Mr. Speaker, I rise today in salute to America's troops

and veterans, and urge my colleagues to honor their sacrifices not with

lofty political rhetoric but with concrete budgetary reality.

Sadly, we are denied that opportunity today. Instead, after waiting

weeks for a budget and voting primarily on uncontested matters,

receiving only this week a proposed budget that:

Fails to appropriately address the sad state of our economy;

Fails to propose policies that will create an environment for the

maintenance and creation of jobs;

Fails to clearly fund ongoing expenses related to the continuing

military efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq and fails to adequately fund

force protective measures as well as first responder needs for homeland

security;

Fails to fund the President's own promises with respect to education

mandates on local communities;

Fails to even begin to deal with the nation's health care crisis;

Proposes pilfering the Social Security surplus; and

Forces enormous further debt burden on every one of our children.

This Republican House leadership--I believe in cooperation with the

White House--now proposes to politicize foreign policy for their own

domestic political purposes.

It's a disgrace!

The self-promoted ``uniter not divider'' in the White House has at

every opportunity slammed any effort at bi-partnership--this resolution

is one more example. The White House has been complicit as House

Republicans manipulate and distort rules and customs to wring every

ounce of the democratic process out of the exercise of government here,

while professing to support democracy worldwide.

After shamelessly exploiting in TV advertisements the 9/11 tragedies

and depicting victims (whose families the President would not honor by

cooperating with the investigation into circumstances surrounding the

incident as well as intelligence and government action and inaction

leading up to and following 9/11) and first responders (who must

continue to labor on the front lines without adequate communications,

equipment, training, standards and support), this group of Republicans

now allows four hours to debate a resolution the sole purpose of which

is to create a dilemma for those who know the Administration's effort

with respect to Iraq and with respect to fighting terror to be woefully

inadequate.

The resolution is structured with the appearance of supporting our

troops, but is worded so that it could be argued--however wrong such an

argument would be--that Congress endorsed the way this Administration

has conducted itself with respect to Iraq.

In essence, yet another false choice for Members: Vote for it, so

disingenuous political operatives can claim the President is supported

even in his misleading acts and his diversion of efforts from the fight

against terrorists and his Administration's abject failures of planning

for post-Saddam Iraq, or Subject oneself to even more disingenuous

assertion by political hacks--for that is what they would be--who might

assert a vote against the resolution was a vote against support and

recognition for our troops.

It is politics at its most base and vile level, yet this White House

and this Republican majority promote it without hesitation.

Well, it will not work! The American people--even with an all-too-

slowly awakening media--is learning more each day that this President

and this Republican majority have very little in the way of meaningful

policy for America--and far too much politics aimed at benefiting their

careers and ideological extremists.

Whichever way people vote on this resolution, it will be clear to

America that the President's and the Republican majority's hypocritical

resolutions will not work any better than their tasteless

advertisements.

The American people deserve far better, and the Democrats stand ready

with a vision and a plan to deliver it: Democrats are working to

protect and defend America from those who plan attacks against our

families and communities. Democrats are prepared to use military force

to protect our security, our people, and our vital interests, and have

an unswerving commitment to ensure that America's armed forces remain

the best trained, best led, best equipped force for peace the world has

ever known.

Democrats applaud the troops who ousted Saddam in 20 days. We want to

support them on their still dangerous mission, and believe we should be

debating giving our troops the armor--body and vehicle--rifles, jammers

and other equipment they need.

It now appears that the President's rationale for war was flawed. CIA

Director George Tenet admitted that the intelligence agencies never

told the White House that Iraq posed an imminent threat. [Washington

Post 3/10/04] Former Chief UN Weapons Inspector Hans Blix stated that

the Bush Administration made up its mind that Iraq had weapons of mass

destruction--and wasn't interested in evidence to the contrary. [AP, 3/

12/04] But the President and the rest of the Administration said Iraq

posed an ``urgent and unique threat,'' an ``immediate threat,'' a

``mortal threat,'' and an ``imminent threat'' to the people of the

United States. [President Bush, 11/20/02; Secretary Rumsfeld, 11/14/02;

Financial Times, 8/27/02; Press gaggle with Scott McClellan, 2/10/03]

Democrats want a full accounting of the events leading up to the war in

Iraq. Americans should be able to trust that what the President tells

them is true--especially when it comes to the life and death decisions

of war and peace.

Our troops were sent to Iraq without enough of the equipment they

depend on to do their jobs safely. Un-armored Humvees are falling

victim to road-side bombs and rocket propelled grenades. Thousands of

soldiers are

forced to fight without body armor--and the President still failed to

include enough funds in his budget to pay for operations in Iraq.

Americans shouldn't have to continue to bear most of the burden of

rebuilding Iraq alone. President Bush's dismissive treatment of our

allies has left the United States primarily responsible for the heavy

burden of stabilizing and rebuilding Iraq. A year after invading Iraq,

we are seeing the price of the President's distorted priorities.

American taxpayers are paying almost all the bills--a colossal $120

billion and rising. Most importantly, American soldiers are enduring

almost all the casualties: over 550 Americans killed and thousands more

wounded.

Democrats want to work with our international allies. Democrats want

to strengthen the capacity of America's intelligence gathering

operation, and forge stronger international coalitions, to increase our

ability to target and capture terrorists even before they act. Instead

of alienating our allies, Democrats want to work with them and with

international institutions so that we can prevent the proliferation of

weapons of mass destruction and keep them out of the hands of

terrorists.

Democrats support a foreign policy that reflects American priorities.

Democrats want to make America safer with a foreign policy that

reflects American priorities--promoting political and economic freedom

and human rights; cooperating with allies and friends; and respecting

international law and institutions.

Democrats want an honest accounting of the continued cost of the Iraq

war. Top defense officials, including Army Chief of Staff General Peter

Schoomaker, testified to Congress that the U.S. war efforts in Iraq and

Afghanistan will run out of money in September, leaving the military

scrambling to cover as much as $19 billion in costs. [St. Petersburg

Times, 2/11/04] Democrats want a detailed plan for future spending, so

our troops are guaranteed to get the resources they need.

Homeland security must be a priority. Democrats want to make sure

that our firefighters and police officers get the tools they need to

keep us safe here at home. But the Bush Administration and the

Republicans' budgets fail to provide the funding we need to address our

security concerns. Democrats want to connect local, state, and federal

terrorist information systems to make sure that every cop on the beat

has the information they need to keep our families safe. We want to

provide firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical personnel

with the equipment they need to communicate in a crisis. We want to

protect the long stretches of our border that are currently unwatched

and unprotected. And we want to help make sure states are prepared to

respond to a bioterrorist attack.

Part of winning the war on terror is taking care of those who helped

us fight it. On the battlefield, our troops pledge to leave no soldier

behind. Here at home, Democrats know that we must leave no veteran

behind. We must ensure their health care, their pensions, and their

survivor's benefits. But the Bush Administration wants to raise health

care costs for over 1 million veterans, increasing co-payments and

imposing new enrollment fees that will cost veterans $2 billion over

five years.

Unfortunately, in a disgraceful rebuke to democracy, the Republican

majority has stubbornly refused to offer Democrats any opportunity to

share our vision and plan with the American people--refusing an up-or-

down vote on the Democrats' plan to salute our troops not just with

lofty political rhetoric, but with concrete budgetary reality. What are

they afraid of? Why are the Republicans cowed by the prospect of a fair

debate?

My colleagues, just because the Republican majority refuses us a

democratic debate, you need not subject yourselves to the political

antics of this most demeaning political ploy. Vote no, yes or present .

. . whichever best allows you to share these comments and facts with

the American people.

What is important is that the American people know our troops are

supported, and that their sacrifices and those of their families are

appreciated and honored.

They will know (quickly if the press is alert and perceptive; over

time if left to their own diligent inquiries and pursuit of truth) that

at a time of great national challenge and need for unity, this White

House and their Republican majority once again sought to divide the

nation, not unite it, and did so for crass, short-sighted, selfish

benefit.