Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the

continued obstructionism in the Senate, led by our Republican

colleagues, concerning the vote on supporting or opposing the

President's escalation of the war in Iraq.

For 2 weeks our distinguished majority leader has been trying to get

an agreement to just proceed to a fair debate, to just have the

opportunity on the floor of the Senate to have a debate on whether we

support the President's escalation of the war in Iraq. He has offered

an up-or-down vote on two different proposals--one opposing the

escalation, the second supporting it. At every turn he has been

stymied.

Our Republican minority claims they want to debate the war in Iraq,

but they have done everything they can to obstruct the debate. I would

like to go through some of the history of this obstructionism. Since

the first of the year, Republicans have rejected at least three

different compromises that would have allowed the Senate to move

forward with a vote on the escalation of the war in Iraq. In an effort

to obtain an up-or-down vote on the bipartisan resolution disapproving

the President's plan, Senate Democrats offered to schedule an up-or-

down vote on the McCain-Graham resolution supporting the President's

plan. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership rejected this offer on

what they claimed to support.

Then we, as Senate Democrats, offered the Republican leadership up-

or-down votes on two other resolutions--the Gregg resolution and a

resolution stating simply that the Senate does not support the surge

and demands that the troops deploying to Iraq receive the body armor

and other equipment they need. The Republican leadership again rejected

the offer.

Finally, Senate Democrats offered to allow votes on the bipartisan

resolution and the McCain-Gramm resolution that would each have

required a supermajority of 60 votes. The Republican leadership again

said no.

The pattern of obstruction has, unfortunately, continued. On February

5, all but two Republican Senators opted to block a debate, including

the distinguished author of the resolution--chose to block debate on

whether we support the President's escalation plan. The reaction across

the country was echoed in numerous newspaper headlines.

After almost 2 weeks of more stalling by the Republican leadership,

Senate majority leader Harry Reid today, again, offered a compromise

that would have allowed all of us the opportunity to stand up and take

a position and vote our conscience. Simply put, every Member of the

Senate would be given the opportunity to vote on a bill equal to the

House resolution opposing the President's escalation of the war in Iraq

and also a resolution supporting the President's plan to send even more

troops into combat operations in Iraq.

What could be simpler? What could be more fair? The reaction by the

Republican leadership, sadly, was not surprising. They again said no.

They don't want to vote. I find it interesting that earlier today

colleagues on the other side of the aisle who voted to stop us from

going ahead to a vote are now saying we should not adjourn until we

vote. Well, in fact, our distinguished majority leader and the majority

agree. Therefore, we will have that vote after the House votes

tomorrow. We will have that vote on Saturday.

Supporters of the war in Iraq have claimed that one of their goals is

to spread democracy throughout the Middle East, throughout the region.

That is an ironic statement, considering that they are stifling the

democratic process on the floor of the Senate. Recent public opinion

surveys have shown that a clear majority of Americans--in some cases as

many as 70 percent of American citizens--when asked, say they oppose

the President's plan to escalate the war in Iraq. From our biggest

cities to our smallest towns, the American people are demanding

accountability on the war in Iraq. They have questions and they are

looking to their leaders for answers. They are looking to their

leaders--to us--for focus and debate and a willingness to take a

position and speak out and make change happen.

Mr. President, our troops and their families, more than anybody else,

deserve better. They deserve better than this strategy, and they

deserve better than tactics designed to stop us from a full and open

debate about the President's strategy. They deserve better than people

avoiding taking a stand, taking a vote on this President's escalation

in Iraq.

This debate is already taking place all across America, all across

Michigan--in coffee shops, diners, union halls, office parks, at church

dinners, and at VFW halls. Americans are speaking out and asking tough

questions about this administration's misguided escalation of the war.

And in the Senate, in a move that clearly disregards the opinions of

the majority of Americans, the Republican leadership has refused to

allow a real debate and a vote on the President's escalation.

Four years ago, I stood in this Chamber alongside 22 colleagues and

voted no on giving the President the authority to go to war. It was a

hard vote. It was a lonely vote. But I was proud to do my duty, along

with all of my colleagues, and stand publicly and take a position and

have our votes counted. It strikes me as sad that the Senators who

support the President's escalation of the war have decided to hide from

this opportunity to do the same--to

vote their conscience and to tell the American people where they stand,

win or lose.

This should not be a discussion of politics. This is a discussion of

the most serious policy. Any soldier will tell you that there are no

politics in a foxhole. The American people--Republicans, Democrats, and

Independents--are asking us to take a look, long and hard, at what we

are doing in Iraq. We were not elected to stand silently by while our

fellow citizens demand answers. American men and women are in harm's

way. Unfortunately, it seems that the Republican leadership doesn't see

it that way.

Let me again say, as clearly as possible, that I believe the

escalation of this war is not the answer. Putting more Americans in

harm's way will not bring our men and women home any sooner. Why would

we go further down a path that has led us to this point? Why would we

repeat our previous mistakes and call it a ``new strategy''?

A free and stable Iraq can only be secured by the Iraqis. They must

embrace responsibility for their collective future and decide that

living and dying at the hands of sectarian violence is not the future

they want for their children and grandchildren.

We must support their efforts, but we cannot substitute American

troops for Iraqi resolve. With the freedom of self-determination comes

a responsibility of collective security. I believe we must continue to

train the Iraqis and equip them and provide sensible military support,

based on the advice of our generals and military experts. And we must

lead them by example--by embracing, not turning our backs on, our own

democratic process.

I believe the American people want a new direction in Iraq. What they

don't want is more legislative games designed to stop debate or hide

from the realities of the situation on the ground which our men and

women are facing. Wishful thinking and best-case scenario planning will

not make the situation in Iraq any better. Our troops in the field and

our fellow citizens here at home demand leadership, critical analysis,

a willingness to change course when the evidence shows that we must,

and they deserve action.

The Republican leadership can stonewall a vote on this resolution,

but they cannot silence the debate. They cannot avoid reality. They

cannot avoid the truth.

To every American around the country asking questions, I say thank

you--thank you for asking questions, thank you for speaking up, thank

you for being a part of the democratic process we hold so dear, and

thank you for following your conscience.

There is nothing simple about the situation in Iraq. We all know

that. But there is nothing complicated about what America is asking us

to do. It is time for all of us--those who oppose the escalation of the

war and those who support it--to stand up and have our votes counted.

This is not the time for legislative games. This is too serious a

time and too serious a topic. The President has presented a plan. It is

time for us to vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I take this time, first, to commend the

majority leader, Senator Reid, for doing everything in his power to

bring up the most important issue we face as a nation, and that is the

future of Iraq.

I must tell you, as I travel through the State of Maryland, the

citizens of my State ask: What are we doing to change the course in

Iraq? What are we doing?

Senator Reid has proposed a way that we can have an up-or-down vote

on the most pressing issue of our time, and that is whether we are

going to introduce more American troops, escalate our presence in

Iraq--an up-or-down vote. The other body will be holding that vote some

time tomorrow. Every Member of that body will go on record either for

or against the President's proposal to escalate our presence in Iraq

with additional American troops.

We need to have that same vote in this body, and we should not be

looking at procedural obstacles that prevent us from going on record

whether we favor or oppose the President's proposals.

I look at what the President is suggesting, putting additional troops

in Iraq, as more of the same, not a new plan. If we learned anything at

all from the elections last November, it was that the people of this

Nation want to see a change in direction in Iraq. They understand our

plans have not worked, that we need to look for a new direction. And

yet the President is giving us more of the same.

What we need to do is start by saying no to the escalation of

additional troops, and then we need to look at what are the right

policies in Iraq. Quite frankly, to me, we need to have the Iraqis

stand up and defend their own country, with Iraqis assuming principal

responsibility and American troops starting to come home. We need to

engage diplomacy. We are in the middle of a civil war.

We need to engage the international community to look for a political

solution so that Iraqis have confidence in their own Government and

Sunnis and Shiites can live together in one country. We need to engage

the international community to help rebuild Iraq. They need help in the

rebuilding of their country, and they certainly need the help of the

international community in training Iraqis to take care of their own

needs.

Americans have made a significant investment in this country. We have

given so much. Four years ago, I opposed the military presence of

America in Iraq. I voted against it in the other body.

Unfortunately, I was right. I remember the predictions that were made

4 years ago that this would be a relatively brief military operation,

that we would be welcomed by the Iraqis, that the Iraqis would be able

to take care of the security of their own country, that the standard of

living for the average Iraqi would increase dramatically.

Unfortunately, that has not come true. The reality of the situation

is that over 3,100 American soldiers have lost their lives in Iraq.

Over 20,000 American soldiers have had life-changing injuries as a

result of their service in Iraq. Hundreds of billions of dollars of

U.S. taxpayer money has been spent in Iraq, and terrorism is on the

increase in that region, not diminished. And we are in the middle of a

civil war, with sectarian violence increasing.

The Iraqis, having passed their constitution, have elected their

Government, and it is time for the Iraqis to take responsibility for

controlling the sectarian violence in their own country. More troops

will not solve the

problem. More American troops will not solve the problem in Iraq.

I am a member of the Foreign Relations Committee. We completed over 3

weeks of hearings concerning the current status in Iraq. We heard from

military experts and foreign policy experts, generals and policy

people. I must tell you, they raise serious questions as to whether we

can win the war in Iraq on the battlefield. They are telling us over

and over again that what we need is a surge in diplomacy, not

additional American troops. We need to signal the Iraqi Government, the

international community, and, most importantly, the American people

that our presence in Iraq is not indefinite. More American troops will

not bring about victory in Iraq. More diplomacy might. More engagement

of the international community might. But more American troops will

not.

It is time for this body to act. It is time for us to debate the

current circumstances in Iraq and the President's policy, and it is

time for us to take action on the President's plan to escalate. That

should be our first vote, and that is what Majority Leader Reid is

attempting to do. But my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are

trying to use procedural roadblocks so we cannot have an up-or-down

vote on the President's plan. We should never play politics with our

American troops who are in harm's way. We shouldn't be doing that. But

let us have a vote up or down on the President's policy, and then we

need to look at other options.

The majority leader indicates that we will certainly be taking up the

recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, to implement their

recommendations, and we will have an open debate and the opportunity to

offer amendments as to how we can bring our troops home with honor, how

we can engage the international community, how we can move forward in

the Middle East. That we need to do. But we first must stop the

escalation of American troops, and that is the vote the other body will

be having as early as tomorrow, and I hope, with the support of my

colleagues, we can have that vote by Saturday. That is what we should

do.

I urge my colleagues to allow us to have the debate on this floor and

an up-or-down vote on the President's plan to add additional American

troops. Then I hope we will find some way to listen to what the experts

are telling us, to listen to what the American people are telling us,

that they want to see from our country a changed policy in Iraq. They

want America to exercise its international leadership that only we can

do. They want us to find a way to honorably bring our troops home, to

energize the international community on diplomacy and on rebuilding

Iraq. And they want the Iraqis to stand up and defend their own country

in the midst of a civil war, and we will help end that civil war by

allowing the Iraqis to take control of their own country and by

energizing a diplomatic solution so that all the people in Iraq have

confidence that their Government will protect their rights, and then

working with the international community, helping build a type of

country where the people can live in peace and prosperity. That should

be our mission.

But let us start by removing the procedural roadblocks. Let us start

by having an up-or-down vote, as the other body will have, on whether

we support or oppose the President's plans to escalate American troops.