Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this resolution.

Is this the perfect solution? No. But how can there be a perfect

solution to a war so imperfectly devised, so catastrophically planned,

so horribly managed by the Bush administration?

This resolution turns in a better direction. It provides health care

to our veterans.

It provides support to our warfighters.

It demands accountability from our President.

And it creates the process to redeploy our troops.

I voted for the use of force in Iraq, Mr. Speaker. I believed then,

as I believe now, that the Middle East is an exceedingly dangerous

region on the brink of an eruption that threatens global security.

But the war in Iraq did not stabilize the Middle East. It has

destabilized it.

Before the war in Iraq, Iran was concerned about Israel. Today,

Israel is concerned about Iran.

Before the war in Iraq, there was no such thing as ``Al Queda in

Iraq''. Today, there is.

Before the war in Iraq, our military was capable of swiftly and

decisively responding to multiple threats, foreign and domestic. Just

yesterday, the New York National Guard reported to my office that it

has only 37 percent of the mission critical transportation it needs to

respond to a homeland security emergency in my state: whether it's a

terrorist attack or a severe hurricane.

This resolution reinvests in the priorities we need. And it says to

both the Iraqi government and the Bush Administration:

``No more blank checks. No more endless commitments.''

Many are troubled with the inclusion of a strategic withdrawal of our

troops between December of this year and August of next. Mr. Speaker.

And I must be honest. I have struggled with this as well. The

decision should be hard. It should be contentious. It should torment us

all. Because no matter what we do, the stakes are high. The

consequences are great.

If you lean to the right, an August 2008 redeployment is way too

soon.

If you lean to the left, an August 2008 redeployment is way too long.

I reached my own judgment a few months ago. Based not on polls, not

on politics, not on the convenience of sound-bytes on either side of

the aisle and not on righteous absolutism that can only be formulated

in a vacuum. I formed it after listening to the Commanding General of

CENTCOM testify to the Armed Services Committee that we had until the

middle of this year before Baghdad spins out of control. Shortly after

that, the Iraq Study Group, after months of non-partisan work and

study, reached the judgment that: ``By the first quarter of 2008,

subject to unexpected developments in the security situation on the

ground, all combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be

out of Iraq.''

The middle of this year to the middle of next year.

Those are the benchmarks, Mr. Speaker. Those are the nonpartisan,

nonpolitical, balanced and reasoned benchmarks.

And those benchmarks are contained in this resolution.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me say this: Today Republicans and

Democrats will disagree. Fair enough. But it's time to stop thinking

about our disagreements and begin working together on our agreements.

Last week, several members of the House Center Aisle Caucus, which I

have the privilege of co-chairing, met to discuss cooperating on

several Iraq initiatives. This week. I introduced the first of these

bipartisan measures with the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. Davis), the

gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Carney), the gentleman from Louisiana

(Mr. Boustany). Our resolution requires the President to submit a Status Of

Forces Agreement to the Iraq government, just as we have with other

governments where we have a military presence. This will send the

message that we are not occupiers of Iraq. And we follow the rule of

law.

I mention this now, Mr. Speaker, in the hopes that my colleagues who

wish to join us in constructive ways forward will join us. That the

debate will turn from left and right to forward.

That is what our troops want. That is what our constituents want.

That is our obligation.