I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, by nearly all measures, the situation in Iraq is a mess.

And yet what seems crystal clear to most Minnesoteans the President

says that we still have a realistic chance to achieve his vision for a

free and democratic Iraq and that all is needed is a short-term

addition of 21,000 American combat troops. Does nobody seriously think

that this is true, that success is only 21,000 more soldiers away?

Mr. Speaker, I am against the President's plan. I have given this

President the benefit of the doubt on more than one occasion. But his

plan to send in more troops does not pass the test of common sense. If

a short-term surge was going to deliver victory and democracy in Iraq,

we would have already done it.

This idea would have made more sense at the beginning of this war.

And more troops at the start were what many experts counseled. I was

serving on the Select Intelligence Committee when the President, senior

Pentagon officials, and senior intelligence officials told us that Iraq

was a threat to our national security. At the time, we had a great deal

of confusing and occasionally conflicting information.

We questioned them about this, and their response was that the

information that they had required us to act and that they had a plan

for the aftermath. I gave them the benefit of the doubt then, and I

believed them.

But as time passed and events unfolded, we all learned that, at best,

we had received unreliable information and, at worst, we had been

misled.

Mr. Speaker, I want to focus now on the soldiers in the Minnesota

National Guard and talk about what the President's plan is going to

mean for them.

A Minnesota Guardsman, a staff sergeant who is currently deployed in

Iraq, and, by the way, that is the same rank I held when I left the

Guard, sent a letter to the editor of one the newspapers in my

district; and I want to read some of it to you.

He says, ``My unit, the Second Battalion, 136th Infantry, Bear Cats

of Minnesota, which are now the 34th Infantry Division 1, First

Brigade, is on its second deployment since 2003. In 2003, we were

mobilized for a 10-month deployment to Bosnia. We returned home in

April of 2004 and were mobilized again in October, 2005, for our

current Iraq deployment. When our current deployment is complete, the

134th Combat Battalion will have spent 490 days in combat, exceeding

the current record held by the First Armored Division, an active duty

armor unit, by 35 days. A great deal has been asked of us and more will

be asked of us in the near future. But our benefits do not reflect the

burden that we carry.''

He says that, ``while the State and the people of Minnesota have been

extremely generous towards their soldiers, the Federal Government

continues to treat Minnesota soldiers like unwanted stepchildren by

neglecting to give them the benefits that better reflect their roles in

today's military, that is as full-time, front-line soldiers who are

used on a regular basis, rather than sparingly. However, it is not our

choice to be full-time soldiers, a capacity that we essentially fill

for the military, given the frequency of deployments and the sheer

numbers of National Guard and Reserve troops deployed across the globe

at any one time. If the military is going to use the National Guard in

an active duty capacity, it must increase our benefits to go along with

the responsibility or there will be no National Guard for the Federal

and State governments to rely upon in times of crisis.''

Mr. Speaker, I think he said it clearly; and I couldn't agree more.

When called upon to serve our country, the Minnesota National Guard has

a proud

history of answering that call. Over 2,500 soldiers of the Minnesota

National Guard are in Iraq. Many of them were already deployed

overseas, as I said, in Bosnia; and they were slated to come home in

March. But, instead, they are having their tour extended for 4 more

months because of this administration's plan.

Now they are scheduled to come home in July and will have spent 22

months away from their families. They will have been deployed a total

of 36 months out of the last 5 years. In my opinion, that is

unacceptable, and I say, enough is enough.

The soldiers of the Minnesota National Guard are performing their

duties admirably. They are performing well or better than the regular

Army. They are serious about completing their mission; and, from my

experience, they will always do more than what is asked of them.

Another group of people that I would like to recognize are the

Guard's families. They are not in harm's way, but they wake up every

day worrying, not knowing what that day will about bring for their

loved ones. They didn't enlist for the military, but they share their

daily effects of this war.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to oppose this plan.