Mr. Speaker, today we will begin a long

overdue debate about the President's troop escalation plan, and the

Iraq war in general. I spoke earlier this morning, and I had the

opportunity to address some of the conflict between the testimony of

experts and this administration's wishful thinking in regard to this

escalation.

What is said here on the floor of Congress, what is said by our

experts and what is said by the administration matters. It matters

because our troops will be asked to fulfill the mission that comes out

of these discussions. Our debate on this resolution is about far more

than expressing our disapproval for the President. We offer this debate

in the hopes that it will shape the mission that our soldiers are asked

to carry out, one that is based on facts and reality, not blind

ideology.

I retired from the Army National Guard in the spring of 2005, and the

unit I served with is now in Iraq. Many of these soldiers were kids

that I taught in my high school classroom, that I coached on our

football team. They joined my Guard unit, and I trained them. We

deployed together in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, and now

they are deployed again to Iraq.

As a 24-year veteran of the Army National Guard, I know that our

soldiers are trained to fulfill the mission they are given, but having

a mission that is achievable is the key to any military success.

The previous Republican Congress failed to hold the administration

accountable for providing a mission that could succeed; and in so

doing, they failed to support our troops.

Last week, I had the opportunity to speak with a field commander from

the Minnesota National Guard serving in Iraq. He told me that our

soldiers are performing magnificently, every minute of every hour of

every day. That is not the issue at hand here. The issue at hand is

providing a mission that can succeed.

Mr. Speaker, when we recess for our district work period next week, I

will go home and look into the eyes of the families of these soldiers.

These are the same families and the men and women who learned on cable

television that they would be extended in their tour of duty. These are

the same men and women who will face financial loss because many of

them had the plan to return to their jobs after an 18-month deployment

to work in agriculture and construction businesses, and now they will

be delayed in their return. They will miss the critical season. They

have been deployed for 2\1/2\ of the last 4 years.

Mr. Speaker, we can and must do better by our soldiers. The

resolution we will debate today and that I am in support of is meant as

a first step to giving them an achievable mission and a chance to

return. Our soldiers are trained to fulfill their mission without

question. We as civilian leaders have a duty to question it on their

behalf.

For the past 4 years, this Republican-led Congress has failed in

their duty. This resolution is about this Congress standing up and

saying we will achieve our duty to the same level of excellence that

our soldiers have.