Madam President, it was just a few years ago--some days

seem much longer--that we considered a resolution in the Senate to

authorize the use of military force in Iraq. We cast thousands of

votes. Most members of Congress cannot recall too many of them

specifically, unless reminded. But you never forget a vote on a war

because you know that, at the end of the day, if you decide to go

forward, people will die. It is your fervent hope that it will be the

enemy, of course, but you know, in honesty, that it will be American

soldiers and innocent people as well. So a vote on a war is one that

Members of Congress--most every one of them--take so seriously. It

costs you sleep, as you think about the right thing to do.

I can recall when the vote was cast on this war in Iraq. I sat on the

Intelligence Committee for months listening to the testimony and all

the evidence that was brought before us, listening behind closed doors

to this classified information about the situation in that country, and

then emerging from that Intelligence Committee and reading newspapers

and watching television, saying the American people are not being told

the same thing outside that room that I am being told inside that room.

There were serious differences of opinion in this administration about

whether there were even weapons of mass destruction.

At one point, we challenged the administration and said: If there are

weapons of mass destruction, for goodness' sake, turn over some

locations to the international inspectors. Let them find them. Once

they discover them, it will confirm our fear, and other countries will

join us in this effort against Saddam Hussein. But, no, they wouldn't

do it. Although they told us there were hundreds of possible locations,

they wouldn't turn over any specific location possibility to the

international inspectors.

It raised a question in my mind as to whether they were very certain

of any locations. And, if you remember, weapons of mass destruction

were the centerpiece of the argument for the invasion of Iraq.

On Christmas Day many years later after that decision was made on the

floor of this Senate, we learned that more Americans have now died in

Iraq than died on September 11. Less than a week after that disclosure,

on New Year's Eve, we marked a mournful milestone in the war in Iraq:

the death of the 3,000th U.S. serviceman killed in Iraq.

Today, as I stand before the Senate, the Department of Defense

reports that we have lost 3,014 American soldiers in Iraq. The 3,000th

death is as tragic as the 1st death, the 300th death, the 1,000th

death, but the staggering scope of casualties, the enormous toll this

war has taken, must not be allowed to pass unnoticed.

America's service men and women are the bravest and best in the

world. I know I say that with some patriotic pride, having been there

to sit and have breakfast and lunch with them in Iraq, Afghanistan, and

their other assignments. I just can't say enough about their courage

and sacrifice, just ordinary, young-looking men and women who do

extraordinary things.

This last October, with Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island, while

sitting for breakfast with a group of about 12 soldiers from Illinois,

I went around the table: Where are you from? Downstate. Oh, you are

from the suburbs of Chicago. Or, you live in the city. We talked about

everything under the Sun. We talked about the Chicago Bears, the Cubs,

the White Sox, and how things were going back home.

I asked them how things were going. They said: We had to get up

early. We had to form an honor guard at dawn because one of our

soldiers was killed in the middle of the night by one of these homemade

bombs that takes so many lives.

I asked: How often does that happen?

Well, pretty frequently.

We know it does because we read the press accounts. We think of these

young men and women and the challenges they face every single day as

they risk their lives for America. We think about the families back

home deep in prayer that their soldier is going to return home safely.

We owe them so much. We owe them our prayers and thanks for sure. But

those of us in elected office owe them more than that. Part of what we

owe them is a plan to bring this war to a close, a plan to bring them

home safely, a plan to congratulate them as they return home for what

they have given to this country.

Last March, President Bush was asked whether there would come a day

when there will be no U.S. forces in Iraq. His answer to that simple

question spoke volumes. The President said: That, of course, is an

objective, and that will be decided by future Presidents and future

Governments of Iraq.

Now we are told that in a few days the President will make a major

policy announcement about this war. According to reports he is going to

call for an increase, a major escalation of the U.S. troops committed

in Iraq. The administration carefully has used the word ``surge'' to

suggest this is somehow temporary, but we have to listen carefully when

the President makes his announcement to see just how temporary it might

be for the 10,000 or 20,000 or more American lives that will be at risk

because of this decision.

Sending tens of thousands more troops to Iraq is not a change of

course. It is not what our top military experts advise. In fact, they

have said just the opposite. It is clearly not what the American people

bargained for when they voted just a few months ago for a change in our

direction in Iraq. It is literally and tragically more of the same. I

think our troops deserve better.

President Bush has always said he will send more troops if the

commanders in the field said they needed more. In December, General

Abizaid, the head of the U.S. Central Command, testified before the

Armed Services Committee. This is what the general said.

That was a statement made by General Abizaid just a few weeks ago. He

is now moving on. He is being replaced. This was the advice of the

leader of the Army and the Central Command in the field of battle.

Last month, the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, the group that was

headed by former Secretary of State James Baker and Congressman Lee

Hamilton of Indiana, offered a series of recommendations that they say

could allow U.S. forces to largely redeploy safely out of Iraq by April

1, 2008. The President has made it clear--although he thanked the

commission--that he doesn't share their feelings. He also apparently

does not share the views of the Commission that the situation in Iraq

is grave and deteriorating.

This war began with deception--a deception of the American people

about the threat of weapons of mass destruction. It then moved into a

phase of denial where we were told over and over: Oh, the Iraqi

soldiers, the forces are just terrific; we are getting them ready to

take our place there; we are going to stand down when they stand up. As

violence ramped up dramatically, as more and more people died,

including American soldiers, it went from deception to denial, and now

we are in delusion, a delusion that somehow sending more American

troops into the field of battle, putting them in the midst of a civil

war that finds its roots in history 14 centuries old, that somehow

placing our best and bravest soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors in

this crossfire of sectarian violence, putting more of them there, as

the President is likely to suggest, is going to bring this to an end

sooner.

I think the President is wrong, I think the Iraq Study Group had it

right, and I think sending those troops in, as General Abizaid said,

gives a message to the Iraqis that is completely wrong.

Think about this for a minute. We sent the best military in the

world. They deposed Saddam Hussein, took him out of power in a matter

of weeks, dug him out of a hole in the ground, put him on trial which

led to his execution. We then gave the Iraqis a chance to vote on their

own constitution. We allowed them to form their own government. We have

spent $400 billion. We have lost 3,014 lives as of this moment, and the

number, sadly, continues to mount. Twenty-three thousand American

soldiers have come home injured, 2,000 of them multiple amputees,

soldiers who are blinded, soldiers whose lives may never be the same.

We have done all this for this nation of Iraq, and now what we ask of

them is simply this: Stand up and defend your own country. If you

believe in your country and your future, be willing to stand and fight

for it. Be willing to make the hard political decisions to bring peace

and stability to your country.

That is the message we should be giving them, but instead, this

administration's message is we will send in more American soldiers,

maybe 10,000, 20,000, 30,000. We will escalate this conflict. We will

escalate our commitment. We will build up these forces.

According to two members of the Iraq Study Group who were present

when the group met with the President in November, President Bush said

he continues to use the word ``victory'' to describe the vision in Iraq

because ``it's a word the American people understand.'' The President

said: If I start to change it, it will look like I am beginning to

change my policy.

That is a staggering statement because, Mr. President, we do need a

change of policy. We need to face the reality of what we are currently

facing in Iraq.

There are other costs beyond what I have mentioned. There are costs

that we feel at home. I voted against this Iraq war--23 of us did--but

I voted for every single penny this President has asked for. My

thinking on it is very basic and fundamental: If it were my son and

daughter in uniform, I would want them to have everything they need--

everything. I can quarrel with this President, debate him all day about

the policy, but not at the expense of the safety of our troops.

The money we spent there--almost $2 billion a week, over $400 billion

in total--is money that has been taken out of America, away from our

needs at home, money that, sadly, has been piled up in debt as this

administration refuses to even pay for the war they are waging.

We are currently spending about $8 billion a month on Iraq--$8

billion. We are going to be asked to come up with another $100 billion

soon and, sadly, that money we spent so far doesn't even include the

cost of reequipping our Armed Forces or caring for our veterans who

have come home. That is a long-term cost of this war that we will pay

for decades to come.

What could we have done in America with the $380 billion or $400

billion that we spent in Iraq? We could have paid for all of the

following that I am about to list--all of the following: Health care

coverage for all of the uninsured children in America for the entire

duration of this war; 4-year scholarships to a public university for

all of this year's graduating high school seniors in America; new

affordable housing units for 500,000 needy families; all the needed

port security requirements to keep our homeland safe; substantial new

energy conservation programs. Or, we could have completely funded No

Child Left Behind.

Remember that program where we tested our kids and found out they

needed help and then the Federal Government didn't send the help? We

could have done that.

Or, we could have provided savings accounts for low-income families

preparing for retirement, or made a downpayment on reducing the

alternative minimum tax.

From my State of Illinois, our share of the Iraq war comes to about

$19 billion. With that $19 billion, we could have paid for 2.5 million

Illinois children in Head Start, insured 11 million children for 1

year, paid the salaries of 330,000 teachers for a year, underwritten

170,000 new affordable housing units, and covered 900,000 4-year

scholarships to public universities.

President Bush has the distinction not just for this policy in Iraq,

but the fact that he is the first American President in our history who

has cut taxes in the midst of a war. His tax cuts have benefited the

wealthiest people in America and left the largest debt in the history

of the United States, and every year we remain in Iraq we add $75

billion to $100 billion to that national debt.

Beyond the cost of human lives and dollars, there are strategic costs

in this war. Our military is stretched dangerously thin. The National

Guard units that have been activated have come home with less

equipment. Today, in Illinois, we have about a third of the equipment

we need to respond to another crisis either at home or overseas.

We also know that when it comes to combat readiness, there are no

units prepared to go into war at this moment. We have stretched our

military so thin. The costs of reequipping these units and rebuilding

these services are enormous and go way beyond what we have already

spent in Iraq. Investing U.S. troop levels in Iraq will almost

certainly prolong our involvement in that nation. It almost certainly

will make President Bush's statement that it will be up to the

successors to bring our forces home a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is

not what the American people voted for in November. Sending these

troops to Iraq will send the wrong message to Iraq. It will signal that

Americans will continue to bear the burdens of this war.

This year, the British, who have been the most cooperative in helping

us there, are slated to pull their troops out. At that point, it will

be virtually

an American struggle, with only a handful of countries remaining by our

side.

These are the generals President Bush said he listens to, and these

are the people who are in command of our forces. These are voices which

clearly disagree with the escalation of this war in Iraq.

Last week, America bid farewell to a good and decent man named Gerald

Ford. I was honored to be at his funeral service in Grand Rapids, MI.

He was a man who served at one of the most tumultuous times in American

history. He inherited a war he couldn't win.

A generation later, our Nation faces a similar moment. We need to

work together. We need to cooperate on a bipartisan basis to find a

plan worthy of the courage and sacrifice of our men and women in

uniform. It should begin now. It shouldn't be left to future

Presidents.

If one reads the authorization for Iraq, one understands that the

goals and missions of that statement for the use of force have changed

dramatically. No weapons of mass destruction, no Saddam Hussein, no

threat to America. It is time for us to announce that we achieved our

goals in Iraq and now the American people need to hand this

responsibility over to the people of that nation in Iraq.