Mr. Speaker, as this essential debate begins today, I am

quite honored to be asked to make opening remarks at its beginning.

I served in our military for over three decades, entering during the

Vietnam War and serving under Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan,

Bush, Clinton, and our Commander in Chief today, President Bush. I had

the honor of leading men and women in harm's way, the highest honor

that our Nation can give to anyone; most recently in combat, over at

Afghanistan and Iraq, where I commanded an aircraft carrier battle

group of 30 ships and 15,000 sailors and marines.

Having worn the cloth of this Nation so long, I know that duty of

choice, that the citizens of this great country have about the future

course of this war in Iraq is not an unpatriotic one, nor is what

anyone will say in the next few days unpatriotic.

If my 31 years in the military taught me anything, it was that we

serve in this all-volunteer military to defend Americans' freedom to

think as they please and to say what they think, even if they disagree

with their leaders. A democracy is based on freedom of expression, and

those who join the military do so to fight, if necessary, the wars

which defend that freedom, hoping that our use will be to a wise end.

And that is what concerns me about Iraq.

The continuing use of our national treasure in what is an

inconclusive, open-ended involvement within a country with long-term

benefits does not match what we need to reap. It is why I am opposed to

a troop surge that doubles down on a bad military debt that has been

tried already.

We need to apply our resources elsewhere in the world, where

terrorists come from, including Osama bin Laden who is still on the

loose, or emerging nations such as in the Western Pacific have growing

political and economic interests and, therefore, influence that may

challenge ours.

I do not think that my extensive military experience alone gives me

license to disagree with our strategy in Iraq, but just being an

American who has closely watched and thought about the trade-off and

benefits for our future prosperity, interest, and values does.

Our military is a national treasure that should not be used

recklessly, nor should it be hoarded like miser's gold. It is a vital

resource if we are to continue to be a force for peace and prosperity,

but throughout the world. And that is why I firmly believe in a planned

end to our military engagement in Iraq within the next year as the

primary catalyst for change in Iraq so their leaders are forced to

accept the political and military responsibility for their country,

with our diplomatic and economic help, and limited military support

from outside Iraq, but within the region is best. It is for our

Nation's greater security that I believe this, and why I cannot support

a troop surge that strains our military readiness further and, more,

our overall strategic security in a war that does not serve our

Nation's greater interest in this world and our future.