Madam Speaker, I thank Mr. Engel for

yielding.

Last Saturday in my hometown of Springfield, Massachusetts, I spent

the day welcoming back 150 brave American soldiers from the 181st

Engineer Battalion of the National Guard who just completed a year-long

deployment in Iraq. Their mission was to provide security for their

fellow service members and to protect military facilities. This group

included members who possessed the Bronze Star, the Combat Action

Badge, and the Purple Heart. Every Member of this House and Senate has

participated in ceremonies similar to this across the country. We might

have our differences about the war, but we find common ground in our

steadfast support for these soldiers both in Iraq, on their way to

Iraq, and around the world. And that is one of the reasons I intend to

vote in favor of this bipartisan resolution today.

There is a reason that the framers of our constitutional system chose

in Article I to establish that Congress is the first branch of the

government, to oversee the Executive. One of the reasons that we are

here today is because the majority at the time never asked a question

of the Administration. Everything the Administration said, the

Republican majority at that time in Congress went along with.

I am mindful of the thousands of soldiers who have died, more than

3,200. I am mindful of the 21,000 today who have been wounded. I am

mindful of those who continue to serve our country bravely and

honorably, and that the burden of this war has fallen on these troops

and their families. There has been very little sacrifice asked of the

American people.

But those who have sacrificed deserve a frank and honest debate about

President Bush's policy. This is the debate we should have had 4 years

ago.

You cannot edit history. We know today there were no weapons of mass

destruction. There was no enriched uranium from Niger. There was no

connection to al Qaeda. We were not welcomed as liberators in war. And

3 1/2 years later, the mission has not been accomplished.

Madam Speaker, like the vast majority of the American people, I agree

that the war in Iraq is going badly and getting worse. I attach great

significance to the National Intelligence Estimate. The overall

security situation in Iraq has deteriorated, as they have said, with

2006 being one of the deadliest years to date. The war has increased

Islamic radicalism around the world and has helped to destabilize the

entire Middle East. By any objective standard, Iraq has descended into

something worse than a civil war, as noted by the Iraq Study Group, and

our American troops are caught in the middle. And let us call it for

what it is: a civil war.

Yet President Bush, nearly 3 years after declaring an end to major

combat operations in Iraq, is sending another 20,000 American troops

into battle. And Vice President Cheney, in the face of insurmountable

evidence, continues to declare that Iraq is a success.

As we debate this resolution today, it is clear that support for the

war is at a tipping point. Our intelligence community, speaking

collectively in the recent NIE, they believe that the future of Iraq is

grim. And, most significantly, our distinguished military commanders

believe it is time for a new direction. General Powell, General Zinni,

General Batiste, General Gregory Newbold, and others have all expressed

concern about the future of Iraq. These are individuals who were

involved in the planning and execution of the war; and, obviously, they

do not like what they see.

Even former director of the National Security Agency under President

Reagan, retired Lieutenant General William Odom, acknowledged on Sunday

that ``the President's policy in Iraq is based on illusions, not

realities.''

I do not believe that public opinion alone should shape public

policy, but no one should underestimate the intelligence of the

American people. They are convinced that ``stay the course,'' as

President Bush has suggested, has not succeeded.

Every Member of Congress wants our soldiers to succeed in Iraq. No

elected representative in this institution would ever seek to undermine

our servicemen and women. But the facts are clear. The war in Iraq is

the most important issue facing America today, and our constituents are

entitled to know where their representatives stand on the way forward.

That is why this debate, finally, is so important. Just as the debate

in 2002 led us into the war with Iraq, perhaps this conversation with

the American people that we are having today will begin the process of

bringing our troops back home.

More than 4 years ago, I came to the floor of the House with deep

reservations about granting President Bush unlimited powers to

authorize this invasion of a sovereign country. It is the best vote of

opposition that I have offered in my 19 years in this House of

Representatives