Mr. Speaker, I rise in disgust at the level of cynicism

that is represented by this resolution.

This exercise by the House Republican leadership is about as un-

American and contemptuous as it gets.

I support Mr. Murtha's resolution to bring about an end to U.S.

operations in Iraq in--and I quote--``at the earliest practicable

date.''

The resolution before us is not about that.

This resolution is a blatant political effort to make it look like

the President's Iraq policy has broad support in Congress and among the

public--which it obviously does not.

Worse, it transforms the sacrifice of our brave troops into crass

political exercise.

Mr. Speaker, I have opposed this war from the beginning.

I wasn't convinced of the need for it and deeply concerned about the

potential fallout that it could precipitate.

Sadly, many of my concerns have been borne out, as nearly 2,100 brave

Americans have lost their lives and many thousands more have been

wounded.

Today, the insurgency continues unabated and now Iraq is a hotbed of

terrorist activity.

We are less secure today than before we invaded.

As a result, America's position and influence in the world have

suffered greatly in the process.

I believe it is long past time that the administration produce an

exit strategy for Iraq and am deeply disappointed that all we have seen

is more of the same arrogance and incompetence that got us here in the

first place.

I am not surprised by Representative Murtha's statement yesterday.

Mr. Murtha's distinguished military career, and his decades of public

service, have given him a level of expertise on defense issues

virtually unparalleled in today's Congress.

He understands the troops and their leadership, and the challenges

faced by the military in times of war and peace far better than most.

I am sure his announcement is the result of long and careful

consideration and demands the attention of all thinking Americans.

I am shocked, but not surprised, by the shameful response of some of

my Republican colleagues in Congress and by officials in the White

House who have sought to besmirch Mr. Murtha's motivations and accumen.

Today's action by the House leadership is more of the same--an

attempt to smear a man of honor who commits the unpardonable sin of

disagreeing with them.

Fortunately, I know that as time goes on Mr. Murtha's call for a

serious reassessment of our position in Iraq will be recognized as

thoughtful analysis of a policy in deep trouble and need for change.

I only hope that President Bush and his administration will discover

that truth before more lives are lost in this very tragic situation.

Speaker J. Dennis Hastert declared: ``Murtha and Democratic leaders

have adopted a policy of cut and run. They would prefer that the United

States surrender to the terrorists who would harm innocent Americans.

To add insult to injury, this is done while the President is on foreign

soil.''

Majority Leader Roy Blunt informed Murtha that his views ``only

embolden our enemies'' and lamented that ``Democrats undermine our

troops in Iraq from the security of their Washington, DC, offices.''

At a rival news conference called four hours after Murtha's

appearance, Representative J.D. Hayworth, who like Hastert and Blunt

does not have military service on his resume, alerted the 73-year-old

Murtha that ``the American people are made of sterner stuff.'' And

Representative John Carter said the likes of Murtha want to take ``the

cowardly way out and say, `We're going to surrender.' ''

The White House accused a senior House Democrat--and a decorated

Vietnam veteran--who called for a swift withdrawal from Iraq of

advocating surrender, comparing him to anti-war filmmaker Michael

Moore.

In a broadside issued Thursday night, Bush spokesman Scott McClellan

said that it is ``baffling that [Pennsylvania Representative John

Murtha] is endorsing the policy positions of Michael Moore and the

extreme liberal wing of the Democratic party.''

Murtha, whose brand of hawkishness has never been qualified by the

word ``chicken,'' was expecting the attacks. ``I like guys who've never

been there to criticize us who've been there. I like that,'' the burly

old marine said, hands in pocket. Referring to Vice President Cheney,

he continued: ``I like guys who got five deferments and never been

there, and send people to war, and then don't like to hear suggestions

about what needs to be done.''