Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the most

critical issue this Congress, indeed our Nation, is facing. The U.S.

military is the best fighting force in the world, and it is vitally

important that we keep it that way. I am concerned that the President's

planned escalation is too little, too late, and it will further deplete

our military's readiness.

My life changed in the late spring of 2002 when my husband Steve

casually said he thought we would be at war with Iraq by Christmas. And

I said certainly that wouldn't be the case; the terrorists were from

Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia. Certainly we will continue to hunt down

Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice. We wouldn't take resources

away from fighting the terrorists in Afghanistan. But that isn't what

happened.

That fall, every time I heard that we were going to be greeted as

liberators in Iraq, I cringed. We were going into the most unstable

part of the world, a region that has been at war for centuries, and we

were going in with dangerously naive plans. We were going after a

hornet's nest with a baseball bat.

As the mother of two and stepmother of five, I felt my family's very

safety was being threatened by this diversion of resources. Like a

mother bear who senses, no, who knows that her cubs are being

threatened, I could not remain silent.

Diverting resources from Afghanistan and invading Iraq may be one of

the most dangerous decisions this country has ever made. Our Nation's

civilian leadership took their eye off the ball. Instead of securing

more resources to hunt down Osama bin Laden, instead of engaging in

diplomacy, they put resources into what has become a civil war and have

depleted our Nation's strategic readiness.

Please, please understand me. Our military has not failed. What has

failed is our civilian leadership. Our military and their families have

repeatedly stepped up and done what our Nation has asked of them. And

now, Mr. Speaker, President Bush proposes to send more than 20,000 more

troops to this civil war. He asks us to trust him with our soldiers'

lives, even after trust has been broken time and time again.

Not only is the goal of this escalation unclear, but its effect would

be to redirect precious military resources instead of preparing for

potential future conflicts. In a recent hearing of the House Armed

Services Committee, I asked General Peter Pace whether he was satisfied

with the readiness levels of our troops. His response? ``No, ma'am, I'm

not.'' General Peter Schoomaker and General Steven Blum have echoed his

concerns.

America lives in an unstable world; we face threats from a nuclear-

armed North Korea, from a belligerent Iran, and from the al Qaeda

terrorists who considered September 11 as only the first act in their

sinister play. In these dangerous times we are not safer if we devote

so many of our resources to a civil war in Iraq. And I as a mother, I

cannot support this escalation. It is withdrawing precious resources

from a fighting force that is already stretched too thin.

America's strategic readiness is not a political question; it is a

question of national security, and it is a critical question about the

safety of all our families.

The U.S. military is the best fighting force in the world, and it is

vitally important that we keep it that way.

Mr. Speaker, as a mother, stepmother, wife, citizen, and, yes, as a

U.S. Congresswoman, I cannot support further escalation of the war in

Iraq.