Mr. Speaker, like most Members of

Congress, I have visited our men and women in uniform in Iraq. I have

visited our wounded in the hospital at Ramstein Air Force Base in

Germany and at the hospital in Balad Air Base in Iraq; and I have

offered my condolences to grieving families who have lost loved ones in

Iraq. I respect and appreciate our men and women in uniform in Iraq.

They have served nobly, and they deserve our prayers.

Mr. Speaker, they have done their duty, and now we must do our duty.

Our duty to the Constitution, our duty to our country, our duty to our

men and women in uniform is to look with clear eyes at the facts and to

exercise independent judgment.

For 4 years, this Congress has failed in that duty. For 4 years, this

Congress has passed one resolution after another, offering uncritical

support for the President's policies in Iraq.

In June, Congress passed a resolution finding that we were well along

the path to a sovereign, free, secure and united Iraq and the Iraqi

Security Forces were operating independently of our forces and were

increasingly leading the fight to secure Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, that is what Republicans did when they were in the

majority. They played make believe.

Americans knew better then, and we certainly know better down. The

Iraqi Study Group report, just a couple of months ago, described the

situation in Iraq as grave and deteriorating. The most recent National

Intelligence Estimate, just a week ago, described the

situation in even starker terms, ``The violence is now feeding on

itself, and it is too complex to be called simply a civil war.'' The

estimate concluded that all of the likely outcomes are grim.

For 4 years, patriotic Americans, Democrats and Republicans alike,

have anguished over events in Iraq and have given deep and prayerful

thought to alternatives, but the Bush Administration dismissed and

insulted dissenters and often made fierce attempts to discredit them.

Not even General Eric Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff, or James

Baker, Secretary of State for the first President Bush, was spared; and

the Bush administration has treated criticism by Members of Congress as

meddling, as sticking our nose in their war.

House Democrats have offered plan after plan to alter our course in

Iraq, and House Republicans have greeted every plan with strident

attack.

Let's consider the new plan that President Bush has proposed.

The force initially committed to Iraq was well short of what General

Shinseki said would be required to secure the country. When I visited

Iraq 3 years ago, the presence of our forces in Baghdad may not have

been enough to secure order, but it was more than enough to remind

every Iraqi every day that there was a foreign army on their soil.

When I visited Iraq a year and a half ago, our military forces in

Baghdad were less noticeable. Our briefing officer explained that we

had deliberately reduced our footprint to lessen the resentment of

Iraqis so that Iraqis would come into daily contact with Iraqi security

forces, not our men and women. But the violence only increased.

We tried twice last year to reduce the violence by increasing Iraqi

and American forces in Baghdad. The Iraqi forces didn't show up, and

twice the effort failed, and violence has continued to increase.

Now we are trying it again and calling it a new plan: Less troops,

more troops, less troops, more troops. House Republicans are playing

make believe again to call that a new plan.

The apocalyptic violence in Iraq will not be solved militarily.

Congressman David Price and I introduced a resolution setting forth a

comprehensive plan which Mr. Price described here the other day. We

need to engage Iraq's neighbors through regional diplomacy to provide

economic assistance, conditioned on a genuine attempt at national

reconciliation, and to begin a phased withdrawal of our troops. Our

plan includes many of the suggestions of the Iraq Study Group.

The Iraq Study Group report was right: No path is certain of success.

And after 4 years of failed policy, all of our options are grim. But

the resolution we will vote on shortly is a first step toward doing our

duty by looking realistically at events in Iraq and by forcing us to

consider what our options really are.