I thank my colleague from New York.

Mr. Speaker, next month we will mark the fourth anniversary of the

President's decision to launch a war of choice against Iraq. Many of us

came to the floor of this House in the weeks before the invasion to

urge the President to take a different course. The White House ignored

those appeals for restraint. The President's mantra was, and these are

his words, ``Bring it on.''

For almost 4 years after the invasion, the President had a rubber-

stamp Congress right here that never seriously questioned his misguided

policies in Iraq. It was the ``see no problems, hear no problems,

conduct no oversight'' Congress.

When the President stood below the banner ``Mission Accomplished''

aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln in May 2003, the rubber-stamp Congress

believed the slogan, rather than the facts on the ground.

When Vice President Cheney declared that the insurgency was in ``its

final throes'' back in May 2005, the Republican Congress accepted that

verdict without question.

When the President unveiled his so-called ``Plan For Victory'' at the

Naval Academy in November 2005, the old Congress dutifully parroted the

talking points sent down from the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The days of the rubber-stamp Congress are now over. This Congress

will no longer serve as the mouthpiece for the White House. This

Congress is finally standing up to do its job as a separate and coequal

branch of government.

Mr. Speaker, the message from the last election was clear. The

American people have an uncanny ability to cut through the slogans and

get to the heart of the matter. They understood clearly that more of

the same in Iraq was not working. And the American people understand

what both General Casey and General Abizaid have told us: that the

escalation of more troops in Iraq is not the answer; that it will make

matters worse, not better.

Increasing the number of American troops in Iraq will put off the day

when the Iraqis, the Shia, the Sunnis and the Kurds, must make the

difficult compromises necessary to achieve political and national

reconciliation. Putting more American forces in the middle of a bloody

sectarian civil war will only lead to further violence and more

American and more Iraqi casualties. It is time for the Iraqis to assume

more responsibility, not less.

The Bush administration has been wrong about this war from the

beginning and it is wrong with respect to its proposed course of action

now. The recommendations of the bipartisan, independent Baker-Hamilton

Commission provide for the responsible redeployment of our forces and

represents the best way forward in Iraq.

And to those who would suggest that having this debate will undermine

our troops, I say shame on you. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

General Peter Pace put that canard to rest just last week when he said,

``There is no doubt in my mind that the dialogue here in Washington

strengthens our democracy. Period.''

Our men and women fighting in Iraq understand the strength and

vibrancy of this democracy, and they understand that it is our duty in

this Congress to exercise our best judgment for America's national

security. What has harmed our national security is not the

debate in Iraq, but the lack of serious oversight over the Bush

administration's decisions and conduct.

What emboldens our enemies is not the exercise of our democracy, but

misguided policies that have weakened our national security.

Our national security is weakened when our credibility around the

world is undermined by false claims regarding weapons of mass

destruction. Our national security is weakened when the chaos in Iraq

allows Iran to greatly expand its influence in the region. Our national

security is weakened when America's diminished standing in the world

has eroded our ability to influence the actions of others. Our national

security is weakened because we have diverted our attention away from

completing the mission against the architects of 9/11, against Osama

bin Laden and al Qaeda and the terrorist network that continues to

operate along the Afghan-Pakistan border.

We must change course. We must strengthen our national security

position, not compound the errors we have already made. That is what

this resolution is all about. We hope the President will join us in

that effort. Let's chart a new direction now together.