Mr. President, I have been periodically tuning in today

during committee hearings and other work we do around here on some of

the debate surrounding whether we are going to have a debate on Iraq.

It is hard for the average American out there who may be watching C-

SPAN to understand whether there is any sanity in this place, whether

we are really rational individuals running the Senate.

This is supposed to be the most deliberative body, as we keep calling

ourselves, in the world. The function of the Senate is to debate and to

discuss, sometimes ad nauseam, different measures. Sometimes we can

debate for a long time around here. People in this country wonder what

is happening here that the Republicans won't even allow debate on the

most important single issue confronting America today: the war in Iraq

and the escalation.

I make it clear from the outset to those who may be watching, to try

to clear it up as much as possible, the Republicans, through

parliamentary maneuvers and through their vote yesterday, will not even

allow the Senate to

debate Iraq. I can talk on it if I want to. Of course, I can. But they

will not allow us to go to a debate on the Warner resolution, which has

very strong bipartisan support, and has a majority of the votes in the

Senate.

We are faced with an unusual situation which I don't know has ever

occurred here before. A matter which is life and death for so many of

our young men and women--disrupting families, causing untold drain on

our Federal Treasury, not just now but for years in the future, causing

us to lose friends and allies around the world--and we can't even

debate it. But that is the situation in which we find ourselves.

I can tell you, over the last few weeks I have had thousands contact

my office through e-mails and phone calls. I must say, the vast

majority, the overwhelming majority, oppose the President's escalation

and the war in Iraq.

Over the last 24 hours, since yesterday, much of their anger and

focus has been not so much on the President and his misguided policies

but on the Republicans in the Senate who won't allow Members to debate

the issue. As one said, we debate this in our workplace, we debate it

in the parking lot, we debate it after church on Sunday, we debate it

with our neighbors, in our clubs, at the bowling alleys, but you guys

can't debate it in the Senate? They just cannot believe that Republican

Senators are blocking debate on the No. 1 issue before our Nation.

In a nutshell, what callers are saying to my office is that Senators

have a right if they want to support the President's position on the

war in Iraq. They have a right to embrace his escalation of the war,

but they do not have a right to block legitimate debate in the Senate

on whether the escalation is wise or appropriate. They do not have the

right to silence the voices of tens of millions of Americans who have

had enough of our quagmire in Iraq.

People in Iowa, and I suspect across the country, are saying the

election last November was a referendum on the war. Voters spoke loudly

and clearly; they want our troops out of the civil war in Iraq. I

imagine the American people probably thought their elected leaders in

Washington got the message. Well, maybe they see now that the

Republican minority in the Senate does not even care about what

happened in the election. They want to escalate the war. But that is

fine. If that is their choice, that is their choice. But what should

not be their choice is to silence debate by a majority of Senators who

oppose the escalation in Iraq.

I think this is what got people so upset and are calling and e-

mailing my office. People in this country, in times of crisis such as

this, are always way ahead of the politicians. They know that by voting

against debating the war, the Republican Senators have voted to endorse

President Bush's escalation of that war.

It is one thing for Republican Senators to ignore the Iraq Study

Group's recommendations. It is one thing for Republican Senators to

ignore the results of the November election. It is one thing for them

to ignore all the warnings of the generals last year. But what is

unacceptable is that Republicans in the Senate refuse to listen to the

families of soldiers who are being asked to put their lives on the line

for this last and reckless roll of the dice in Iraq.

Among those being committed to the escalation are more than 600

soldiers from the Iowa Army National Guard. Many of them are from the

1st Battalion of the 133rd Infantry headquartered in Waterloo, IA.

Other units are from Dubuque, Iowa Falls, Charles City, and Oelwein.

These soldiers have been deployed since early last year in Anbar

Province, the most violent region in Iraq.

These soldiers were supposed to come home in the spring. But just 1

day after the President announced his escalation, they learned they

would not be coming home. Instead, their combat tour in Iraq would be

extended to 16 months. Think about that--nearly a year and a half in

the middle of some of the most deadly combat in Iraq. To make matters

worse, as we now know, many of the soldiers and their families learned

about it through the media before they were officially notified.

I want to make it clear, I know some of these members of the Iowa

Army National Guard. They are disciplined professionals. Even those who

I know profoundly disagree with this escalation, I know they will do

their duty. And they are doing their duty in Iraq. They deserve our

profound respect and admiration. But they deserve to be listened to.

And their families deserve to be listened to.

From the letters, e-mails, and phone calls I have gotten, people are

outraged that Republicans are not allowing the Senate to even debate

the escalation.

We got some e-mails in, and I started reading some of them. I asked

my staff to contact them to see if I could read them on the Senate

floor. I would not want to read an e-mail on the floor unless I had

permission from the sender.

So I have three letters I am going to read because they are so

profound. One is from Barbara--I will not use the last name--in Iowa

whose husband is with the 133rd Infantry. This is what she writes:

The next letter is from Jodi in Iowa. She said:

Last, I will read a letter from Nikole:

Think about that: ``Our motivation was the ability to secure our

future with financial freedom.''

Sure, my wife.

Mr. President, I took the time to read those three letters. If we do

not speak for these families, who will? If we are not allowed to debate

here, are their voices to be silenced? They do not have the right to

come here on the Senate floor and speak. I have the right to read their

letters, with their permission, but why can't we debate this and speak

on behalf of them and so many other families in this country who want

their stories told and who want an end to this quagmire in Iraq?

They now know--people are so far ahead of us; they are so far ahead

of the politicians around here--they know what is happening. They know

that Iraq was a lie; it was a mistake. They know there was never any

weapons of mass destruction. They know now that Saddam Hussein, however

bad he was, was not involved in acts of terrorism against the United

States--against his own people but not against the United States.

They now know that what is happening in Iraq is a civil war. As I was

told some years ago by a person from the Emirates--close to there--he

said to me: Senator, you have to understand that Iraq was really three

countries. It is just a figment of the British imagination that they

put it together in the Treaty of Versailles after the First World War.

He said: Really it is three countries, the Shias, the Sunnis, and the

Kurds. He said: Furthermore, Senator, it is a civil war waiting to

happen, and there is nothing you can do about it.

Yes, maybe someone as ruthless as Saddam could put the lid on it for

a while. And we would hope they would come to their senses and not have

a civil war. They have had an election. They have a parliament. And now

it is time for the Iraqis to take matters into their own hands. The

longer we are there, the more involved we become, the more it becomes

America's war against the Iraqis.

I read the article in the Washington Post this morning about how our

troops are now going door-to-door in Iraq, and they just bust in. They

busted into the home of a woman who had a master's degree in English

translation, whose husband was a major in the Iraqi Army. And she said:

Why didn't you just have the courtesy to knock? I would have let you

in.

These soldiers are going into homes. They are going into bedrooms and

looking under beds, tearing sheets off the beds, looking through

dressers of people who have nothing to do with the war. These are just

civilians and they happen to be caught in a zone.

You wonder how they feel about us after something like that happens.

One soldier was quoted in the paper this morning talking about his

first tour of Iraq right after the invasion. He said: Things were fine.

We went out with the Iraqi people. Now I go over there and they spit at

us, every one of them.

So the people of this country understand that this war was a terrible

mistake from the beginning. It has been not only a mistake and a lie to

get into it, it has been mismanaged from the very beginning. It has

cost over 3,000 of our young men and women's lives. How many Iraqi

lives? I am told the count is now way over 50,000, maybe as high as

100,000, with millions more displaced from their homes, going into

Jordan. That is going to cause a lot of unrest in Jordan with all the

displaced people and refugees there.

The answer is not to continue this miserable escalation the President

wants to do. Everyone realizes this won't do it. It is just going to

cause more misery, more suffering, cost more money, cost more lives.

That is the kind of debate we want to have. But Republican Senators

will not allow us to have the debate or even to have a vote on the

resolution of disapproval. We have a duty to debate this escalation, to

speak up when we believe the President's policy is wrong. We have a

duty to speak up for families, such as the ones whose letters I read,

and for the overwhelming majority of Americans who oppose this new

escalation. It is unconscionable that Republicans leaders, at the

behest of President Bush, are refusing to allow the Senate to debate

the escalation in Iraq. It is time for them to listen to the American

people and the families of our troops in the field. It is time to stop

the obstruction, allow the Senate to debate the Warner resolution, and

to have a vote. That is all we are asking for. Vote your conscience. If

people want to vote to support the escalation, if they want to speak on

behalf of it, that is their right as U.S. Senators. But I hope they

don't realize they have a right to silence the voices of millions of

Americans who are looking to us to do something, to bring some

reasoning, some rational discourse, and some clear thinking to what is

happening in Iraq and to confront the truth.

As I said earlier, our young men and women are doing their duty. I

know. I have an e-mail I received the other day from a young man in

Iraq who has been there for quite a while. I won't use his name because

I didn't ask his permission to use the e-mail. He said in his e-mail

that he--I am not sure of the word--disagreed with the war. He said:

This war is not winnable. The military cannot do this over here. But he

is doing his job. He is putting himself in harm's way day after day.

They realize this is a bad mistake. You think we would start realizing

it around here, too.

War is not the answer in Iraq. Diplomacy is, bringing in other

countries. Does it mean we have to talk with Iran? I have no problem

with that. The President once said he didn't want to talk to Iran

because they were our enemies. I guess all we want to talk to is our

friends. If I disagree with someone here, I want to talk to that

person. I want to find out why. Is there any way we can reach

resolution? So we ought to be talking with Syria and Jordan and Iran,

Iraq, of course, Turkey, Syria--all the countries around there. We

ought to be talking to them. And there ought to be a more concerted

effort on the diplomatic side than there is on the military side. We

are putting too much on the military and not enough on diplomacy. I

would hope the Iraqis would come to their senses and not engage in a

civil war, but that is their decision to make. We can't make it for

them.

The longer we are there, the worse it becomes. The longer we are

there, the more and more Iraqis turn against us. More and more people

in the Mideast turn against us. And more and more we lose our standing

in the world community. I daresay we have precious few friends around

the world today who are willing to stand with us. Prior to this war,

after 9/11, the entire world was on our side. After those planes hit

the Twin Towers and the one hit the Pentagon and the one went down in

Pennsylvania which was probably coming here, the world was on our side.

Countries all over the world--Muslim nations were on our side. Even

Iran sent out some feelers to go after the Taliban. They didn't like

the Taliban, either. And here we squandered it all, with the whole

world on our side 5 years ago. Now we would be hard-pressed to find a

few. They may be with us here and there on this or that, but

we know what they are saying about our involvement in Iraq. We know

what they are saying about our standing in the world community. We know

that. It is going to take a long time to rebuild it. The longer we

persist in this unconscionable, unwinnable quagmire war in Iraq, the

longer it is going to take us to get our standing back in the word

community. Try we must. We need to bring this war to its conclusion.

It is not losing the war. People say: We can't lose it. I wasn't in

the Senate, but I was in the House of Representatives when the Vietnam

war finally came to a close. We heard the same arguments then, that we

can't afford to lose, that the whole of Southeast Asia would be in

flames, communism would take over the Philippines, communism would take

over Indonesia. We heard it time after time. Guess what. None of it

happened. And you look back now and you go down here to the Vietnam

Memorial wall and you read those names and you think about their

sacrifice, families that were left behind, children, loved ones. You

wonder what for. What for? They served their country proudly. They did

their duty. But you wonder in the end, what was it for?

I think, as we look back on this war in Iraq years from now, the

thousands of Americans who have lost their lives, we will ask that same

question: What for? Why? War is not the answer. Escalation is not the

answer. We need to bring our troops home.

Those on the other side are saying we ought to talk about cutting off

funding. That is going to come. We are going to have a supplemental

appropriations bill. It will be here probably in the next couple

months. I, for one, am going to do everything I can to make sure we

have some kind of amendment on that bill which will limit the

President's ability to spend the taxpayers' money on the war in Iraq.

After all, the Constitution gives us the power of the purse strings,

not the President. If we want to say: Mr. President, you can spend the

money to redeploy troops out of Iraq and to protect them while they are

being deployed, you can do that, but you can't spend any of that money

to send any more troops there and put them in harm's way and have them

going door to door in Baghdad and have them be shot at by snipers, we

will have that opportunity when the supplemental appropriations bill

comes before us.

Right now is time for us as a Senate to stand up and say whether we

approve of the escalation or disapprove. Republican Senators on the

other side of the aisle won't even give us that opportunity. I hope

they hear from more families like the letters I just read. Maybe we

will get that opportunity. It is time for us to quit shirking our

responsibility, time for us to stand up and say whether we are for the

escalation. I, for one, am not. Maybe others are for it. I think that

is what we ought to debate, and that is what we ought to vote on.