Madam Speaker, I grew up surrounded by heroes. My

father, Byard Braley, got permission from his mother at the age of 17

to enlist in the Marine Corps, and 1 year later found himself landing

on Iwo Jima, the same day the flags were raised on Mount Suribachi.

Thirty thousand marines and Japanese soldiers lost their lives in 1

month on an island the same size as my hometown of Brooklyn, Iowa.

My father saw one of his best friends vaporized by a shell burst, and

we did not learn that fact until 15 years after he died.

The same night that my father landed on Iwo Jima, another marine from

my hometown of Brooklyn slept under those flags as Japanese bombs flew

overhead. Harold Keller was the real deal. He was the second marine to

reach the summit of Mount Suribachi, and he single-handedly fought off

a Japanese counterattack and rescued the people you see depicted in

Flags of Our Fathers.

When he came home to my hometown, he repaired milking equipment for

area farmers. My uncle Gordon Braley served in the merchant marine,

guarding allied shipping lanes in the North Atlantic.

My Uncle Bert Braley served in the Army Air Corps, and my Uncle Lyle

Nesselroad served in the Navy. My cousin, Dick Braley, was a Marine

Corps artillery officer at a firebase in Vietnam.

These ordinary men taught me that patriotism is not something you

claim by putting down others who disagree with your viewpoints. It is

something you earn by the way you live your life, the respect you have

for the institutions that make the United States a great beacon of

liberty, freedom and justice.

When I return to my hometown of Waterloo, Iowa, I am still surrounded

by heroes. These heroes belong to the battalion of the Ironman

Battalion of the Iowa National Guard. They are approximately 560

fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters from Waterloo, Dubuque, Oelwein

and everywhere in between.

One of them, Ray Zirkelbach, is missing his second consecutive year

in the Iowa House of Representatives, because their latest tour was

recently extended. A flag is draped over his desk in the House chamber.

These heroes are the reason why I stand here today in opposition to

the President's plan to escalate the war in Iraq. On November 7, 2006,

the voters of this country went to the polls and clearly stated that it

is time for a new direction in Iraq.

Soon after, the bipartisan Iraq Study Group presented President Bush

with a desperately needed blueprint for change. They recognized that

the deteriorating crisis in Iraq couldn't be solved by military action.

Instead, it required a political solution between warring factions for

a stable democracy to evolve.

The Iraq Study Group recognized that ``stay the course'' was a failed

strategy, and that three prior troop surges had done little to stem the

growing violence. They knew that the Iraqis would never get serious

about standing up for their own country until they were confronted with

a timetable for redeploying our forces.

After I was sworn in as a Member of Congress on January 4, I hoped

that President Bush would listen to the advice of this bipartisan group

whose recommendations he welcomed.

I hoped that he would move to fulfill the promise of the Defense

Authorization Act of 2006, when this Congress stated that 2006 would be

a period of significant transition in Iraq, with the Iraqi Security

Forces taking the lead for their own security, so we could begin a

phased redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq. Instead, the President

ignored the recommendations of the study group and chose to escalate

the war in Iraq without charting a new course.

To my friends on the other side of the aisle who disagree with the

resolution we are debating today, by all means vote your conscience. I

will be voting my conscience and joining well-known Republicans who

agree that the escalation is a mistake:

People like Senator Chuck Hagel of my neighboring State of Nebraska,

who called the President's escalation plan the most dangerous foreign

policy blunder in this country since Vietnam, if it is carried out.

People like former Iowa Representative Jim Leach, who said that the

President's policy in Iraq may go down as the greatest foreign policy

blunder in U.S. history.

Well-respected military experts also oppose this escalation,

including General Colin Powell, General George Casey and the Joint

Chiefs of Staff.

The President truly stands alone with a strategy that his own

generals, key Republicans, and the American people oppose. The time is

long overdue for the people's House to reassert its rightful place in

our constitutional system of checks and balances.

We have a duty to send a message that it is time for real change in

Iraq, change characterized by accountability and redeployment of our

troops. There will be no more blank checks. There will be tough

questions in oversight, and I will work hard to make sure that this

happens. I ask everyone to support the resolution