Mr. Speaker, we have just heard a great

example of an important form of political debate. The Republicans

specialize in this. It is kind of political necrophilia. There is this

love of dead Democrats among many Republicans. Democrats who, when they

were alive were trashed by the right wing, once they are dead and

safely no longer possibly candidates for office, get lionized. Nothing

of course shows that better than with Harry Truman, but it is John

Kennedy, and it is others.

The assertion that the Democrats who are supporting this resolution,

and the unspoken Republicans who will be joining with us, that we

somehow oppose the use of force is terrible history. It is wrong. In

fact, the most recent entirely successful use of military force by the

United States came from a Democratic President, Bill Clinton--he's

still alive, so don't say good things about him--and supported by

Democrats in Congress, and it was opposed by many of the Republicans,

including many of the current Republican leadership.

Under Bill Clinton, American military forces were used quite

successfully; and the result is not perfection but a much better

situation in the former Yugoslavia than we had before. And the

Republicans brought forth, guess what, nonbinding resolutions.

Now, they pretend to be upset about nonbinding resolutions. Frankly,

I was a little encouraged when I heard the Bush administration

criticize nonbinding resolutions, because, up till now, I had thought

that Bush and Cheney thought that everything we did was nonbinding with

regard to national security. So they were at least implicitly conceding

that some things can be binding.

But the fact is that the Democrats strongly supported--I didn't mean

to make it partisan, they did--the effort in Yugoslavia over Republican

opposition.

And then let's talk about terrorists. We were attacked in 9/11 from

Afghanistan and overwhelmingly, with only one exception, Democrats in

the House and Senate supported the war in Afghanistan. We are

continuing to support that war in Afghanistan.

I am critical of an administration which has diverted military

resources and energy and political resources from Afghanistan. They are

weakening the number one fight against terrorism, which is in

Afghanistan. And that is one of the reasons for opposing this war in

Iraq.

Now, the war in Iraq has been, in my judgment, the greatest national

security disaster in America history. And it isn't one in which we got

sucked in and had to defend ourselves. It was an entirely voluntary

error. This administration unwisely went into Iraq on inaccurate

grounds; and not only did they make the wrong war, they have been

disastrously wrong in virtually every decision. So the question now is,

are we doing more good than harm to the causes we care about?

I believe, in fact, that fighting terrorism, fighting extremism,

fighting that particularly radical fundamentalist form of Islam, not

all Islam, obviously, by all means, that that is

weakened by our being in Iraq. It has clearly weakened our effort in

Afghanistan. The commanders in Afghanistan beg for more troops, and

instead they go uselessly to Iraq, uselessly not because of the lack of

capacity of the fighting people but because they are condemned to fight

in a very mistaken strategy.

It has emboldened radicals elsewhere. This administration predicted

that our overthrowing Saddam Hussein would strengthen the forces of

moderation. In fact, it has weakened them.

Let's remember that when America invaded Afghanistan with the

overwhelming support of both parties and the united support of this

country, we were popular in the world. We mobilized the world. And

since that time came the invasion of Iraq. And because of the mistaken

decision and the poor way in which it is carried out, I do not think

there has been a time in recent history when America has been less able

to accomplish in the world the things we want to accomplish.

So then the question is, okay, but isn't this escalation going to

change that?

There is zero reason to think that. First, we are told this is what

the administration says. If ever any group of people forfeited their

right to be listened to, it is the collection of people who have shown

an aggressive incompetence with regard to Iraq. Can anyone think of a

single decision from the invasion forward that has been correct, that

has been borne out by events?

So why do you take people who have been wrong about everything, wrong

about the politics, wrong about the military situation, wrong about the

economy, and then you say, oh, but this time we think they got it

right. Maybe it is the theory of random occurrences, that people,

having been wrong so often and so consistently, they are owed one. But

that is not a basis on which we ought to be making a decision.

This war in Iraq continues to hurt rather than help our efforts

overall. If I thought we were doing some good there, then it would be a

different story. But the causes of the disaster, in addition to the

rampant incompetence of this administration at virtually all levels,

the cause of the disaster is internal, it is ethnic and political and a

whole range of other things within Iraq. It is not a lack of American

firepower.

So to try to resolve this disaster by taking the advice of people who

created the disaster and have been wrong about it would be a terrible

error, and I hope the resolution passes.

If the gentleman from California wants to

claim Iraq as a success, he is entitled to do that. I must say that the

initial victory was a very deceptive one, because it led to the current

situation. But the biggest difference between us, I guess, is when he

cites Lebanon as one of the successful ripples, as he says. In fact,

the terrible tragedy that went on in Lebanon that was initially

something that was promising, we have had that war with Hezbollah in

control in Israel, I think Lebanon is a further sad example of the

extent to which this misguided and badly run operation in Iraq has

sadly strengthened the most radical and anti-American forces in the

Middle East, not weaken them.

Does the gentleman consider Lebanon or

Syria free today?