Mr. Speaker. Last night I watched the State of the Union

Address in this hall for the first time as a Member of Congress. While

I found the pageantry inspiring, I wish I could say the same about the

speech itself.

We heard another attempt to allay with hollow rhetoric the concerns

of an alarmed Nation about the war in Iraq. And rather than seizing an

opportunity to level with the American people and set the new course

they rightly demand, the administration, once again, chose to cling to

its delusions and insist that its failing policies be enacted.

In 2003, the administration requested and received from Congress

authority to invade Iraq on the basis of the claim that Iraq possessed

weapons of mass destruction and presented an imminent threat to our

national security. Senior administration officials claimed that the

Iraqi Government was connected with the al Qaeda terrorists who

perpetrated the attacks of September 11, 2001. And we now know that

neither the premise for the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq

nor the claim of a connection to 9/11 was true.

After the fall of Baghdad, the administration sent in officials with

little or no knowledge and understanding of Iraq, its people, its

culture or its politics. Costly mistakes, including the dismantling of

the army and the failure to secure weapons stockpiles, paved the way

for the current situation in Iraq: More than $450 billion spent with

billions unaccounted for; an undependable Iraqi Government, unwilling

or incapable of controlling warring sects in their militias; more than

3,000 American deaths, and more than 25,000 soldiers maimed or

grievously wounded; hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians killed,

wounded or driven from their homes by sectarian violence; and a

profound loss of respect for our country in the region and around the

world.

All in all, it constitutes an unparalleled foreign policy disaster

for the United States.

The administration still has no plans for a responsible exit strategy

to protect our security. And unbelievably, the administration wants to

send an additional 21,000 troops to Iraq.

The proposal is a cavalier rejection of the sound views of the

American people, the consensus of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, and

the counsel of wise military commanders.

In a city of some 7 million people, and without a unified government

or the infrastructure to provide jobs to an ever more agitated

population, an injection of 20,000 troops will not succeed. It can only

stoke the flames of chaos and bloodshed in Iraq.

Our national strategic interests, Mr. Speaker, require a change of

course, not an escalation. The imperative to support our troops

requires a change of course, not an escalation.

Last year the Republican-controlled House declared in the defense

authorization bill that 2006 would be a year of transition to Iraqi

control of Iraq, and that redeployment would begin at that point. Yet

here we are in 2007 with the administration calling for an escalation

supported by many in this body.

In my judgment, Mr. Speaker, the time has come and gone for this

Congress to say ``enough is enough.'' The time has come and gone for

statements of concern. The time has come and gone for ``trust but

verify.'' The situation in Iraq is dire.

It is now time for this Congress to do what the American people said

so clearly in November that they wanted us to do: Change the course in

Iraq. We have a saying in my home State in New Hampshire, ``When you're

in a hole, stop digging.''

Mr. Speaker, I support our valiant troops, and I oppose the

administration's proposed escalation. I resolve to work with my

colleagues over the coming weeks for a concrete new direction in Iraq.

In the absence of an acceptable plan from the President, the American

people are calling upon Congress to lead the way. Popular demand for

new direction in Iraq is, in large part, the reason I am here in

Washington and the reason Democrats now hold the majority.

We can no longer accept empty promises from the administration or

hope the administration will honestly confront the realty of its

failures. The American people are looking to this Congress for

leadership. They are impatient. And we must and we will respond.