Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from New York for

yielding me the time and for her outstanding leadership on our

committee.

Mr. Speaker, this debate is long overdue. There is no issue more

serious or more urgent. The American people said loud and clear in the

last election that they consider bringing this war to a close to be the

singular imperative of their leaders. Yet rather than beginning to

bring the troops home, the President has proposed escalating this

conflict.

The American people deserve to know where their elected

representatives stand on this, the most critical issue at this moment

in history. This week the people will get their answer.

Mr. Speaker, here is where I stand: I opposed this war from the

beginning, and I support several responsible proposals to bring this

war to a close. I believe the President's proposed escalation would be

a tragic mistake. It will most likely result in an increase in violence

while only postponing the hard political choices the Iraqi people must

make. It will also increase the strain on a military that is already

stretched to the breaking point.

Mr. Speaker, it is critically important to make clear that Iraq has

spiraled into civil war because of the failure of this country's

political leadership, not our troops. Our brave men

and women in uniform have done everything that has been asked of them.

The real tragedy is how ill served they have been by their political

leadership.

I have heard firsthand from many families in Sacramento the impact

this has had on their lives. Linda, a concerned mother, told me about

her son, Nicholas, who serves as an Army sergeant in the 82nd Airborne

in Germany. Shortly, he will be returning to Iraq for his third tour.

And there are some 30 soldiers in the Sacramento area who have died in

this war. I have met several times with members of the National Guard

and Reserve and their families. Every Member knows what I am talking

about. We have all done it. We all know the pain.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this administration has failed to meet

the most basic requirements of responsible leadership. As a result, it

has abdicated any claim to deference from this Chamber on this war and

has certainly relinquished the moral authority to send men and women

into this catastrophe.

Undoubtedly, this Chamber will need to take more forceful action if

we are to bring this war to a conclusion. But today is an important

first step.

I urge my colleagues to support this resolution and to oppose this

gravely mistaken proposal to escalate the war.

Mr. Speaker, this debate is long overdue. There is no issue more

serious . . . or more urgent. The American People sent a message in the

last election. That message was that they consider bringing this war to

a close to be the singular imperative of their leaders.

Yet rather than beginning to bring troops home, the President has

proposed escalating this conflict . . . sending tens of thousands of

additional troops to Iraq.

Rather than change direction . . . they would instead continue down

our current, disastrous path . . . only at a faster pace and with more

human life placed in harm's way.

This week, every Member of the House of Representatives will have an

opportunity to let their constituents know where they stand on the

President's proposed escalation. That is only right.

The American people deserve to know where their elective

representatives stand on this, the most critical issue at this moment

of our history.

Mr. Speaker, here's where I stand. I opposed this war from the

beginning, and I support several responsible proposals to bring this

war to a close.

I believe the President's proposed escalation would be a tragic

mistake. His stubborn insistence on pursuing the present course has

been rejected by our military leaders . . . the independent Iraq study

group . . . and a strong majority of the public. And with good reason.

This escalation will most likely result in an increase in violence

while only postponing the hard political choices the Iraqi people must

make.

Escalation of this conflict will also increase the strain on a

military that is already stretched to the breaking point.

Mr. Speaker, it is critically important to make clear that Iraq has

spiraled into civil war because of the failure of this country's

political leadership . . . not our troops.

Our brave men and women in uniform have done everything that has been

asked of them. They courageously put their lives on the line every day

for us.

The real tragedy is how ill-served our men and women in uniform have

been by their political leadership.

I have heard firsthand from many families in Sacramento about the

impact this has had on their lives.

In 2005, I spoke with a group of women whose husbands were serving in

the National Guard in Iraq.

One woman told me she bought her husband a Kevlar vest before he

deployed . . . something all too many families were doing for their

loved ones because the military wasn't providing it. Imagine the stress

. . . sending a loved one into danger without the confidence that he

would be given the needed equipment for protection.

And I have heard countless stories about the hardships being created

by the multiple tours this conflict has demanded.

Linda, a concerned mother from Sacramento, told me about her son,

Nicholas, who serves as an Army sergeant in the 82nd Airborne in

Germany. He lives on-base with his wife and two children, ages four and

five. Another child is on the way.

Nicholas recently learned that he was going to have to return to Iraq

for his third tour.

Linda wrote me and said that his family . . . and I'm quoting . . .

``. . . will be all alone in Germany when he leaves and each time he

has gone, the children have terrible nightmares and anger issues

because they do not understand the long separations.''

Another Sacramento couple that wrote me are the proud parents of

three Army soldiers . . . one is currently serving his second tour in

Iraq . . . the other two have already completed two tours in Iraq. They

ask . . . will their sons be asked to go back a third time?

My friend Richard Beach served as a chaplain in the U.S. Army

Reserves in Iraq. Richard served in Iraq early in the conflict, and

realized that four years since he went there, many of his fellow

reservists are still serving there.

Richard shared with me a note he sent to some of his fellow members

of the 114th. He wrote . . . and I quote . . . ``I remember four years

ago we were getting ready for our trip to Fort Lewis and then on to

Iraq. I hope as the fourth anniversary of the war comes up you are all

in good health and living life to the fullest. I too pray that soon

this war will end, and we will stop sending our soldiers off to war.''

Four years later . . . and still many of the same soldiers and their

families are making the same sacrifice. But that is the heartbreaking

reality here.

There are some 30 soldiers in the Sacramento area who have died in

this war. I've met several times with members of the National Guard and

Reserve and their families. Every member knows what I am talking about.

We've all done it. We all know the pain.

The notion of ``shared sacrifice'' is something that helped make this

country great.

But with this administration . . . only our soldiers and their

families share in the sacrifice.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that this country

has tried troop increases before . . . to no avail. Sadly, this

administration simply lacks credibility when arguing that this proposal

will work.

As a result of this administration's failure to meet the most basic

requirements of responsible leadership, it has abdicated any claim to

deference from this chamber on this war . . . and it has certainly

relinquished the moral authority to send additional men and women into

this catastrophe.

Today's step is only a first step. Undoubtedly, this chamber will

need to take more forceful action if we are to bring this war to a

conclusion. But it is an important first step.

I urge my colleagues to support this resolution . . . and to oppose

this gravely mistaken proposal to escalate the war.