Mr. President, yesterday, by a vote of 49 to 47, a cloture

motion failed that would have essentially cut off a broader debate on

the big issue of the day; that is, how are we going to deal with the

situation in Iraq? I think the vote failed not because, as was reported

in some newspapers, Republicans did not want to debate the issue but,

rather, because we want a full debate on the issue.

The importance of this issue and the stakes associated with its

outcome warrant a full debate, not one restricted by one party in the

Senate. The full range of views on this issue deserves to be heard.

They deserve a voice in the Senate. The American people deserve that

debate. And surely, the Americans in uniform who are fighting and dying

deserve that debate in the Senate.

Saturday, I attended two welcome home ceremonies for National Guard

units. Both performed superbly in fighting the global war on terror.

The 114th Air Wing, a National Guard unit

in Sioux Falls, SD, has been deployed all over the planet. They have

been in Afghanistan. They have been in Iraq--16 different places since

2001, after the terrorist attacks, in each case performing with

distinction. They support an F-16 mission and have been utilized

extensively. In fact, 72 percent, I believe, of all the members of that

unit have been deployed someplace in the last 5 years, as we have been

fighting this war on terror.

They and their families deserve a debate in the Senate about the

future of that mission they have been undertaking. There has been a lot

of debate around the country, a lot of debate in Washington about what

to do next. We have now before us a plan which is a change of strategy.

It incorporates more involvement by the Iraqi security forces in terms

of their military. Also, their political structures, their Government

has certain benchmarks it has to meet and economic requirements they

have to comply with regarding the division, distribution of oil

revenues--a whole range of things that have given us a new opportunity,

a new opening to get this right with the situation in Iraq.

I believe the families of those who have served and sacrificed

certainly deserve to have a full debate, not a restricted debate, in

the Senate, a full debate where the full range of views, the full range

of options that are held by the American people can be adequately

voiced.

I also attended a welcoming home ceremony for the 147th Field

Artillery, 1st Battalion, Charlie Battery, in Yankton, SD. This is a

unit which has contributed mightily to the war on terror and suffered

greatly. They have had four members of their unit who never came back,

killed by IEDs: SGT Richard Schild, SGT Daniel Cuka, SGT Allen Kokesh,

and SGT Greg Wagner--young Americans who will never be with their

families again.

Also, they had a young sergeant in their unit who has suffered

debilitating injuries, brain injuries that he continues to receive

intensive medical treatment for and perhaps will never be the same.

They had a young specialist, Brian Knigge from Plankinton, SD, who

suffered injuries from which he is still recovering.

They are a unit that has suffered greatly in this war on terror. Yet

there is a tremendous resilience and commitment and dedication to the

mission. The area in which they were involved was the training of Iraqi

security forces, specifically the Iraqi police, in the area of Baghdad,

which is why it was so very dangerous for them. And the IEDs that have

killed and seriously injured so many of our young American soldiers who

are serving in that region did four of their comrades in. And as I

said, a couple are very seriously injured.

They and their families who have sacrificed so greatly--and when I go

to these events, I, obviously, have opportunities to interact with the

families, with those whom these soldiers left behind. It is

heartbreaking to see the separation, the consequence, and the cost of

war. Yet at the same time, we have to realize when we get into a

conflict like this, it is not just about what we are doing today, it is

about securing a better, safer, more secure future for the next

generation of Americans.

That is why this debate is so important. Many have argued what is

happening today in the Middle East, in Iraq, is simply a regional

conflict or a conflict between different sects within Iraq. But,

frankly, we all know this--you do not have to be a rocket scientist to

see what happens when these terrorist organizations are left free to

prey in areas such as that, where there is not a lot of control and

security. They begin to use these places as sanctuaries and safe havens

to launch attacks against other places across the world, including the

United States.

It is important, in this global war on terror, that we understand

what the consequences and stakes of our failure are. I believe that is

why, when we have a debate, we need to have a debate that reflects the

full range of options and the full range of views that are available to

the Senate when it comes to the future of Iraq--again, the discussion

about consequences of failure, the discussion about plans going

forward.

Right now we have a plan in front of us. We have a strategy that has

been put forward by the President and his commanders in the region. We

have a new commander on the ground, General Petraeus. We have some new

troops heading into the area. There are changes in the rules of

engagement. This may be our last best shot, our last best hope of being

able to get this right.

We have engaged in this debate in the Senate which, again, in my

view, sends entirely the wrong signal, the wrong message to our troops

and to our enemies who interpret these messages that we send as a lack

of resolve, a lack of will to finish what we started. More importantly,

ultimately, the reason this has such great weight and gravity is that

the people who are the primary receivers of the messages we send are

the troops in the field. It is very difficult to say to those troops

who are day in and day out putting on the uniform of the United States,

performing a mission that we have asked them to do, which we have

pointed out has grave consequences not only for that immediate region

but for the entire free world--if you look at the arc of extremism that

branches from areas such as Afghanistan and al-Qaida to areas such as

some of the terrorist organizations in Lebanon, in the Palestinian

territories, all these terrorist organizations and attacks are

orchestrated by organizations that want to kill and destroy Americans.

We have a responsibility in the debate to make sure that when we are

putting young Americans in harm's way, we are allowing a debate to go

forward that examines the full range of views, the full range of

options that are available to the Senate. Frankly, the one that matters

the most, in terms of the options we have as a nation and as the

Senate, comes down to the issue of funding. Frankly, we don't have an

opportunity in this debate to talk about the real tool the Senate has

when it comes to this issue; that is, the issue of funding. We have

nonbinding resolutions. Everybody wants to debate nonbinding

resolutions. They are nonbinding, but they are not meaningless. They

send a message that we are not supportive of the mission our troops are

undertaking.

But if the Senate is serious about doing its work, and if there are

well-meaning and thoughtful people on the other side of the aisle who

want to have this debate, then we ought to get down to what real

options, what the real tools are at the disposal of the Senate when it

comes to having any kind of a role in what happens in the future of

Iraq. That is the issue of funding.

The leadership on the other side has said: We are not going to allow

you to have a debate that includes that option, that includes the other

options proposed, some from the other side that have talked about troop

caps, withdrawal timelines.

Ultimately, fundamentally, if the other side is serious, let's have a

debate about funding because that is the tool the Congress has at its

disposal. If that is not a part of the debate, we are not serious about

this debate or the range of options that ought to be heard and voiced

in the Senate.

I see I have other colleagues who want to speak on this issue.

I yield the floor.