Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of this

resolution. The Iraq war has lasted longer than U.S. involvement in

World War II and has cost the Nation hundreds of billions of dollars.

We have lost over 3,000 of our finest men and women. Thousands more

have been maimed and too many lives have been shattered.

As Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Lantos said, this

``resolution will establish the first marker,'' the first step toward

ending this nightmare.

The war in Iraq is the moral issue of the day, and like all great

moral issues, there are heartfelt disagreements on both sides of the

aisle. But every second, minute, and hour that passes, lives are being

lost in Iraq and devastation continues with no end in sight.

We owe it to all the brave men and women who have already sacrificed

so much, over 3,000 of them who have made the ultimate sacrifice, to

steer our country on a course that will bring our troops home safely,

take care of them and their families when they return and end this war.

Despite 4 years and deadly losses, according to Foreign Policy

Magazine's recent survey of over 100 top national security experts, 86

percent say the world is more dangerous for the U.S., and, most

troubling, 87 percent believe that the war in Iraq has had a negative

impact on the war on terror. Other surveys have reached similar

conclusions.

Yet the President now wants another $235 billion for Iraq and

Afghanistan to add to the $427 billion for the war already approved. In

this debate, we should listen in particular to the words of Americans

who actually served in the war. I am honored to serve in this Congress

with new Members Joe Sestak of Pennsylvania, Tim Walz of Minnesota, and

Patrick Murphy, also of Pennsylvania, all veterans of the Iraq war.

Their eloquent and strong voices of firsthand experience add

immeasurably to this debate.

There are also people like Captain Lisa Blackman, a clinical

psychologist who cared for soldiers in Qatar. As we become increasingly

aware of the thousands of soldiers to emerge from firefights or attacks

physically unscathed but with substantial emotional damage, Captain

Blackman's experience in regularly tending to these soldiers provides

further troubling insights into this devastating war.

In a message chronicled in the book Operation Homecoming, Dr.

Blackburn wrote of how her patients responded to questions she asked

them about their symptoms. She didn't get the expected reactions. They

were unexpressive. But when she asked them, ``Have you ever been in

combat?'' they became unglued and burst into tears.

As she described it, ``[W]hen I say burst, I mean splatter, tears

running . . . sobbing for minutes on end, unable to speak, flat-out

grief . . . '' She observed, ``No one ever feels like they are doing

enough. If you are in a safe location, you feel guilty that your

friends are getting shot at and you aren't. If you are getting shot at,

you feel guilty if your buddy gets hit and you don't. If you get shot

at but don't die, you feel guilty that you lived, and more guilty if

you get to go home and your friends have to stay behind. I have not

seen one person out here who didn't [check off] `increased guilt' on

our intake form.''

Indeed, every soldier who saw combat or the results of combat has

likely suffered hidden but disturbing psychological harm to some

extent. In spite of this, the Veterans Administration has been deprived

of the critical funds necessary for the rehabilitation of these brave

troops. The President, who continues to send more and more troops into

the war on the one hand, has sought to reduce spending for medical

services for these same troops on the other. His budget reduces

spending for VA over the next 3 years.

Our troops are not the only ones suffering from the policies of this

administration. All Americans who now oppose the war 2-1 are impacted

by the massive cuts in or complete elimination of important social,

health, education and environmental programs.

The cost of this war keeps going up, adding to our national debt. The

interest on our debt alone is more than we devote to the education of

our children, care of our veterans, and for the administration of

justice combined. This body must go on record in united and solid

opposition to the escalation of the war and in complete support of our

soldiers and veterans. We must be resolute in our efforts to bring an

end to this quagmire.

As Speaker Pelosi said, ``Friday's vote will signal whether the House

has heard the American people. No more blank checks for President Bush

on Iraq.'