Madam Speaker, I want to begin by saying that last night

when I was watching the floor debate, my colleague from Connecticut,

Chris Shays, gave one of the best speeches on where we are with regard

to the war in Iraq. It was a comprehensive overview of the current

situation, and I agree with his views on this debate, and I would like

to associate myself with his comments. I hope that my colleagues and

those who are following this debate will take a moment to read his

remarks.

Like Mr. Shays, I rise in opposition to this resolution. This is the

wrong resolution to be considering if we in Congress are supposed to be

fulfilling our responsibility to provide oversight on how this war is

to be conducted. Rather than debating the so-called surge, which is

actually taking place, we should be debating how to put policy in place

that will bring stability and ensure the security of the American

people.

Admittedly, the administration has made mistakes in the execution of

this war. Many of us, both Democrats and Republicans, have been telling

them that from the beginning. Among a number of things that we have

been saying has been that they had enough troops to win the war, but

they didn't have enough troops to win the peace. But we can't correct

those mistakes. What we can do now is to find a strategy on how best to

go forward.

So the question becomes, what can we do now that gives the Iraqis the

best chance to take control of their country, while also allowing our

troops to return home with honor? We owe it to the parents and the

families of the men and women who have fought and died in this war to

not let their lives be lost in vain. That is the message that I have

heard many times when I have met with those families in my district and

one that many of my colleagues have also heard.

Last month, I went on a bipartisan congressional delegation trip to

Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. While we met with the U.S. troops and

commanders, we also had a chance to meet with the leaders of those

countries, including the prime minister, al-Maliki. He told us that if

his country had the command and control equipment and our backing, the

Iraqis could begin to take over their own security in 3 to 6 months and

that we could begin to redeploy up to 50,000 of our troops.

Madam Speaker, we need to make sure that Prime Minister Maliki has

the tools and resources to do just that. Frankly, the American people

would be better served if that were this debate, instead of this

nonbinding resolution.

Our focus should be on fixing what needs to be fixed so that the

Iraqi people can take control of their country's fate, like they did 2

years ago when they held their first free elections in 50 years.

This action will require several steps. For example, as several of my

colleagues have already mentioned, the bipartisan Iraq Study Group

supports a short term surge of American combat forces to stabilize

Baghdad. This is being done. The group also recommended that there be

more diplomatic outreach in the region to include countries like Egypt,

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria and even Iran, and this needs to be done by

the administration.

Further, it is imperative that our U.S. troops begin to transition

from a combat role to one focused on training, counterterrorism, force

protection and controlling Iraq's borders.

My colleagues, the world is watching. Our friends, our enemies are

watching and waiting to see what our next move will be. A retreat from

Iraq would lead to even more instability in the region and create a

haven for terrorist groups who despise freedom and our way of life.

What kind of message are we sending when we engage in debate that is

essentially a political exercise, rather than one that is on

substantive strategy on how to bring stability to the region?

Madam Speaker, we cannot accept defeat, but we must insist on making

the changes necessary so that the Iraqi people can take the fate of

their future in their own hands. There is a phrase that has often been

repeated since the war began, and that is as Iraqi forces stand up,

U.S. forces can begin to stand down. Defining a workable strategy to

achieve that goal should have been the focus of this week's debate,

rather than this nonbinding resolution that will not bring us a step

closer to stabilizing Iraq and bringing our troops home or achieving

stability in this region of the world.

Again, I urge my colleagues to oppose this resolution.