Thank you to my colleague

Mr. Speaker, no debate in this House is longer overdue. This debate

has been going on for nearly 4 years in houses, in grocery stores, in

workplaces, in houses of worship all across America. No greater

responsibility rests with us, the people's Representatives, than

debating the decisions involved in waging a war. The decision to send

our brave men and women into combat is not the end of our

responsibility, it is the beginning. This body has a sacred duty to

protect this Nation, our citizens, and especially those we send into

combat in our name.

Constant vigilance, questioning, and adjustments to courses of action

are our number one priority, and this newly elected Congress intends to

do just that.

Some have said that this debate sends a message to our enemies. I

would agree. The message our enemies are hearing this week is that

democracy in America is alive and well. The message that our enemy is

hearing this week is that this Nation will not live in fear of its own

shadow and blindly give away those precious liberties that make this

the greatest Nation the world has ever known.

The message our enemy is hearing this week is this Nation is able and

willing to adjust our tactics to focus on the true threats to our

security, which come from al Qaeda, and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and

by securing our ports and borders.

The message they are hearing is that this Nation is no longer willing

to wage a war based on political ideology and failed policy. We will

wage it on facts and reality. Many of my colleagues have spoken of the

need to support our troops. You will get no debate from me nor any

other American. By implying that some do not support the troops based

on nothing more than political posturing is cynical and divisive.

For more than two decades, I served with soldiers, airmen, marines,

and not once did I ever see these brave men and women as anything other

than patriots. I never saw them as a Democrat, a Republican, an

Independent or a Libertarian; nor did they see me as anything but a

fellow soldier.

The issue that we are debating this week is the execution of this war

and the failure of this administration to provide a realistic plan for

success. From the start of this war up to this recent plan to send more

Americans into Baghdad, this administration has miscalculated, poorly

planned, shifted blame and failed to couple our military policies with

diplomatic, economic and long-range strategic planning that would have

given the soldiers a chance to succeed.

Had the previous Congress done its constitutional duty of oversight

and accountability, there is a strong likelihood we would be in much

better shape today. Even as foreign policy experts, military experts,

the Congress and the American public show an overwhelming desire to

change course and oppose this escalation, this administration ignores

all evidence and stumbles on. This debate marks the new beginning of

this Congress's acceptance of our duty to provide the oversight and

bring about policy changes based in reality and facts and long-range

security needs of this Nation.

I have taken two oaths in my life. The first one was as a young man

of 17 when I swore my allegiance to the Armed Forces of this country.

The second was a month ago when I became a United States Congressman.

In both cases I solemnly swore my allegiance to protect and defend the

U.S. Constitution.

I swore alliance to no man. I swore no alliance to a political

ideology. I swore only to uphold the laws of this great land and

protect with my life, if necessary, the liberties and freedoms we so

dearly cherish. This debate today is exactly about that oath.

Previous Congresses gave this President the authority to conduct this

war in Iraq, which is right, but not the authority to disregard the

expert advice, not the authority to take civil liberties from American

citizens, and not the authority to disregard our constitutional right

in this body as a coequal branch of government.

I, like all Americans, wish nothing more than this President had made

good decisions and that the situation in Iraq were better.

Unfortunately, wishful thinking does not make good foreign policy. But,

fortunately, the genius of the Founders of this Nation are on display

right now. This Congress, by taking this first step of oversight and

accountability, and passing this resolution, will begin to right the

ship of state and take this country on a path that will lead to greater

security and begin to return our brave men and women back to their

families.

A few short months ago, I was teaching high school. Call me

optimistic and naive, but I do not see where casting a vote in this

sacred room is anything but binding. Call me naive again when I hear

this is nothing but words on paper. How does that differ from the U.S.

Constitution?

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to visit with two soldiers from my

old unit, the proud 34th Red Bull Division. Those two young men are out

at Walter Reed Army Hospital. Both John and Tony are being fitted with

their prosthetic limbs for the other ones they left behind in Iraq.

We spoke of everything from how they were injured, to football, to

how to get ready to ski again. I do not know and I do not care about

their political ideology. I only care that this Nation honors its

commitment by providing everything possible to these brave Americans.

Today is the day that

I tell Tony and John, we will always support you. We will provide true

security to this Nation