Republicans who crossed the aisle. Is there a

consensus on the Democratic side on the President's plan? Yes. And it

isn't just a consensus on the Democratic side; it is a consensus across

the Nation.

This morning's Washington Post on the front page has the disclosure

of an ABC News poll. Some 53 percent of the American people think it is

time for a deadline for withdrawing forces from Iraq, and an

overwhelming majority think the President's strategy is wrong.

To argue that the Democrats don't have a consensus position is not an

accurate statement. It does not reflect what occurred in a vote that

just took place a few days ago.

I am also troubled by the continuing reference to support of our

troops. May I put that to rest for just a moment. Twenty-three of us in

the Senate voted against this war in Iraq--1 Republican and 22

Democrats. But I will tell you, Mr. President, when the President came

and then asked for funds to support our troops in Iraq, this Senator,

and the overwhelming majority of those of us who oppose the policy,

gave the President every penny he asked for. Our thinking was very

clear: Though we may disagree with the policy, we can't put the burden

of what we consider bad policy on the backs of our soldiers. We cannot

shortchange them in any way in battle, even if we disagree with the

battle plan of the Commander in Chief. So I voted not for $1 billion,

not for $100 billion, but hundreds of billions of dollars for this war

that I think is the wrong war. Why? Quite simply, if it were my son or

daughter in uniform in this war risking his life, I would want him to

have everything necessary to be safe and to come back home safely.

So, yes, we support our troops. Whether we disagree with this foreign

policy or agree with it, Members of the Senate support our troops. But

one cannot overlook the obvious. When it comes to the support of our

troops, it goes way beyond a speech on the floor of the Senate.

On Sunday, February 18, Dana Priest and Anne Hull of the Washington

Post wrote an article which has seared the conscious of America. It was

part of a series about a military hospital, Walter Reed. I visited that

hospital many times to visit our soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors

who were in recovery. I have been so impressed with the men and women,

the medical professionals who perform medical miracles for these men

and women who come home injured from the wars.

I listen to the soldiers and their families, and they are so grateful

for what they have received at Walter Reed. As the article says at one

point, Walter Reed has always been viewed as ``a surgical hospital that

shines as the crown jewel of military medicine.'' And so it should be.

Our men and women in uniform who have made the sacrifice deserve the

very best.

If that were the message of this series in the Washington Post, it

wouldn't have been noted or remembered by anyone because it would have

been repeating the obvious. But, sadly, this series tells us something

different.

Just a few minutes' drive away from where we are meeting in this

Senate Chamber, at Walter Reed Hospital, there are buildings which are

in deplorable condition. There are veterans and soldiers who are being

treated in ways that are absolutely unacceptable.

Walter Reed Hospital, the crown jewel of medical care for our

soldiers who are giving everything in Iraq.

So now let's ask the question: Who is working to support our troops?

Who is working at Walter Reed to support our troops? Rhetoric is easy

on the floor of the Senate, but for these troops and for the families,

it will take more than words of loyalty and respect.

I can recall when this debate started. As a Senator, I faced the

toughest vote any Senator can face--a vote on a war. You know at the

end of the day, if you go forward with the war, people will die--not

just the enemy but our brave soldiers, as well as many innocent people.

It is the kind of vote that costs you sleep, and it should.

I remember it so well. It was October 11, 2002, within weeks of the

election. We had been subjected to a steady barrage of statements from

the President and the administration about why this war was necessary.

We had been told of weapons of mass destruction which not only

threatened the region but even threatened the United States. We had

been told of a ruthless dictator in Saddam Hussein who had gassed and

killed his own innocent people. We had been told there was a connection

between Saddam Hussein and the terrible events of 9/11 in the United

States. We had been told even of nuclear weapons and the possibility of

mushroom-shaped clouds if we didn't respond, and quickly, in Iraq.

But what we were told turned out not to be true. What we were told as

the reason for the war turned out to be wrong. I was a member of the

Senate Intelligence Committee, and I sat behind closed doors at

confidential hearings and heard disputed evidence about

statements being made by the administration. I was sworn to secrecy. I

couldn't walk outside the room and say: Wait a minute, this morning's

headline about mushroom-shaped clouds is about nuclear weapons that

even this administration is not agreed on. I couldn't say it because of

my oath of loyalty to make certain I didn't disclose classified

information. But I knew when it came time to vote that giving the

President the authority to start this war was a bad decision, and that

is why I voted against it. I think it was the worst foreign policy

decision in my time in Congress. It is one that will haunt us for years

to come.

Iraq has not become the last battle in the war on terrorism. Sadly,

it has become a proving ground, a testing ground, a preparation place

for training even more terrorists. Those are not my conclusions; those

are the conclusions of our intelligence agencies.

When I listen to the Members on the other side say what we need to do

in Iraq is send more Americans into that battleground, I ask myself: To

what end? We were asked to do several things by this President, and we

did them and did them well. We deposed that dictator, dug him out of a

hole in the ground and held him accountable in the courts of his own

nation. We searched high and low for weapons of mass destruction to

destroy and could find none. We gave to the Iraqi people a chance for a

free election, something they never had in their history. Our soldiers

stood guard at the polling places so the Iraqi people could finally

have their own voice and their own future. We let them choose their own

leaders. We let their leaders form their own Government. We gave them

more opportunities at the cost of American lives, American blood, and

American treasure than any nation has ever given to Iraq in its

history. We have achieved those things. We should be proud of those

successes. But, unfortunately, despite all we have done, the Iraqis

have not faced their own political responsibilities. After all of the

years, after all of the money, after all of the training, and all of

the time, they still don't have a police force that can stand up and

defend the people of Iraq in the streets of Baghdad. If there is a

threat of terrorism anywhere in the world, it isn't the army that has

the major responsibility, it is the police force.

What do we know of the Iraqi police force in this surge, in this

escalation? The press report over the weekend was troubling. We are

sending American soldiers into the meanest streets and toughest

neighborhoods of Baghdad where death is at every corner, death is at

every door. They are searching these houses to try to find the

insurgents who are causing the civil war. They are looking for weapons.

They are looking for evidence of these bombs that are being set off and

blowing through our humvees and armored vehicles, killing and disabling

our soldiers. That is what our American soldiers are doing now, house

by house, street by street, in this dangerous part of Baghdad, and they

are accompanied by Iraqi policemen.

It sounds like a good thing until one hears the details. The details

are that the Iraqi police are preceding American soldiers to the homes,

warning the people in the homes to hide their weapons because the

Americans are right behind them. We know this because our translators

are telling our soldiers the Iraqi police are not helping. The Iraqi

police are trying to cover up the insurgents' tracks.

So one wonders why some of us believe it is time for the American

soldiers to start to come home? I think it is past time, it is long

overdue. It is time for the Iraqis to stand up and defend their own

country, to put their lives on the line, the lives of their policemen

and their soldiers, to make the political decisions that need to be

made that Iraq can someday stand on its own. As long as the Iraqis

believe they can dial 9-1-1 and order up American soldiers to come and

stand and fight and die in their streets, they will not accept their

own responsibility for their own future.

Those on the other side say give this plan a chance. I regret to say

we have given this plan a chance three different times. This is the

fourth time the Bush administration has proposed sending more American

troops in for a surge to end the war. I think there is reason to be

skeptical, particularly when it is at the risk of more American lives.

Incidentally, when they make reference to the Iraq Study Group, this

bipartisan group headed by former Secretary of State James Baker and

former Congressman Lee Hamilton, when they talk about their proposal

for a surge or escalation of troops, they forget to add the one

important or two important elements: That was part of a surge in

diplomacy, something this administration is loath to enter into. See,

they believe we should be sitting down as a nation with nations in the

region and trying to work out some stable resolution to this conflict

in Iraq. The Bush administration has been reluctant to do that, but the

study group called for it and, yes, they did call for the possibility

of a surge in troops but only if we are bringing our troops out as of

the end of March in 2008. They had a definite timetable for the removal

of most American troops from this theater. The other side doesn't talk

about that point, and certainly the President doesn't either.

One of the Senators came to the floor and said those of us who are

critical of the President's policy are micromanaging the war. Somebody

needs to manage this war. Somebody needs to manage a war which, as of

this morning, has claimed 3,154 American lives.

We have been losing about three American soldiers every single day

while we have been debating this war.

That is this morning's list. Sadly, every morning there is a list.

If there is a sense of impatience on this side of the aisle, if there

is a sense of impatience across this land, it is because we know each

and every one of those lives is so valuable to their families and to

every single one of us. We want the day to come when soon these

soldiers who are serving us so nobly and gallantly in Iraq can come

home safely to the hero's welcome they deserve for serving their

country so well.

Those of us who question this policy are being criticized because we

are trying to micromanage this war. I wish I could. I wish I had the

power. I do have the power, as a Senator, to speak up on this floor, to

appeal to my colleagues to stand up, to ask them on a bipartisan basis

to reach a compromise which will start to bring these troops home.

It is true we only have one Commander in Chief, but we also only have

one constitution, and the Constitution makes it clear that the

President, despite all of his power, doesn't have all the power in this

town or this Nation. His power is shared, shared with the American

people through their elected representatives in Congress, and that

power gives us the authority to stand and debate.

Much has been said about Senator Carl Levin, who spoke on a

television show, ``Meet the Press,'' this last Sunday. I watched that

show, and I couldn't have been prouder of my colleague from Michigan. I

respect Carl Levin so much. As chairman of the Armed Services

Committee, he takes his job so seriously. I don't know of a more

conscientious Member, carefully weighing every word of every bill,

trying to make the right judgment not just for the moment but for the

Nation. When he spoke on that bill about reauthorizing, about

questioning the authority given to the President in October of 2002, I

think he was right. I know what that resolution said. We passed it in

October of 2002. It addressed two challenges and two threats that no

longer exist. There is no Saddam Hussein and there were no weapons of

mass destruction.

I think it is appropriate that we address this issue again and that

we try to decide what we are going to do to move forward; first,

revoking any authority given in a previous resolution that no longer

exists; and, second, carefully defining the way we will bring our

troops home, making certain we understand the assignments and

responsibilities they will have into the future.

This is an awesome responsibility to discuss this war, to debate it

on the floor of the Senate, and to do it in a constructive and positive

way. I sincerely hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle,

those who are loyal to the President and those who are loyal to the

President's policy, will encourage this debate, that they won't stop us

with procedural obstacles, that they will allow the Senate to speak, to

debate, and to express its will. We have tried before unsuccessfully,

but we are going to try again. I believe this is an extremely important

priority, perhaps the highest we face.

Having said that, the first bill that is likely to come up tomorrow,

maybe later today, is on the 9/11 Commission recommendations. The 9/11

Commission, my colleagues will recall, was an effort to assess

America's vulnerabilities after the attack on 9/11. That commission

published a report that was widely read and applauded because of the

leadership of Republican Governor Kean of New Jersey and Congressman

Lee Hamilton, a Democrat of Indiana. They cochaired a panel, a very

distinguished bipartisan panel, which came up with recommendations to

make America safer.

Some several years later, we have not lived up to their

recommendations and we haven't carried out their agenda. There is much

we can do to make this country safer and we want to move immediately to

considering their recommendations and implementing them, whether it is

port security, whether it is a communication system in Illinois or

other States that allows the police, firefighters, first responders,

and the medical community to communicate quickly in the midst of an

emergency, whether it is a matter of mass evacuation drills, which I

have been asking for and which are included in this legislation. There

are many things we can do, and specific things.

There are many who think we should move immediately to the debate on

the war. We are only going to postpone it long enough to discuss these

9/11 Commission recommendations. The families of the survivors of 9/11

have appealed to us to make this a high priority. For that reason, and

for that reason only, we may set aside the Iraq debate for a few days

but not indefinitely. This debate needs to take place for the very

simple reason that as we debate on the floor of the Senate,

unfortunately, our sons and daughters are still in peril in Iraq. They

are still caught in the crossfire of a civil war, and we are still

losing too many good American lives every single day because of this

confrontation taking place in Iraq.

In the meantime, we will be stepping forward to do something about

Walter Reed Hospital, but we won't stop there. Walter Reed has to meet

its obligation not just for inpatients, where they do a magnificent, an

excellent job, but for those who are outpatients as well. We have to

take this issue to the veterans hospitals and we have to ask the hard

questions about whether the veterans of this war and all of our wars

are being treated with the dignity and respect and care they deserve.

I salute the Washington Post and those who wrote these articles. I am

sure they will receive recognition for bringing this to our attention.

This will be a clear example and a clear opportunity for those of us

who stand on the floor and give speeches about supporting our troops to

prove we mean it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a

quorum.