Mr. Speaker, there is concern on the floor tonight about

the way in which this resolution was brought up. The gentleman from

Pennsylvania, Mr. Murtha, is one of the finest members of this body and

has given his heart to our nation and his wisdom to this Congress. But

underlying concerns about the process tonight, is the critically

important issue regarding the future of U.S. involvement in Iraq. The

United States' commitment to a stable and democratic Iraq is essential

for the future of the region, for the larger war on terrorism and for

the Iraqi people.

In my ten trips to Iraq, four times outside the umbrella of the

military, I've had the opportunity to speak with hundreds of Iraqis and

can tell you with some certainty about their greatest fear . . . It is

not the suicide bombs and other terrorist attacks brought against their

countrymen. It is the concern that the United States, which has helped

give them a taste of freedom and democracy, will leave them before they

are ready to fend for themselves.

Tonight we have the opportunity to proclaim, ``We will not leave

you.'' When I hear the critics on this floor or in the news media say

our policy is a disaster, that we are in a mess in Iraq, I think of the

transfer of power in June 2004, the election in January 2005, the

referendum this past October and what I believe will be a huge success

in December with the election of a permanent Iraqi government. I am in

awe of what the Iraqis have accomplished in such a short period of

time.

Regretfully, the administration has done a very poor job explaining

to the American people why we are there and when and how we intend to

leave, but this does not mean we don't have an exit strategy. We have a

strategy but regretfully it has had to be amended more than once.

The United States' strategy is to assist the Iraqis in creating a

secure environment so

they can develop their new democratic government with a competent

police, border patrol and army to defend that government. American

forces will be reduced when enough Iraqi security forces can take our

place and their new government is fully functioning.

Haven't we learned from the 1983 bombing of the marine barracks in

Beirut that if we leave without finishing the job those that wish us

harm will come at us again?

Didn't we learn any lessons from the attacks against our military

personnel in Saudi Arabia and our diplomats in Africa and our sailors

on the USS Cole? And didn't we learn that the Islamist extremists would

come at us again when they attacked the Twin Towers, the Pentagon and

attempted to attack our Capitol on September 11, 2001 ?

Yes they will be back again and again and again.

If we leave Iraq without completing our mission, what type of message

will this send to the people who need our help? To them and the rest of

the world the message will be clear . . . if you put up a strong enough

resistance, the United States will eventually tire of its efforts and

leave before its mission is accomplished.

John McCain was correct when he asked the same questions during

debate of the Defense Authorization bill: ``Are these the messages we

wish to send? Do we wish to respond to the millions who braved bombs

and threats to vote, who have put their faith and trust in American and

the Iraqi Government, that our number one priority is now bringing our

people home?''

Mr. Speaker, although some may feel otherwise, this is a serious

debate about a serious issue. I strongly urge all members to vote

against this resolution and against the premature withdrawal of our

troops from Iraq.