Mr. President, I want to move to another topic and say

for anyone who has followed the debate this week on Iraq, it has been a

frustration. We came to the Senate with the clear direction of the

American people to change course in Iraq. Unfortunately, the minority--

the Republican minority--decided it was more important to change the

subject than to change course. So they defeated our efforts to bring

this issue of our policy in Iraq to a debate on Monday.

In the Senate, it takes 60 votes to do anything that is important or

controversial. And so we needed help from the Republican side of the

aisle because we only have 51 when we are at full complement, and with

Senator Johnson recuperating, we only had 50. We needed 10 of their

stalwarts to join us, to move forward and say: Let's have this debate

on Iraq.

I was hopeful we would have that many. At least seven or eight

Republican Senators said they disapprove of President Bush's plan to

escalate this war. I thought that was a good starting point, and maybe

others will join in to make sure there is a real debate.

Come time for the vote on Monday, we fell short. The Democrats came

and voted, with all but one exception, to move forward on the debate,

but our Republican friends would not join us. So the debate on Iraq

stopped in its tracks. Efforts were made over the next day or two, with

no success whatever, to try to revive this debate on Iraq. Now we find

ourselves in a position where we moved to the next stage.

That debate was about the Warner resolution, a Republican from

Virginia, with bipartisan sponsorship that we agreed on the Democratic

side would be the vote. I don't know how more accommodating the

majority could be to

say to the minority, in this case the Republicans: We will let one of

your own write the resolution that we will debate. That is what we said

on the Warner resolution. We went further and said to the Republican

minority: And then the countervailing resolution, the one in opposition

to Warner, write that as well. And they did. That was the resolution of

Senator John McCain of Arizona. So we had two competing Republican

resolutions in a Senate with a Democratic majority.

To argue we are playing politics with this issue, I think, fails on

its face. I don't know how we could be more accommodating, but

obviously we didn't reach enough on the other side to get the debate

started.

Interestingly enough, I happened to turn on the television last night

in my office and here Senator John Warner came to the floor to try to

explain what happened when seven or eight Republican Senators who said

they opposed the President's plan, some who openly supported Senator

Warner's resolution and Senator Warner himself, all voted not to debate

his resolution. It is hard to explain to most people who try to follow

the arcane procedures of the Senate.

Having said that, the debate is not over. The debate will continue,

maybe not on the Senate floor for the next few days. But all across

America, in grocery stores, in offices, in churches, all across

America, people are talking about this war. When I am contacted by

people back in my hometown of Springfield, IL, or Chicago, people are

saying this has to change. I understand what they are thinking about in

terms of their own children, in terms of the brave soldiers who are

there, and in terms of the families who are waiting patiently for their

loved ones to return.

We will return to this debate, but the next stage is not going to be

a sense-of-the-Senate resolution. The next stage is going to be much

more serious. As I said on the floor before, the Warner resolution was

a sense-of-the-Senate resolution, which is merely an expression of

sentiment. Important as it is, it is still very thin soup compared to

an actual amendment or bill which could make some change in the way we

wage this war. That is the next stage. The House may take it up before

us because we have to pass the spending bill, and then we are going to

return to it.

Senator Reid, our majority leader, has made it clear. The Republicans

will not prevail when it comes to stopping this debate on Iraq. We

believe the last election was very clear. The American people want us

to change the policy in Iraq. We change it by deliberating and debating

and reaching the best consensus we can, and that is what we will try to

do.

I hope enough Republicans will join us in this debate. This is

critically important. If they are loyal to the President and loyal to

his policies, then so be it; stand on the floor and defend them. If

they agree with us that there has to be a change, that this escalation

of the war moves us in the wrong direction, they will also have a

chance to have their voice on the floor. But to try to shut down the

debate time and again will not ultimately work. The American people

want us to face this issue and face the reality of this war and what it

means to us.

The National Intelligence Estimate, just recently released, paints a

very bleak picture in Iraq about a civil war that is complicated by an

insurgency that is being fought by both Iraqis and foreign al-Qaida

fighters, along with widespread violent crime. There have been 2

million refugees in Iraq so far, by the estimate of major international

agencies. Some 34,000 Iraqi civilians were killed last year. Another

1,000 died last week alone--Iraqi civilians. These are not the

insurgents and terrorists. Many of these are innocent people--men,

women, and children--who happened to go to the market or school on the

day a bomb was detonated.

We have lost more than 3,100 soldiers as of today. In this month of

February, 8 days into this month, we have lost 26 American soldiers,

more than 3 a day. As we postpone this debate for days and weeks,

American soldiers continue to die and continue to be injured. That is

the reality. We have to understand the urgency of this debate and the

urgency to get it right.

The President says he needs 21,500 troops more in Baghdad and Iraq.

Certainly now the CBO tells us the real number could be 35,000 or

48,000 because those 21,500 are ground troops, combat troops. They need

support troops as well, and many of them will be in harm's way.

When asked how much this new escalation of the war will cost, the

President estimates $5.6 billion over 8 months. The Congressional

Budget Office takes a look and says: No, you are wrong; $27 billion

over 12 months.

Some of us remember a man named Lawrence Lindsey, head of the White

House's National Economic Council, who made the fatal political error

in 2002 of saying that he thought the war in Iraq could cost us between

$100 billion and $200 billion. For his estimate, for his candor, Mr.

Lindsey was canned. He was fired. Secretary Rumsfeld got on television

and said: I think the war might cost us $50 billion. That is on the

record. The record shows us he was wrong.

To date, the American taxpayers have paid over $350 billion for this

war. With the new request, it will go to over $500 billion.

Imagine the debate we just had between Senator Alexander and myself

about $200 million to improve teachers and schools across America that

we cannot afford because we are spending $2.5 billion a week on this

war in Iraq. We cannot afford to improve the quality of our teachers in

America's schools because of the money we have committed to a war in

Iraq, a war which, sadly, has no end in sight and a war which is being

escalated by this President.

Some argue--I heard it on the floor repeatedly--that any debate about

the President's policy is going to hurt the morale of the troops.

This is a copy of The Washington Times, a newspaper which I don't

frequently read, but this morning's newspaper says: ``War foes will not

hurt morale,'' contradicting the statement made by some that if we

express opposition to the President's war policy, we are going to hurt

morale. Who was it who said that war foes--those who question the

President's policy--will not hurt morale? It turns out to be none other

than GEN Peter Pace of the U.S. Marine Corps, who is, of course,

Chairman of our Joint Chiefs of Staff. He said it. I want to quote it.

Finally, I would say, Mr. President, that a friend of mine and

colleague in the Senate, Senator Ensign of Nevada, came to the floor

yesterday and quoted me.

Well, he used this as evidence that many Democrats, including myself,

had said, well, they are for increasing the number of troops. Here is

what I was saying. If we need some additional troops to quiet the

situation in Baghdad, then I would be open to it. If there was truly a

plan to exit this untenable situation, where a short-term shift in

troops to Baghdad could make a difference, I would happily entertain

it.

But the fact is that this is not a short-term proposal, it is not

part of a plan that clearly brings our troops home, and putting more

troops in the heart of a civil war does not quiet the situation. Our

troops have achieved what is achievable in Iraq. As the new

NIE states, Iraq is now in a civil war and worse. That is not a battle

that U.S. troops can win. Only the Iraqis can. The President's plan

clearly is not designed to bring our troops home. Nor is he being

honest about its costs or the numbers of men and women who will be sent

to Iraq in this escalation.

My respect for Senator Ensign is not diminished by this

misunderstanding.