Mr. Speaker, 4 years ago I was just like most other

Americans, trying to evaluate the President's plan to invade Iraq.

Unlike most Americans, I was writing a newspaper column and was

expected to take a public position on such a national policy. But like

most Americans, I was unburdened by the classified and faulty

intelligence provided to Members of Congress.

I concluded and wrote that the claims made to justify the American

invasion of Iraq were baseless, that there were no weapons of mass

destruction, that Iraq posed no immediate threat to the United States,

that Saddam Hussein was not in any way connected to the 9/11 attacks,

and finally that Iraq was not a safe harbor for al Qaeda.

I also concluded and wrote that we were rushing into Iraq with no

idea of what we would do after the Iraqi regime fell, and also that we

had no plan for getting out. The point of all of this reminiscing is

not to show that I was so smart, nor is it to say that I told you so.

Four years later, as our men and women are still dying in Iraq, the

American people know everything there is to know about the situation

there. We know as much if not more than the President of the United

States. And our ideas about the conflict are just as valid.

That is why this resolution is so important and this debate so

significant. Tomorrow we will be voting on what may be only a

nonbinding resolution, but it is a resounding and unequivocal

expression of the National will. This is not simply a group of

Congressmen and women explaining their votes. It is the echo of an

overwhelming majority of Americans who are demanding a new direction in

Iraq.

It is the sound of scores of people like me who were sent here by

citizens to turn the ship of state around. During this momentous

debate, we have heard from some on the other side of the aisle that

this resolution and the discussion we are having somehow undermine our

national interest.

I believe they are selling this institution short. We are displaying

for the world what a government of the people, by the people and for

the people truly looks like. What we are doing here this week speaks

far more clearly and loudly than our bullets and our rockets and even

our dollars. When the United States Government so clearly and

dramatically reflects the will of its citizens, we may not shock the

world, but we make it watch in awe.

James Madison wrote that the role of Congress is to expand and refine

the public view. He accurately perceived that on most issues Americans

assume that their representatives will consider their opinions and work

out the details. In the present situation, I believe the American

people are shouting at us that it is time to get our men and women out

of harm's way in Iraq.

I will cast my vote not simply to oppose the President's escalation,

but as a statement that this Congress will no longer abdicate its

responsibility to expand and refine the public view.

Mr. Speaker, today I am as confident about my position as I was 4

years ago. I am confident because I have listened to those who oppose

this resolution. I hear only disingenuous rhetoric. The other side

accuses us of trying to micromanage the Iraqi conflict, then says we

should have our own plan.

They say that we are dishonoring our fallen heroes, but then offer no

strategy for honoring them other than to simply send more brave

soldiers in their place. They continue to talk about victory and

defeat, while virtually everyone agrees that we could never identify or

define either.

They say this resolution is an empty political gesture, and then say

it is tantamount to surrender. What they do not give us, and more

importantly what the President of the United States has not given us,

are any reasons to believe that we are succeeding in Iraq, that the

current plans increase the odds of our success, that we are any closer

to eliminating the threat of terrorism, or finally that the United

States is enhancing its image around the world as the beacon of

freedom.

We who support this resolution honor and respect our troops. We care

deeply about the international reputation of our country. We are

unequivocally committed to our Nation's security, and we desperately

want America to succeed. By supporting this resolution, we undeniably

succeed, because we honor our Nation and its citizens who have

entrusted us with the simple, but grave, responsibility to listen to

them.