Mr. President, earlier today there was a lot of discussion

here about whether and how we should have a debate on the Iraq war. I

cannot think of any issue more important to the Senate.

I have said many times that the 100 men and women who serve here are

privileged to do so. Someday, someone from our State will replace us.

That is the genius of the Founders of this country. However, there are

only 100 Members. There are 300 million Americans. The 300 million

Americans expect the 100 Senators to speak for them. They do not have

that opportunity themselves.

I consider it a great privilege to be here. I used to sit up in the

gallery when I was a law student and watch the Senate, and I thought

then as I do today that the Senate should be and often is the

conscience of the Nation.

I heard the debates during the time of the Vietnam war. I became the

only Vermonter to actually vote on whether to continue that war. Today,

we have a different war but many people in this country are as

concerned. Those for the war in Iraq, those against the war in Iraq.

I go to my State of Vermont and everywhere I go, whether I am in

buying groceries and people come talk to me or I am at the gas station

or if I am shoveling snow--and yesterday we had 2\1/2\ feet of snow at

my home in Vermont--people stop and want to talk about the war in Iraq.

My guess is it is no different in any other State.

These are very patriotic, very honest, very concerned people, and

they have legitimate questions. They always ask: Why isn't the Senate

debating the war in Iraq?

A week ago, Senator Reid, the distinguished majority leader, tried

every which way to provide the Senate with an opportunity to debate a

bipartisan resolution on Iraq. That effort failed, and it failed again

earlier today. It was blocked by some in the Republican Party who

insisted on a separate vote that was nothing more than a political

ploy. Instead of a debate on the President's policy, they wanted the

debate to be about who supports the troops. We all support the troops,

but we have some very different views about the President's policy that

put brave American men and women in harm's way.

As so often is the case when anyone asked a question, expressed

reservations or outright opposed the President's policy in Iraq, the

President's defenders accuse his detractors of not being patriotic or

of not supporting the troops. What blatant balderdash that is.

For years I have fought for veterans' benefits, for fair treatment

for the National Guard, for armor for our troops who were sent by this

administration into battle unprepared--and still, 5 years later don't

have the armor their vehicles need to withstand the roadside bomb

blasts. I have fought to replace the depleted stocks of equipment that

our troops need and depend upon so their families do not have to send

to them what the Government should be providing. The absurd accusation

that it is unpatriotic to disagree with a policy that has resulted in

the deaths of thousands of American soldiers and created a terrorists'

haven in a country that, before our invasion, posed no threat to the

United States, has worn thin.

It reminds me of my days as a prosecutor, when a defendant was caught

red-handed. What would they do? They would usually attack the accuser.

They could not say ``You caught me breaking and entering.'' Rather,

their defense was ``I was set up.'' Or ``He made me do it.'' That is

what has been going on since President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and

former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld ignored all advice to the contrary

and led us into this costly fiasco.

These are the people who, when they had a chance to get Osama bin

Laden--and we all want to see Osama bin Laden brought to justice for

the attacks on September 11--when they had him cornered in Afghanistan,

they decided instead to invade Iraq. Iraq did not pose a threat. Iraq

did not have weapons of mass destruction. The intelligence was as

equivocal as it was distorted and manipulated. But the President was

fixated on Iraq, and he has remained so ever since.

Remember how the Vice President confidently said we would be welcomed

as liberators? Some welcome. Remember the President, dressed up in a

flight suit on an aircraft carrier so he could make a rousing speech

under the sign ``Mission Accomplished.'' Thousands of Americans have

been killed or injured in Iraq in the years since that phony photo op.

The flawed policies of this administration have thrust our troops

into the maw of a bloody civil war. Our troops are not responsible for

the mistaken policies they have been asked to implement. Policymakers

in Washington are responsible for that and only we can change those

policies.

My youngest son was a member of the Marine Corps. He was called up

during the first Gulf War. He saluted and was ready to do his duty, as

are all the loyal men and women in our armed services. That was a

different war. Thank God it was over so quickly. Neither he nor many

others called up were in harm's way.

But the policymakers made this policy and only they can change it,

not the troops on the ground. The polls show, unmistakably, that a

majority of the American people want the Congress to debate and vote on

the Iraq war. They know it is the key issue of the day. They see it is

a widening civil war. They want their sons and daughters to come home

pursuant to as sensible a plan as we can muster.

It is that simple. We ought to be debating that. If there are

Senators who feel the troops should be there longer, that more of them

should be sent there, then come to the Senate and say so. But also,

there are those who feel we have to do all we can to bring our men and

women home. We should have the opportunity to debate and vote on it.

The costs of this misadventure have not just been onerous, they have

been catastrophic. More than 3,000 Americans killed, more than 20,000

wounded. My wife and I have visited some of the wounded. These are

devastating wounds, crippling wounds, blinding wounds, wounds that

disable people for the rest of their lives. And tens of thousands of

innocent Iraqis have lost their lives.

In material terms, we are fast approaching the $1 trillion mark. We

are throwing money out the door at a rate of more than $2 billion per

week to fund this war. We are told about the things we cannot afford in

America because we have to fund the war in Iraq. We are cutting funds

for law enforcement, for police on our streets so we can pay for police

in Iraq. We can't upgrade our hospitals. And on and on.

And the international reputation of America, which has brought us

great influence, has now been tarnished, especially among our allies,

tarnished and diminished.

Where are we in Iraq? We are in the midst of a civil war among

religious and ethnic factions, an insurgency that

shows no signs of diminishing and out-of-control organized crime. It is

hard to say we have made any real progress toward the larger objective

of bringing democracy to Iraq and the Middle East.

It is time we face this grim reality. Our soldiers' lives are in the

balance. America's reputation is in the balance. America's ability to

set an example for the rest of the world is in the balance.

I made a brief statement on Tuesday about a column in last Sunday's

Washington Post by retired LTG William Odom. I know General Odom. I

worked with him on some of the most significant intelligence matters in

this country. He has one of the most distinguished military

intelligence careers. He continues to provide powerful insights on

national security. In his piece entitled ``Victory Is Not An Option,''

he outlines how this administration's entire policy in Iraq, including

the so-called surge strategy, is based on a self-defeating inability to

face reality.

The reality, according to the general, is that we are not going to

make Iraq a democracy. The longer we stay, the more likely Iraq will be

anti-American at the end of our intervention. Think of that, after $1

trillion.

Our invasion made civil war and increased Iranian influence

inevitable. No amount of military force will prevent those outcomes.

Meanwhile, our presence is only stoking al-Qaida's involvement in Iraq.

The reality is that supporting our troops does not mean keeping them

there to carry out a failed strategy. It means pursuing a course that

protects the country's interests and prevents more Americans from dying

in pursuit of an ill-defined, open-ended strategy that cannot succeed.

General Odom knows we need to begin an orderly withdrawal from Iraq.

He argues we should join with other countries in the region, those

whose input this administration has often ignored, and seek to

stabilize the region through sustained, high-level diplomacy. These

views are in line with those of some of our senior military officers,

national security experts and many in Congress, and I might say a

majority of the American people. The people we are here to represent.

Look at what the administration and defenders of the Republican Party

offer instead: We get filibusters when it is time to debate the

President's Iraq policy, we get the same old rhetoric about not

supporting the troops, and we get a bill from the President for another

$100 billion to send 20,000 more troops and continue the war. If the

President cannot face the reality that even some Members of his own

party increasingly have come to accept, then it is our responsibility--

I would also say our patriotic duty and our moral duty--to act.

A nonbinding resolution that sends a clear message in opposition to

an escalation of troops is far better than the years of silence of a

rubberstamp Congress. But we know the President will ignore it. He has

already said so. We know it is only a first step.

I will support binding legislation by Senators Obama and Feingold to

begin a phased redeployment of our troops out of Iraq. It is not our

role to choose sides in this civil war, and it is a prescription for

disaster. It is not our troops' role to die trying to force these

warring factions to settle their age-old differences.

We need to continue to fight the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan.

We need to deploy sufficient forces and intelligence assets to track

down international terrorists around the world. We need to do a lot

better job of policing our borders, without denying entry to innocent

people who are fleeing persecution.

General Odom is right, keeping our troops in Iraq is not making us

safer. We should be bringing our troops home. We should be bringing

them home with the thanks of a nation for doing their duty. Congress

has the power to force the President to change course. That is what the

American people want. That is what we should be debating.