Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today to voice support

for our troops, without reservation, and to oppose the administration's

proposed escalation in Iraq.

We are at a turning point in American history. This Congress will

shortly vote on a bold, clear resolution, repudiating the

administration's failed policy in Iraq, a fiasco which has weakened our

security, threatened our military readiness, cost thousands of lives

and wasted billions of dollars.

I was elected to Congress from the great State of New Hampshire,

promising return of congressional accountability and oversight. For the

past 6 years, while Congress was under Republican control, only 12

hearings were held on the Iraq war, but in the past 6 weeks this

Congress has held 52 hearings.

The evidence is clear that the American people and Congress were

misled into the war in Iraq. No weapons of mass destruction, no links

between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda, no imminent threat to our national

security. Our resources, effort and attention were recklessly diverted

from the war in Afghanistan, which I supported, and which continues to

require our vigilance and commitment.

This administration has now lost its credibility with the American

people and with the world. To succeed in the Middle East, we must

regain our moral compass and embrace a new direction in Iraq. The

administration's stubborn arrogance and incompetence has magnified the

chaos in Iraq.

Our brave troops have done everything asked of them, but the

administration's failures in planning post conflict reconstruction and

its shocking incompetence in management have opened the Pandora's box

of sectarian violence and civil war.

Escalation has been tried before and it has failed before. The

administration claims this escalation is different. The administration

says there are benchmarks for the Iraqis, but what I have concluded

from our hearings and briefings is that no firm benchmarks for the

Iraqis have been set.

Clearly, the administration intends to escalate, whether or not the

Iraqis step up. And today it is reported that they plan to send our

troops off to Iraq without up-armored Humvees. This is deja vu all over

again, a lack of planning, combined with a lack of candor.

Relying on a military force alone as a strategy continues the

administration's one-legged-stool approach to foreign policy. Absent an

Iraqi Government committed to forging a political solution to the

country's woes and absent the infrastructure for jobs and

reconstruction programs, the one-legged stool cannot stand. We have

already lost billions in U.S. and Iraqi dollars to fraud, waste and

abuse.

Baghdad is a city of some 7 million people. In a city that size, an

injection

of 20,000 troops is too little too late. The administration talks of

victory in Iraq. The word is meant to stir our patriotic fervor. But in

this matter, it has, unfortunately, a sad and hollow ring.

As a result of the administration's ineptitude, we are left making

the best out of a bad situation. We owe it to our troops, the American

people, and the Iraqis to act wisely and strategically. The

administration talks tough. We must be tough, smart and fearless. That

means a new direction in Iraq.

Our first order should be to address the missing second leg of the

stool. Replace the military surge with a diplomatic surge, convene a

high-level team of special envoys, send them to the region, and send

them there until the job is done.

The third leg of the stool is economic. We need a real economic

reconstruction program, but only on strict conditions that the Iraqi

Government step up to quell the violence and engage in reconciliation

and oil revenue-sharing.

It is past time to remove our troops from the middle of this civil

war, redeploy them strategically in the region to give pause to our

foes and send the troops we need to Afghanistan where they can support

the government and deal with the resurgent Taliban. Dealing with Iran

is, of course, challenging; but harsh rhetoric and saber-rattling are

counterproductive in the complex, destabilized Middle East.

The true test of leadership is facing reality and having the good

judgment and wisdom to adapt to the reality. By passing this

resolution, we are sending the administration an unambiguous message:

No more blank checks. We have had enough. It is time to face the

reality in Iraq and develop a responsible and comprehensive strategy to

protect American security in the region.

Much has been asked of this country in the past, and the future will

inevitably require sacrifice, but it does not require sending 20,000

more American troops to Iraq. It does not require an escalation of this

war. I urge my colleagues to support the resolution, and I oppose the

administration's escalation of the war in Iraq.