Mr. Speaker, Americans are aching for our leadership to

end the war in Iraq. Instead, they find the President and his enablers

in the House and Senate doing everything they can to block legislation

that would require him to bring the troops home by a date certain. Each

day seems to bring some new proposal that purports to be progress.

Upon examination, however, they leave the President free to pursue

his discredited policies and serve his diversionary tactics by

politicians searching for cover. One proposal calls for the President

to submit a plan by mid-October to narrow the use of U.S. troops in

Iraq to fighting terrorists and securing borders and U.S. interests. It

won't bring home a single American serviceman or woman.

Another proposal seeks to ``change the mission'' of American forces,

but doesn't guarantee when or even if their redeployment will begin.

Supporters of ``changing the mission'' claim it would result in troop

reductions, but they offer no evidence of that. Americans will remain

the targets of violence, and U.S. policy will continue to sow

resentment in the Muslim world. In my opinion, ``changing the mission''

is the war supporters' latest excuse to avoid decisive action to bring

the war to a conclusion.

This is not the leadership the American people expect and that our

national security demands. The failure of the President's surge

strategy means he has lost the ability to shape events in Iraq in a

positive direction. Only by redeploying our forces from Iraq can we

rebuild our depleted military, restore our global reputation and

redirect resources to fight al Qaeda.

Just last week, the National Counterterrorism Center reported that al

Qaeda has regrouped in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, enabled

by the President's diversion of resources to Iraq.

I opposed the Iraq war from the start and take no comfort in the fact

that many of my most ominous predictions have proven true. In a

September 6, 2002, op-ed in the Portland Press Herald, I predicted that

the war would be fought

America has suffered nearly 30,000 casualties, including more than

3,600 combat deaths. The war has cost half a trillion dollars,

resulting in huge deficits that will burden our children's future.

On October 8, 2002, during the House debate on the war resolution, I

said

Unfortunately, this is exactly what has happened.

I voted against the war and have been an outspoken critic of the case

made to justify it, the mismanagement of the occupation and the failure

to hold the administration accountable for its so many mistakes.

More than 18 months ago, I called for a deadline to redeploy our

forces. A firm deadline was, and is, the best way to end the U.S.

involvement in Iraq and force the Iraqis to assume responsibility for

their own security. As former Maine Senator George Mitchell

demonstrated in his Northern Ireland diplomacy, a firm deadline can be

a very effective way to get parties in conflict to compromise their

differences.

Nothing but the force of law will move President Bush to alter his

stay-the-course strategy. Nonbinding resolutions are not sufficient to

compel a real change in policy and get us out of Iraq. This President

is stubbornly determined to delay the inevitable at the cost of

additional precious American lives. More than 600 of our troops have

died since the surge began.

The other costs include greater hatred of the U.S. in the Islamic

world, more terrorists inspired by that hatred and, with our Armed

Forces stretched to the breaking point, great insecurity for our

Nation.

Unless Members of Congress who supported President Bush's war policy

steadfastly for 5 years stop looking for cover and do the right thing,

the President will prevail and our troops will remain in Iraq.

Our Armed Forces have done all that we asked of them and have

performed their mission with great skill and courage. President Bush

will keep our troops in the crossfire of the Iraqi civil war until

Congress sets binding dates for their redeployment. That action

represents the leadership needed to bring our troops safely home.