Madam Speaker, in just a few weeks, America will begin

its fifth year in the Iraq conflict. In that time, 3,117 members of the

United States military have died, and over 23,000 American soldiers

have been injured. $532 billion has been appropriated by Congress or

requested by the administration.

You only need to talk or read letters from many of the returning

military personnel or their families to understand that the mission in

Iraq is unclear and the goals remain undefined. Our men and women are

not certain if they are fighting Sunnis or Shiites, and often it

depends on where they are in order to determine the answer to that

dilemma. In essence, our military personnel are in the midst of a civil

war, the flames of which were fanned by centuries-old animosities.

This week Congress has been addressing a resolution that reiterates

its support for the troops and states clearly its opposition to

escalation.

The first point could easily go unspoken. After all, we are

exercising the very freedom of speech and debate that our Constitution

requires, the public demands, and our men and women in uniform serve to

protect.

The second point of the resolution speaks to the clear determination,

as evidenced on November 7, 2006, that America does not support the

President's planned escalation of this conflict.

Three previous troop buildups have already proven unsuccessful. In

the first, from November 2004 to January 2005, troop levels in Iraq

increased by about 18,000 troops. They did that in advance of the Iraqi

elections held on January of 2005, and the number of daily attacks by

insurgents rose to 61 from 52 the previous month, an increase of 17

percent.

On the second troop buildup, from June 2005 to October 2005, troop

levels increased by approximately 21,500, and the number of daily

attacks by insurgents in October of 2005 rose to 90, from 70 just 2

months earlier, an increase of 29 percent.

And the third troop buildup occurred from May 2006 to November 1 of

2006 when U.S. troop levels in Iraq increased by approximately 17,500

troops, and the number of daily attacks by insurgents in October of

2006 rose to 180, from 100 just 4 months earlier, an increase this time

of 80 percent.

Now the President says he want to change course, but once again he

proposes to only stay the course as he seeks to send in more personnel,

and we still wait for the Iraqi forces to stand up.

Madam Speaker, 132 of my colleagues and I exercised the correct

judgment in October of 2002 when we voted against the war in Iraq. We

recognized then that this administration's claims that Saddam Hussein

posed an imminent and direct threat to the United States were hyped up

and many rightly foresaw that an American occupation of Iraq would, as

one colleague recently said, be of undetermined length, of undetermined

cost and undetermined consequences.

Tragically, this administration was not deterred. It has been flat

wrong on pretty much all of its pre-war and subsequent judgments with

respect to Iraq, with its questionable use of intelligence, its failure

to plan, and its failure for far too long to protect our troops once

they were there.

We knew then what has become painfully obvious since, that rather

than open a new front and destabilize a new area in Iraq, we should

have secured Afghanistan and addressed terrorism at its source as it

was embodied by Osama bin Laden and others. The proposed escalation is

not the answer.

Why, after such a debacle and such a dismal record, would this

administration even think to follow the advice of the same people that

got us into this situation in the first place?

The proposed surge or escalation is as baseless as was going into

Iraq in the first place.

The latest National Intelligence Estimate, even that part that is

unclassified, which I would imagine or speculate certainly puts the

administration's best foot forward, states that even if violence is

diminished, Iraq's absence of unifying leaders makes a political

reconciliation doubtful.

Not enough capable Iraqi troops are showing up to fight. Not enough

armed vehicles are available to protect the new American deployments.

The State Department cannot recruit enough civil officials to manage

the latest push to turn up the electricity in Iraq or to help with

reconstruction.

And so Congress must, and I think they are going to this week, pass a

resolution that reiterates our support to our troops and opposes the

escalation. That action, I sincerely hope, will be followed by action

which will prohibit the use of Federal funds to increase the number of

troops above the number existing in Iraq on January 9, 2007.

The large majority of Americans are waiting for action by this

Congress to insist that we begin redeploying our troops from Iraq and

complete that redeployment as quickly as possible in a measure done in

months, not years.

In essence, this week's action should be the beginning of a

relatively short process, culminating in the redeployment of American

troops from Iraq, and energizing diplomatic efforts and international

efforts to stabilize that nation and ensure its security, while it

provides for a platform to redirect the necessary attention to the

unfinished business of Afghanistan and focus, Madam Speaker, our

efforts on terrorism, both short term and long term.

I urge my colleagues, Madam Speaker, to support this resolution and

take what I expect will be the first step in charting a new course in

Iraq.