Thank you, Congressman Johnson, for your service to our

Nation.

Mr. Speaker, the past few years have been increasingly difficult ones

for the American people, for our military families, and, most

importantly, for our service members in harm's way.

Our troops have done everything that has been asked of them, and

more. Their sacrifices are unimaginable to many of us here on this

floor. Through it all, the only thing that they have asked is for our

support through our words, through our prayers, and, most importantly,

through our actions.

During my two visits to Iraq, the question that I encountered from

Service members was, What are they saying back home? They watch C-SPAN,

and I know with certainty that they are watching us right now.

The resolution that we are discussing today is nonbinding and,

therefore, merely symbolic within the Beltway. The driving force behind

it has more to do with the situation in Washington than it does the

situation in Baghdad. Yet, half a world away this resolution will have

demoralizing effects for those men and women who we have asked to go

into battle.

It is important for the American people watching this debate to know

that this plan is currently under way.

The Second Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division moved into Baghdad

nearly a month ago.

The Fourth Brigade of the First Infantry Division is deploying this

month, with three more brigades set to arrive soon. That means that we

are not here today to discuss whether or not the troops will go, we are

discussing what message the troops will hear from us when they get

there.

Like many of my colleagues, I am concerned about the current

situation in Iraq. Last April, I witnessed the election of the Iraqi

Prime Minister. Since that time, the Iraqis have failed to make

acceptable progress, stabilizing their nation, and strengthening their

democratic institutions.

Many of us have concerns about the plan. Will Prime Minister Maliki

live up to the commitments that he made in November? Does this plan get

the most out of the 21 trained and equipped Iraqi battalions deployed

outside of Baghdad? These are reasonable questions, and ones I believe

that are within the scope of Congress to discuss and resolve.

I appreciate debate, and the American people appreciate debate. But

it is important to remember that the American people have sent us here

to solve problems. Unfortunately, this resolution makes no attempt to

solve the problems in Iraq.

If Congress believes that the President's plan can be improved on,

then Congress has the responsibility to work with the Commander in

Chief to ensure that the Iraqis are meeting stringent benchmarks and

are living up to their commitments. This resolution is best defined by

what it lacks. This resolution fails to include the proposal for a

bipartisan panel tasked with outlining rigorous benchmarks and making

sure they are met so that our troops may return home in victory.

This resolution fails to specifically protect the funding that our

troops need to execute the mission. This resolution fails to condemn

the terrorists and insurgents who target both our troops and Iraqis,

and, most importantly, it fails to reiterate that victory should always

be the goal.

We were told this week would provide an opportunity for every Member

to go on the record, yet the majority has not allowed a Republican

alternative that would protect funding for the troops. How do the

American people know where their Representatives in Washington stand on

funding for our troops when the majority will not allow that to be?

The American people are anxious, but they want progress, not defeat.

They want to see their elected officials working together to ensure

success on behalf of our troops. Simply inserting a sentence, saying

you support the troops, is not enough when your actions say otherwise.

The consequences of retreat would be dire. This is understood by our

allies as well as our regional partners who have spoken up against

withdrawal.

According to the Iraq National Intelligence Estimate, it would result

in an immediate increase in sectarian violence and genocide and has the

potential to destabilize the entire region. For decades, the

instability in the Middle East has repeatedly resulted in the deaths of

American citizens and service members, in places as far apart as Beirut

and Yemen, New York City, and the Pentagon.

A retreat at this point in time could, down the road, necessitate our

troops returning to an Iraq that is much more dangerous than the one

they left. I truly believe that the United States has the most

formidable military in the world, not solely because of our

technological and tactical advantages, but because our men and women in

uniform fight in the name of a free and Democratic people. They fight

on behalf of freedom for all, knowing they have the full support and

confidence of the American people.

When we take that support away, we strip our troops of the greatest

weapon in the fight against tyranny. I ask my colleagues not to vote

for this resolution, but to once again work together.