Mr. President, in my home State of Vermont and all

across this country, the American people are deeply concerned about the

war in Iraq. They want real debate here in Washington on this issue

and, more importantly, they want real action.

Frankly, I have a hard time understanding why some of my colleagues,

regardless of what their position on the war might be, would try to

prevent a vote on what is at best a very modest proposal that was

brought forth this afternoon. If you like the Warner bill, you should

vote for it. If you do not like it, you should vote against it. But in

fairness to the American people, we should have a serious debate and a

vote on this issue.

Let me be very clear in giving you my perspective on this war. In my

view, President Bush's war in Iraq has been a disaster. It is a war we

were misled into and a war many of us believed we never should have

gotten into in the first place.

This is a war which the administration was unprepared to fight. The

administration has shown little understanding of the enemy or the

historical context or the cultural context in which we found ourselves.

Who will forget President Bush declaring ``mission accomplished''

aboard the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln when, in fact, the mission

had barely begun? Who will forget Vice President Cheney telling us that

the insurgency was in its ``last throes,'' just before some of the

bloodiest months of the war took place? Who will ever forget those Bush

advisers who predicted that the war would be a cakewalk--nothing to

worry about--and that we would be greeted in Iraq as liberators?

This war in Iraq has come at a very, very high price in so many ways.

This is a war which has cost us terribly in American blood. As of

today, we have lost some 3,100 brave American soldiers, twenty-three

thousand more have been wounded, and tens of thousands will come home

with post-traumatic stress disorder.

This is a war which, with the President's proposed increase, will

cost us some $500 billion, with the price tag going up by $8 billion

every single month. This cost is going to add to the huge national debt

we are already leaving to our children and grandchildren. And it is

going to make it more difficult for us to fund health care, education,

environmental protection, affordable housing, childcare, and the

pressing needs of the middle class and working families of our country,

not to mention the needs of our veterans, whose numbers are rapidly

increasing as a result of this war.

This is a war which has caused unimaginable horror for the people of

Iraq. People who had suffered so long under the brutality of the Saddam

Hussein dictatorship are suffering even more today. There are estimates

that hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed or wounded and

almost 2 million have been forced to flee their country--some 8 percent

of their population.

While civil war tears neighborhoods apart, children are without

schools, and the Iraqi people lack electricity, health care, and other

basic necessities of life. The doctors and nurses, teachers and

administrators who have provided the professional infrastructure for

the people of Iraq are now long gone.

This is a war which has lowered our standing in the international

community to an all-time low in our lifetimes, with leaders in

democratic countries hesitant to work with us because of the lack of

respect their citizens have for our President. Long-time friends and

allies are simply wondering what is going on in the United States

today. This is a war which has stretched our active-duty military to

the breaking point, as well as our National Guard and Reserve forces.

Morale in the military is low, and this war will have lasting impacts

on the future recruitment, retention, and readiness of our Nation's

military. This is a war which has in many respects lowered our

capability to effectively fight the very serious threats of

international terrorism and Islamic extremism.

Five years after the horrific attacks of 9/11, Osama bin Laden

remains free. Using the presence of United States troops in Iraq as

their rallying call, al-Qaida's strength around the world continues to

grow and the situation in Afghanistan is currently becoming more and

more difficult.

Tragically, this administration has refused to listen to the American

people who, in this last election, made it very clear that they want a

new direction in Iraq, and they want this war wound down, not

escalated.

This administration has refused to listen to the thoughtful

suggestions of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, which included two

former Secretaries of State, including President Bush's own father's

Secretary of State, as well as a former Presidential chief of staff and

a former Secretary of Defense, that it was time for a change in

direction. This administration has refused to listen to the advice of

our military leaders in Iraq who told us that increasing troops from

the United States would make it easier for the Iraqi Government and

military to avoid their political and military responsibilities.

This administration has refused to listen to the Iraqi people who,

according to a number of polls, have told us very strongly that they

believe, in the midst of all of the horror and turmoil and violence

within their country, that they would be safer and more secure if our

troops left their country.

In fact, this administration has tragically refused to listen to

almost anybody except that same shrinking inner circle, led by the Vice

President, who has consistently been wrong on this issue from day one.

As most everybody understands and as the recent National Intelligence

Estimate has confirmed, the situation today in Iraq is extremely dire.

The sad truth is there are now no good options before us; there are

simply less bad options. In Iraq today, according to Secretary of

Defense Bob Gates, there are now at least four separate wars being

fought, wars that our soldiers who have fought with incredible bravery

and skill find themselves in the middle of.

The reality today, as described by the Secretary of Defense, has

nothing to do with why President Bush got us into this war in the first

place. In March of 2002, he told us Iraq had weapons of mass

destruction and that they were poised to use those weapons against us.

That was not true and certainly has no relevance to the war today. In

2002, the President told us Iraq was somehow linked to al-Qaida and

bore some responsibility for the horrific 9/11 attack against our

country. That also turned out not to be true and has no relevance to

the situation we find ourselves in today.

In the 2006 elections, the American people, in a loud and

unmistakable voice, told us they no longer had confidence in the Bush

administration's handling of the war in Iraq. In my view, they told us

they wanted Congress to begin asserting its constitutional authority

over this war, and they wanted us to rein in the administration. Most

importantly, they told us they wanted us to begin the process of

bringing our troops home as soon as possible. And as a Vermont Senator,

that is exactly the effort I intend to make.

In my view, the Warner resolution is far too weak. It is a baby step

forward. Whether it is passed or not, it must be followed with much

stronger legislation, legislation that has real teeth. Instead of just

voicing our disapproval of President Bush's escalation of the war with

a nonbinding resolution, we should now be considering legislation that

provides for the safe and orderly redeployment of virtually all of our

troops out of Iraq within the next year, even as we continue to give

support to the Iraq Government and their military for the purpose of

helping them accept their political and military responsibilities. That

is the legislation we should be debating. That is the legislation we

should be passing.

How can we accomplish this withdrawal and redeployment? Regardless of

what happens with the nonbinding Warner bill, in the very near future

we must bring forth legislation on to the floor of the Senate that

would prohibit the use of funds for an escalation of United States

military forces without a specific new authorization from the Congress.

Secondly, we must consider legislation to require a schedule for the

return home of a majority of American forces and the redeployment of

the rest of the American forces from Iraq to other places. Finally, we

must vote against any additional funding to increase troop levels. In

addition, we must set conditions in any future funding bill so that the

President is obliged to begin winding down this war.

We are mired in a war that has gone on longer than American

involvement in either the First World War or the Second World War. We

will spend more money on this war in real dollars than we spent on

either the Korean war or the war in Vietnam. Our standing in the

international community has declined, and our ability to combat

international terrorism has been seriously compromised. It is time to

say no to this ill-conceived escalation. It is time to deploy our

troops out of harm's way. It is time to end this war.