Mr. Speaker, today is, indeed, a day for thoughtfulness

and courage in this House. As we debate the future of our involvement

in Iraq, we must not forget that our troops are engaged in armed

conflict a half a world away. It is their future and their sacrifice

which necessitated this debate today.

Now is the time when this hallowed institution must dig deeply within

its own conscience and rise above the politics and the platitudes which

have plagued us for far too long. The American people and our troops

demand and expect no less of us. Yet no simple solutions face us.

Let's look first at the decisions we have made.

We were advised that the conflict in Iraq would require more troops,

a longer engagement, and an exit strategy. We did not heed that advice,

and now we face an escalating insurgency and civil war.

We were told the cost was $50 billion. We were wrong. It cost more

than $380 billion and climbing fast, and we have not been good stewards

of the taxpayer money, as there has been much corruption and waste in

our spending.

We were told of eminent success in Afghanistan, and we pulled out our

troops in order to provide an earlier surge in Iraq. We were wrong, and

we have seen a rise in violence in both countries.

We must break this pattern. We can ill afford any further

misjudgments, because it is our obligation in this deliberative body to

consider every option available.

We stand here today to engage in the first substantive discussion of

the policies we need to implement in order to succeed in Iraq and bring

our troops home. It is abundantly clear that Iraq has been and remains

deeply embedded in the conscience of the American people. As this world

watches, we must demonstrate from the well of this House that democracy

flourishes only when honest and open debate occurs.

In this difficult decision, I believe this body has two primary

obligations to the American people: one, to fully support our troops

with resources they need in order to accomplish the missions they are

assigned; and, two, to ensure full accountability for the vital

resources that we have sent to Iraq. This House has neglected both of

these obligations for too long, and it is time for us to exercise our

responsibilities on behalf of our troops, the American people, and the

world.

I stand here today in opposition to the proposed troop surge. We all

agree that cutting off funding for our troops currently serving in Iraq

is an untenable option that will send the wrong message to our partners

and our enemies alike.

I will never vote to leave our troops stranded. But the question

facing us now is, how can we vote to put upwards of 20,000 additional

troops in harm's way without adequate resources and without a clear and

detailed plan?

Because I stand in support of our troops, I cannot support this

proposed surge. It is clear that the burden of our Nation's current

struggle continues to rest with the brave men and women in our armed

services.

It is no longer fair to our troops to rubber-stamp this war. I want

them to know that we were deliberative in our decision. I fear this

surge will not by itself be sufficient today. It is time for Members of

both parties to listen to the experts for whose opinion we have asked,

yet have ignored: our military leaders past and present, the bipartisan

members of the Iraq Study Group, and soldiers returning from Iraq.

It is time for a strategic change in course in Iraq, one including

diplomacy and education and an honest reconstruction effort. These

actions partnered with the actions of the military will show our

dedication to improving the lives of all Iraqis in making their nation

one of peace, freedom, and democracy.

I am not here today to criticize the President or to engage in

partisan grandstanding. This war is not a partisan issue. I have no

doubt that one day the actions of our Nation will help bring peace and

democracy to the Middle East. However, the strategy we are here to

debate today remains flawed. Too many questions remain unanswered.

While my loyalty to and my confidence in our troops remains steadfast,

this Congress and this Nation must today seek a new direction.