Mr. President, I thank

my colleagues. I have listened carefully

to the remarks of the Senator

from Vermont, Mr. SANDERS. I know of

his passion and his knowledge on the

subject. That was demonstrated by his

words this evening. He speaks from the

heart on many issues. I know he spoke

from his heart this evening about this

war in Iraq. Before him, Senator

WHITEHOUSE, a new colleague from

Rhode Island, read letters he received

from constituents asking the same

questions we are hearing across Illinois

and across the country—questions

about why we are in this war and how

we will start to bring our troops home.

Today, in the House of Representatives,

in a historic vote, by a margin of

246 to 182, the House of Representatives

made it clear they do not approve of

President Bush’s new policy to escalate

this war in Iraq.

I think you have to step back for a

moment and reflect on what happened

today. Four years into a war—which

Senator SANDERS has reminded us has

lasted longer than World War I or II—

we are now engaged in the first meaningful

debate about the course of that

war since the invasion; and 3,132 American

soldiers have died, thousands have

been injured, billions have been spent,

and for years the Congress, in the

thrall of another party, didn’t have a

hearing, didn’t have a debate, and

didn’t question the policy of this war.

It is no surprise that the American

people reached the limit of their tolerance

and, in the last election, made it

clear they want a change—not just a

change in Congress but a change in the

policy when it came to this war in Iraq.

I was heartened after the election, particularly

when President Bush asked

for the resignation of Secretary of Defense

Rumsfeld. I thought that finally

we were going to see a breakaway from

this so-called neocon theory that

dragged us into this terrible conflict.

Unfortunately, what I hoped for wasn’t

realized. Even though I think Robert

Gates, the successor of Rumsfeld, is a

good man and will be a good Secretary

of Defense, when it came time for the

President to talk about the policies of

the war and what we would do, he dug

the hole deeper.

I am not a military strategist and

don’t profess to be. There are people in

our caucus with military experience

who can speak to a wise strategy and

an unwise strategy. I am not necessarily

one of those, nor do I profess

to be. But I have been to Iraq twice—

first, in the early stage, when we visited

the Green Zone in Baghdad and it

was so dangerous that we could not

even stay overnight. In October, we

were allowed to stay the night and

visit with troops in the field and talk

to some of the people who were working

in Iraq. I will share some of those

recollections in a moment.

First, let me tell you that my highest

priority was to sit across the table

from our soldiers, to break bread with

them and talk about home and try to

take their minds away from the danger

of their daily lives. These men and

women are the best. These are the best

and bravest among us. They are volunteers

to a person. They have enlisted in

the services and they risk their lives

every single day.

Unfortunately, many want to drag

this debate into a referendum about

whether we respect, admire, and honor

these troops. Any honest person would

tell you that you should concede the

obvious: We all respect, admire, and

honor these troops. Many of us believe

the best way to honor them is to start

bringing them safely home. When I

think about what they have faced, and

continue to face, and I think about

these young men and women getting

into these humvees or walking the

streets of Baghdad and other cities,

risking their lives every day, I want

this to end and end soon.

What those on the other side argue is

the opposite. They argue that the

President is right, that sending more

troops into harm’s way is the best way

to end the war. I could not disagree

more. But the point of that disagreement

is the reason the debate is necessary.

It happened in the House. It

should happen in the Senate.

Tomorrow, we will have a chance, at

1:45 p.m. eastern time, to vote as to

whether we will have a real debate on

this war in Iraq. I am not hopeful. We

need the cooperation of Republican

Senators to even debate the issue.

Many have already announced they are

opposed to this debate; they don’t want

it to occur. I think they are wrong. I

think they are walking away from our

basic responsibility as Members of the

Senate.

I think those who want an escalation

of the war need to answer some fundamental

questions. I think they should

answer the question: How many troops

will be involved here? Will it be 21,000,

as the President says or, as the CBO

tells us, a number much larger than

21,000, which represents combat troops;

they may need an equal or larger number

to support those combat troops, endangering

the lives of 40,000 more soldiers,

not 20,000.

Outgoing Army Chief of Staff Peter

Schoomaker said yesterday that an increase

of 17,500 Army combat troops in

Iraq represents, in his words, ‘‘only the

tip of the iceberg.’’ It worries me that

this is the beginning of a spiraling escalation,

endangering even more

troops.

Army officials have also stated that

virtually all of the U.S.-based Army

combat brigades are not prepared to be

deployed. The Army is scrambling to

find the gear and personnel for units

that are being sent to Iraq and Afghanistan,

pulling both people and equipment

out of other units, scavenging for

pieces of equipment that are necessary,

to get them ready in some fashion for

battle. General Schoomaker testified

before the Senate Armed Services Committee

that—pay special attention to

this—‘‘I am not satisfied with the readiness

of our nondeployed forces.’’

We ask a lot of our men and women

in uniform. We ask for their commitment

to our country. We ask them to

be trained and to be brave. But we

should never ask them to go into battle

without the equipment they need in

order to come home safely.

What this general says, the outgoing

Army Chief of Staff, is that that is exactly

what is going to happen with this

escalation. Men and women will be sent

into dangerous situations without the

protection they need.

On January 25, the Department of

Defense inspector general released a

summary report that stated that

American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan

experienced ‘‘shortages of forceprotection

equipment, such as

uparmored vehicles, electronic countermeasure

devices, crew-served weapons,

and communications equipment.’’

January 25, just a few days ago.

The report went on to say:

We have a special responsibility—

those who make the policy in this town

and those who vote for it—to keep our

promise to these soldiers and their

families that we will give them the

training and equipment they need so

they can perform their missions effectively.

The same report I referred to stated

that when servicemembers were asked

to perform tasks outside their usual

duties, they often did not receive the

equipment necessary to perform their

wartime mission.

These were tasks such as training

Iraqi forces, one of our most important

missions, or disposing of explosives, a

highly dangerous undertaking.

Today’s Washington Post states that

approximately 40 percent of Army and

Marine Corps equipment is now in Iraq

or Afghanistan or undergoing repair or

maintenance.

It is inexcusable that 4 years and almost

$400 billion into this war, we

should be sending our troops into action

without the equipment they need.

Those who support the escalation and

say they are supporting the troops

need to be asked, and answer, the basic

question: How can you support a soldier

if you don’t give them the equipment

they need to be safe, perform

their mission, and come home?

Army Deputy Chief of Staff of Force

Development, LTG Stephen Speakes,

recently said the Army would need

1,500 up-armored trucks for the new

forces that were being sent to Iraq. But

he went on to say:

He said it will take the Army

months, probably until the summer, to

supply and outfit additional trucks. In

the meantime, units are sharing vehicles,

many of which are not properly

protected so that these soldiers will be

safe.

The Washington Post interviewed

commanders in Iraq about the equipment

situation. These commanders

doubted that the new units would receive

the full complement of humvees

that they need.

One senior Army official was quoted

as saying shortfalls would be inevitable

‘‘unless five brigades of uparmored

humvees fall out of the sky.’’ This official

predicted some units would have to

rely more heavily on Bradley fighting

vehicles and tanks.

The good news is that these vehicles

are very highly armored, but they may

not be the best vehicles for the mission.

Our troops are the best. Shouldn’t

their equipment be the best? If you believe

that an escalation of this war and

more soldiers thrown into the crossfire

of the civil war is in the best interest

of America, shouldn’t those same Senators

step forward and demand that

these soldiers be given the equipment

they need?

These equipment shortfalls are more

acute on the battlefield, of course, but

they are echoed throughout our military,

including the Guard and Reserve.

I recently met with Lieutenant General

Blum, Chief of the National Guard

Bureau at the Pentagon. He reports

that National Guard equipment readiness

levels are at 34 percent. Guard

units have about one-third of the

equipment they need to be ready for

battle. That is 34 percent of the equipment

they need for missions at home

and abroad. That is another direct cost

of the war in Iraq.

I asked the general what the Pentagon’s

plans were to address this situation.

He said there was a 5-year budget

plan to bring the Guard up to a readiness

level of 60 percent, which incidentally

is below the level of readiness

when this war began.

In the world we live in, 60 percent is

not good enough if it is your son, your

daughter, your brother, your sister,

your husband, or your wife. It will cost

another $40 billion to bring the Guard

up to the readiness level that we really

need. I think that is an investment we

ought to make.

That is one of the real costs of this

war—to make sure our troops, our

Guard, have the equipment they need.

These issues demand our attention, our

debate, and our vote.

Tomorrow, if the Republicans refuse

to cross the aisle to cooperate, to start

this debate, these questions will not be

addressed as part of this debate over

the escalation of this war. That is not

fair to these soldiers. That is not fair

to their families. It certainly is not

fair to the States and the people we

represent.

We should have an up-or-down vote, a

basic exercise of Congress’s responsibility.

We have offered to the Republicans

an opportunity to vote not only

on the measure that passed the House

today but on an alternative offered by

Senator MCCAIN, who is asking we increase

the troops who will be involved.

I have read many things about this

war. Some of them I think are extremely

insightful; some of them are

troubling. Yesterday in the Washington

Post, there was an article which

laid out what was expected to happen

in Iraq and never occurred.

When GEN Tommy Franks and his

top officers got together in August 2002

to review the invasion plan for Iraq,

they reflected on what would likely

occur. By their estimate today, we

would have 5,000 American soldiers left

in that theater. Instead, we have over

130,000 and a President wanting to increase

that number by 20,000 or 40,000

more. It shows that the planning and

vision of the people who scheduled this

invasion was seriously flawed.

I joined 22 others on the floor of the

Senate voting against the authorization

for this war. I felt at the time that

the American people had been deceived—

deceived about weapons of

mass destruction that did not exist, deceived

about connections with al-Qaida

terrorists and 9/11, which did not exist,

deceived about nuclear weapons and

mushroom clouds when there was no

threat.

That deception that occurred in the

fear and panic that still followed 9/11

led many of my colleagues to vote for

this war. I was not one of them. But

then came the time when I was challenged,

and others, as to whether we

would vote for the money to wage the

war. I stopped and reflected and said if

my son or my daughter was in uniform,

I would want them to have everything

they need to come home safely, even if

I think this policy is wrong.

These soldiers, sailors, marines, and

airmen didn’t write this policy. It was

written in the Pentagon and the White

House. They were sent into battle with

the battle plans that were handed to

them, not battle plans that they wrote.

They deserve a lot better. They deserve

to come home. If they are going to war,

they deserve the equipment they need.

They deserve leadership in the White

House and in Congress that is sensitive

to their bravery and responds with real

caring for their future.