Mr. Speaker, tonight we will once again listen to

President Bush as he describes yet another strategy for the war in

Iraq. By all accounts from the media, the President will tell the

Nation that he intends to send more U.S. troops to fight and die in

Iraq.

This is not ``stay the course,'' Mr. Speaker, this is escalation.

And at a bare minimum, Congress must find the wisdom and the courage

to require and vote upon specific new authorization to escalate the

number of troops in Iraq.

This is what Senator Kennedy called for yesterday. He has introduced

legislation that prohibits any Federal funds from being used to

increase the number of U.S. forces in Iraq without a specific

authorization of Congress by law for such an increase.

It is the very minimum we can do, Mr. Speaker, for Congress to

finally take some responsibility for this war and exercise some

accountability.

What do you do, Mr. Speaker, when a President fails to listen to the

military advice of his generals? When he consistently changes generals

when their experience and best counsel does not match his own

preconceived ideas?

What do you do, Mr. Speaker, when a President ignores the

recommendations of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group?

What do you do when a President, whose idea of a exit strategy is to

kick the ball down field, is determined to dump this mess on whoever

will be the next President of the United States?

Mr. Speaker, this President lost the mid-term elections. He lost

because the American people voted against the war, and they want a new

direction. This is George Bush's war, and he should end it on his

watch. If he is not going to listen to his own generals, the counsel of

the Iraq Study Group or the American people, then Congress must

confront him and begin to deny him the means and the ability to carry

out the next disastrous step of his policy.

It is my view that too many in Washington are consumed with saving

face,

rather than saving lives. Political expediency, political cover and

political posturing must not be the guiding principles on how we

proceed in Iraq. Instead, we must be focused on the men and women we

put in harm's way.

And everyone in this Chamber should be haunted by the fact that

Congress has acquiesced too many times in one of the worst foreign

policy blunders in United States history. Over 3,000 American military

personnel have been killed in this war. Are we going to stand here next

January and talk about the 4,000 or 5,000 who will have died? Well over

22,000 American troops have been wounded, some injured for life, and

over tens of thousands of Iraqi men, women and children are dead.

It is long past time for this Congress to accept responsibility for

having given this President a blank check and a free pass for nearly 4

years.

It is simply false to argue that placing any restrictions on funding

for this disastrous war somehow shortchanges our troops. Redeployment

from Iraq does not shortchange our troops. Bringing them home to their

families does not shortchange our troops.

I will tell you what shortchanges our troops. Making them serve two,

three or possibly even four tours of duty in Iraq, that shortchanges

our troops. Failing to provide the veterans of this war with health

care, that shortchanges our troops. Increasing by more than five times

the backlog on veterans' disability claims so that those injured in

Iraq and those suffering from PTSD don't get the help they need when

they return home, that shortchanges our troops, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is no military victory to be had in Iraq. It is

time George Bush ended his war and brought our uniformed men and women

home. To do that, we must change the dynamic in Iraq. We must end our

occupation, let the Iraqi people determine their own destiny and engage

the countries of the region and the international community while we

withdraw.

We can start by voting not to escalate this war, even if that means

conditioning or withholding funds. I, for one, Mr. Speaker, will not

vote for any so-called emergency supplemental appropriations bill that

escalates the war in Iraq, that fails to offer a clear plan for when

our troops will be coming home.

Mr. Speaker, the American people get it. They are far ahead of the

politicians in Washington. They want leadership. They want us to do

what is right. They want us to end the war.