Mr. President, before

I begin discussing the war in Iraq, I

wish to say a few words about another

issue that is perhaps even more important

and that is the constitutional

issues at the very heart of this entire

debate.

Let me be very frank: I am not a

great fan of the Bush administration.

And of the many grave concerns I have

about President Bush and his actions,

at the top of that list is that the President

seems not to understand what the

Constitution of the United States is all

about. Whether it is the consistent attack

on our constitutional rights

which his administration has pursued

for a number of years or his ‘‘signing

statements’’ which attempt to circumvent

legislation passed by Congress,

the President appears to believe

he can do whatever he wants, whenever

he wants to. That, in my view, is not

what the United States of America is

all about, and it is not what our Constitution

provides for.

In that regard, I wish to inform my

colleagues in the Senate that I have

submitted a resolution, similar to one

introduced by Congressman DEFAZIO in

the House, that makes it very clear the

President does not have the constitutional

authority to start a war against

Iran without the express authority of

the Congress. There are many people in

my State of Vermont—and there are

people all over this country—who are

deeply worried that the President may

take us into a war in Iran and that he

is currently laying the groundwork for

that war in exactly the same way he

led us into the war in Iraq.

So let me be very clear: If President

Bush were to start a war in Iran without

receiving the authority to do so

from Congress, he would not only be

creating, in my view, an international

disaster, he would also be creating a

major constitutional crisis. I hope very

much he does not do that.

President Bush fails to understand

the power to declare war under the

Constitution is given to the Congress,

not the President. My resolution, S.

Con. Res. 13, is very simple. It states

clearly that it is ‘‘the sense of Congress

that the President should not initiate

military action against Iran without

first obtaining authorization from Congress.’’

I hope my colleagues will give

strong support to this resolution.

Mr. President, in my State of

Vermont and all across this Nation,

the American people are increasingly

concerned about the war in Iraq. As

others have stated more eloquently

than I, the American people want real

debate in Washington, in the Senate,

on this issue that is worrying people

all across our Nation. More importantly,

not only do they want debate,

they want action, and they want action

now.

Frankly, I have a hard time understanding

why some of my colleagues

would try, through parliamentary maneuvers,

to prevent a vote on what is at

best a very modest proposal. This issue

is not complicated in terms of what

will be taking place tomorrow on this

floor. It seems to me that if you support

President Bush’s escalation of the

war in Iraq—and there are many who

do—then vote against the resolution.

That is your right. On the other hand,

if you don’t believe that an escalation

of this war is a sensible idea—and I certainly

do not—then vote for the Reid

resolution. But at the very least, there

should be a vote. Let the American

people know how we stand.

Let me be 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 believe we never

should have gotten into in the first

place, a war I voted against as a Member

of the House. This is a war the administration

was unprepared to fight.

The administration has shown little

understanding of the enemy or the historical

context in which we found ourselves.

Who will ever 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. Who will forget those Bush advisors

who predicted 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

high price in so many ways. This is a

war that has cost us terribly in American

blood. As of today, we have lost

over 3,100 brave American soldiers. In

my own small State of Vermont, we

have lost 25. Twenty-three thousand

more Americans have been wounded,

and tens of thousands will be coming

home with posttraumatic stress disorder

which will impact their lives forever.

This is a war which, with the

President’s proposed increase in funding,

will cost us some $500 billion, with

the price tag going up by $8 billion

every month. This cost is going to add

to the huge national debt we are leaving

to our children and our grandchildren

and it is going to make it that

much 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 which have been so long

neglected. Yes, for more military

spending; no, for the needs of ordinary

Americans who are struggling so hard

to keep their heads above water.

This increased expense for the war

will make it that much harder for us to

fund the needs of our veterans whose

numbers are increasing as a result of

this war. This is a war which has

caused unimaginable horror for the

people of Iraq. People who 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

own country, some 8 percent of their

entire population. While civil war tears

neighborhoods apart, children are without

schools, people are without 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 of America,

that great country? This is a war

which has stretched both 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 a lasting impact on

the future recruitment, retention, and

readiness of our Nation’s Armed

Forces.

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 U.S.

troops in Iraq as their rallying cry, al-

Qaida’s strength around the world continues

to grow. And currently the situation

in Afghanistan is 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 they want a new direction in

Iraq and they want this war wound

down. 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 of direction.

The President didn’t listen to them.

This administration has refused to listen

to the advice of our military leaders

in Iraq who told us increasing

troops from the United States would

make it easier for the Iraqi Government

and military to avoid their political

and military responsibilities. The

more troops that come in, the easier it

is for the Iraqi Government to avoid

making the political compromises and

the tough choices they have to make.

This administration has refused to

listen to the Iraqi people, who, according

to a number of polls, tell us very

strongly that they believe in the midst

of all of the chaos and horror taking

place in Iraq today, the Iraqi people

say they would be safer and more secure

if our troops left their country. In

fact, this administration has tragically

refused to listen to anybody, except

that same shrinking inner circle, led

by Vice President CHENEY, who has

been consistently wrong from day one.

Those are the people the President continues

to listen to.

As most everybody understands, and

as the recent National Intelligence Estimate

has recently confirmed, the situation

in Iraq today is extremely dire.

The sad truth is that now there are 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—four separate

wars that our soldiers, who have fought

with incredible bravery and skill, now

find themselves in the middle of.

Let me quote Secretary Gates, who

has recently stated:

I believe there are essentially four

wars going on in Iraq: One is Shia on

Shia, principally in the south; second

is sectarian conflict, principally in

Baghdad, but not solely; third is the insurgency;

and fourth is al-Qaida.

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 them against us.

That was not true and certainly has no

relevance to the war today. In 2002, he

told us Iraq was somehow linked to al-

Qaida and had some responsibility for

the 9/11 attack against our country.

That also turned out not to be true and

certainly has no relevance today to the

situation in which we find ourselves.

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 that

they wanted us to rein in this 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 Reid resolution before

us is but a small first step at moving

us forward. If it is passed—and I

hope it will be—it must be followed

with much stronger legislation that

has real teeth in it. That is what the

American people want. I have cosponsored

legislation, introduced by Senator

KENNEDY, that would prohibit the

use of funds for an escalation of U.S.

military forces without a specific, new

authorization from the Congress—a

prohibition also included in the legislation

introduced by Senator OBAMA,

whose bill I also support.

Instead of just voicing our disapproval

of President Bush’s escalation

of the war in a nonbinding manner, 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 passing.

Senator FEINGOLD has introduced legislation

requiring that our troops be

redeployed from Iraq within 6 months

of passage of the bill. Senator OBAMA

has introduced similar legislation requiring

that our troops be redeployed

starting this May.

In my view, while I will vote for the

Reid resolution tomorrow, and while I

think it is terribly important that we

bring together a bipartisan effort to

tell the President this escalation is

wrong, the bottom line is we must go

forward well beyond that, and we must

do that in the near future. We must exercise

the constitutional responsibility

we have over the power of the purse.

We are mired in a war that has now

gone on longer than any American involvement—

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 Vietnam war. 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 and to bring our troops

home as soon as we possibly can.