Mr. Speaker, first of all, congratulations for being up

in that chair.

I rise today to unwaveringly support the Speaker of the House, who

has said that she opposes any escalation of the occupation of Iraq,

that she opposes sending more combat troops into a situation in Iraq

that is so, so messy.

The Speaker represents an overwhelming majority viewpoint among the

American people. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, she is Speaker today because the

American people overwhelmingly rejected the Bush occupation policy, a

policy that has already claimed over 3,000 American lives, cost us

hundreds of billions of dollars, ignited a bloody civil war, and

diminished our national security.

But President Bush is stubbornly and desperately clinging onto an

ideological vision that has been completely discredited. He is not

listening to the new Congress. He is not listening to the American

people. He is not listening to the Iraq Study Group. He is not even

listening to his military commanders, who have advised against an

escalation.

Even the most hawkish observer imaginable, Oliver North, has come out

against an escalation in a recent column entitled: ``More Troops Equals

More Targets.''

This occupation takes a more disastrous turn with each passing week,

but the Bush administration not only is sticking to its failed policy;

it is investing even more in that policy.

Our military presence, from the very beginning, hasn't brought peace

and freedom to Iraq. It has been a catalyst for greater violence and

disorder. It hasn't defeated the insurgency. It has been what has

motivated the insurgency. It hasn't solved problems in Iraq. It has

exacerbated them.

So what is the White House's solution? Send more troops and put more

Americans in harm's way, even though the American presence destabilized

Iraq in the first place. Escalation defies common sense, Mr. Speaker.

It is completely incomprehensible. The President of the United States has a

unique take on an old proverb. He believes that if you find yourself in

a hole, the solution is to keep on digging.

Here in Congress, however, we want to stop digging. On Friday, the

Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Out of Iraq Caucus will co-

host a forum featuring former Senator George McGovern and Mideast

expert Dr. William Polk. They will be discussing their plan for ending

the occupation, as outlined in their recent book, ``Out of Iraq: A

Practical Plan For Withdrawal Now.''

We will also be joined by leaders from the military, and from

diplomatic and intelligence communities, who will offer their expertise

and input in a dialogue with Senator McGovern and Dr. Polk.

It is time for a 180-degree turn in the U.S. policy toward Iraq. It

is time for the Congress to act out the mandate it received from the

American people in November. It is time to get down to business and

figure out how to extricate ourselves from Iraq, end the occupation and

bring our troops home.