Mr. Speaker, this week the Congress finally takes up its

obligation to change course in Iraq. We have arrived at a new moment.

Few responsibilities are more solemn for a Member of this body than one

in which he or she is obligated to register a vote of no confidence in

their President in a time of war.

Under different circumstances, I think most Americans would want to

give their President the benefit of the doubt on matters of war, that

they would want to trust the President's judgment to do what is right

for our country, for our national security interests, and for our

troops and their families who never leave our prayers.

It is a measure of how desperate matters have become in Iraq that the

Congress considers this resolution of disapproval. Today, we find

ourselves embroiled in a war that is not winnable, a religious war that

is inconsistent with our original mission there, a war the American

people no longer support.

And with 3,100 American lives lost, sectarian violence threatening to

spill over into the entire Middle East, and no prospect for a stable,

constitutional democracy in Iraq in sight, today we consider this war

for not what we wish it were but for what it has so clearly and

tragically become, a mistake of historic proportions.

As such, I will support this resolution opposing the escalation of

this conflict. And with this debate, the Congress takes up its

constitutional responsibilities with a sense of urgency and

accountability that the public so desperately seeks from us. For too

long the Congress has asked too few questions and been all too willing

to put politics and ideology before our Nation's security.

To be sure, matters of war are the most serious that I will

deliberate over in the United States Congress. Indeed, such a vote was

my first in the Congress in 1991. But with this moment, Congress now

has the opportunity to take the country into a new phase of this war.

To me, nothing matters more than getting this right.

Four years ago, I voted against authorizing the President to go to

war because, as I said on this House floor, I believed taking

unilateral action against Iraq would ``weaken our moral authority, our

military effectiveness and our ability to keep events under control

afterwards.''

Today, 1 month into the new Congress, and for the first time since

the previous majority rushed to authorize this war in October of 2002,

every Member of this institution, Democrat or Republican, will face a

different choice. With the situation so clearly out of control, Members

can trust President Bush one more time as he escalates the conflict in

Iraq, or they can support a change in direction that begins to redeploy

our troops out of Iraq, that uses our military in the right way, to

make our country safer and raise America's standing so that we have

both allies and moral authority to address our threats.

To be sure, of all the concerns we take to the floor with, it is the

deteriorating welfare of our troops that is most alarming. Of course,

every American takes comfort in the heroism and the determination that

our soldiers have shown. They have performed magnificently, but they

have been charged with an impossible mission that undermines their

incalculable sacrifice and has strained our military in countless ways,

from manpower to morale.

As the father of one marine whose son has been deployed for the

second time to Iraq wrote to me, ``You forget what it is like to

actually sleep through the night without waking up to the horrible

thought that you might not ever see your son again.''

Mr. Speaker, we all know our troops will do anything their country

asks of them, but let us not ask them to escalate an unwinnable war.

Today, virtually everyone agrees we need a new strategy, everyone,

that is, except for the President who continues to pursue an objective

the consensus judgment of our Nation's intelligence agencies says has

no chance of success. Indeed, in proposing an escalation of the current

strategy, the President rejects conclusions drawn by the National

Intelligence Estimate, the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, his own

generals and, perhaps most importantly, the American people. In so

doing, he sends what could be as many as 170,000 troops into a civil

war that is being waged along sectarian fault lines that have existed

for more than 1,300 years.

Such a policy will not only make matters worse, in my view and that

of the Iraq Study Group. It will also postpone Iraqis taking

responsibility and postpone diplomatic efforts that we so urgently need

to reach a political settlement in Iraq and avoid an all-out civil war

that spills into the entire Middle East.

Mr. Speaker, I am not willing to stand here in the well of the House

of Representatives and not move to change our policy in Iraq. There are

too many lives at stake, our security at stake. I support the

conclusions and recommendations of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, but

I have crossed the Rubicon on this war. I support phased redeployment

over the next year and will seek every opportunity to mandate such a

change in law. But that begins with stopping this escalation

Mr. Speaker, I harbor no illusions about the President's willingness

to hear this message from the Congress. Before long, it may be

necessary to mandate reductions in troop levels. But the President must

understand that the public and the Congress do not support his policies

in Iraq--that if we can even hope to achieve a stable Iraq, a peaceful

Middle East and a more secure America, our strategy must change. That

is what this vote of no confidence is about. That is our obligation--

let us honor it.