Mr. Speaker, yesterday morning I had an experience I

will never forget. In the snow, in the slush and the ice, I joined the

family of Major Alan Johnson as his body was laid to rest at Arlington

Cemetery. He had lost his life in an IED explosion in Iraq just 2 weeks

before.

On behalf of the people of North Dakota, I expressed to the extent I

could our profound condolences for the family's loss. The major's

grieving widow stared into my eyes and said, ``Do what you can for our

troops over there.''

This is not just a plea and a prayer of the families of our soldiers,

it is the demand of the American people. I believe each and every one

of us here shares an intense commitment to our soldiers that comes

right from the bottom of

our heart. This debate is revealing a sharp difference between us in

how to proceed in Iraq.

But there are no differences when it comes to all we share about the

valor our soldiers have displayed in service to our country. I have

seen it personally in the four trips I have been to Iraq. I have seen

soldiers in full battle gear, in 133 degree heat, doing their absolute

best to perform their mission. I have seen North Dakota National Guard

soldiers charged with training up Iraqi soldiers through an impossible,

absolute, language barrier.

I have seen other soldiers just back from the life-threatening

business of finding and detonating these explosive devices, saving

American lives while keeping essential roads open. Like most of you, I

have mourned and prayed with shattered families whose sons and

daughters have lost their lives in selfless service to our country and

all we care about.

So I cannot get Tori Johnson's fervent request out of my mind, take

care of our soldiers over there. Honestly, there is nothing I care more

about as a Member of this House.

So, how do we respond? We take care of our soldiers over there by

making certain they have the equipment they need as they undertake this

most difficult and dangerous mission. We take care of our soldiers over

there by making certain their deployments are only for acceptable

periods and at acceptable intervals, with enough time at home in

between to heal, to rest and to train. But beyond these things, we take

care of our soldiers over there when we as a Congress make certain the

mission they have been sent to perform has a reasonable chance of

success.

In a war where so many tragic mistakes have been made, this Congress

must not sit quietly by while additional plans are cooked up in

Washington, whose only certainty is to accelerate the loss of American

lives, compound the already severe strain on our military capability

and accelerate the burn rack of taxpayer dollars spent in Iraq.

For these reasons, this resolution is a very important opening

statement for this Congress to make in Iraq in 97 words. It states our

support for our soldiers, while opposing the President's plan to

escalate the number of troops we send into the middle of the Shia-Sunni

violence taking place in Baghdad.

On one of my trips to Iraq, a soldier said to me, ``We can stand up

an Iraqi Army, but we cannot create a country for this army to

defend.'' This simple truth goes right to the heart of the issue and

exposes the flaw of the President's plan.

Without the commitment between the warring parties in Iraq to stop

the killing and create a political agreement upon which a national

government can exist, 20,000 more U.S. soldiers are not likely to bring

about a lasting peace. Our soldiers are disciplined and determined.

They have superbly performed everything that has been asked of them.

However, the United States alone cannot create a democracy in Iraq.

Only the Iraqi people can achieve that.

A broad group of experts, including the bipartisan Iraq Study Group,

former Secretary of State Colin Powell, the former senior military

commander in the region, General John Abizaid, have all rejected the

strategy of escalating U.S. troop numbers as a means of bringing the

factions of Iraq together.

The bottom line is that this troop escalation will increase the

terrible cost of this endeavor, more lives lost, more young men and

women maimed forever, more tens of billions spent, all without

improving our prospects for an acceptable outcome.

Under these circumstances, I will vote to oppose this escalation of

troops. It is part of what I believe we must do. Under these

circumstances, I will oppose this escalation of troops. It is part of

what I believe we must do to support our soldiers over there and the

American interests they have put their lives on the line to defend.