I thank the distinguished gentleman for

yielding the time to me.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that we are having this open discussion and

this debate on Iraq, but let me first make my position very clear: I

did not vote on this war. After 9/11, when the President urged military

action against Osama bin Laden, I, like all other Members, was fully

supportive of that position and voted to send our troops to

Afghanistan. Despite the heroic efforts of our Armed Forces, Osama bin

Laden, the mastermind of America's darkest hour, has yet to be brought

to justice.

While the search for bin Laden has not been completely abandoned,

President Bush turned his attention away from our most deadly adversary

and devoted our military resources into invading Iraq. The search for

bin Laden was neglected for a search for weapons that were never found

and perhaps may have never existed.

One thing is very clear here, Mr. Speaker: All Members of this

Congress support our troops. Many of us have been with families who

have lost a loved one. Many of us have gone to visit them. And on

Memorial Day I give special recognition to those whom I have lost in my

district in the State of California. Also, I have a special community

pride, where I give the names of all of those who gave the ultimate

sacrifice. So let it be very clear that the Members of this Congress

support our troops.

Now, while the war has hindered our search for Osama bin Laden, it is

shocking and regrettable that Iraq is more of a breeding ground for

terrorism than it was before we invaded in March of 2003.

So many Americans, in my district and throughout the Nation, have

fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters who are being placed in harm's

way by being deployed two or more times to Iraq. Transfixed and

horrified, we watch an escalation in violence that has all the

characteristics of a civil war. We recognize that on November 7 the

American people asked for a new

direction. But they also asked for the truth as we know it.

We know that there is too much rhetoric surrounding this issue. But

the truth is, first, the President's proposal for an escalation or

resurgence is a flawed strategy that will put more than 21,500 more

Americans in harm's way. In fact, this escalation leaves Americans and

Iraqis in a perpetual state of war, a condition that is not sustainable

or supportable.

Secondly, Iraq's problems are best solved by Iraqis. While a number

of American troops will be needed to continue training operations of

Iraqi forces, it will only be successful if those living in Iraq, the

Sunnis, Shias and Kurds alike, fully embrace democratic principles and

work together to make their nation secure.

Thirdly, I support the principal recommendations of the Iraq Study

Group, that we engage Iraq's neighbors such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan,

Syria and others, in problem-solving. The President's plan should

emphasize diplomacy. There is no Commander in Chief that I know of that

does not, and did not, during a war engage in diplomacy. That is the

answer, not military force. This type of position that the President is

going, this is a brute force that will not deter the insurgency. Any

viable solution must contain a diplomatic element.

Mr. Speaker, the House has taken 4 days to debate the war because

clearly we need a sensible resolution to this quagmire. Democrats have

borne much criticism for bringing this resolution to the floor, but it

is fair to remind our Republican detractors that they also brought

nonbinding resolutions to the floor. What it is, is to really send a

message to the American people that we are moving in the wrong

direction. Stay the course is not the course to take. The resolution we

are considering today is entirely straightforward, and the premise is

simple: Do you or do you not support the President's escalation?

The resolution before us marks the first time this Chamber will vote

whether or not to disagree with the President's war plans. I hope that

everyone who recognizes that this ``stay the course'' is not the issue,

that we vote for H. Con. Res. 63. It is an important step.