Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I

may consume.

I guess the first thing I want to point out, and there are other

arguments I want to make, but during Mr. Lewis' comments, and I have a

great deal of respect for the gentleman from California, he mentioned

that, you know, George Washington never retreated. Well, as it happens,

I just read a biography of Mr. Washington, and not to go puncturing

holes in the midst of our great Nation, he retreated a fair amount,

actually.

In fact, I don't know where we got this idea that the great leaders

of our time only went forward. We have heard about President Kennedy

and President Truman. At one time or another, they retreated from a

fair number of battles. Now, sometimes that was a wise and tactical

maneuver to win the larger war. Sometimes it was a mistake.

History judges, but I think it does sort of portray the thinking of

the President that the only way is forward, regardless of the details.

A little more thought, I think, might help us. I will return to that

point at the end of my remarks.

But the first thing I want to say, I think this is by and large a

very good debate on a very important issue facing our Nation. The only

time I become troubled in this debate is when speakers on the other

side say that this is just political, and that this resolution is

irrelevant. What they are saying is that the opinion of the United

States House of Representatives on the most important public policy

issue facing our Nation today is irrelevant. The opinion of the

people's House doesn't matter.

Now, that explains a lot for the last 4 years while the minority

party was in the majority, when they did not question this President,

when they did not express their opinion in a way that would move us in

a more positive direction.

I feel very strongly that it is absolutely the responsibility of

those of us in Congress who represent people, our constituents, to

express our opinion. In a way we are expressing their opinion. That is

what we are supposed to be here in the House, the most directly

reflective voice of the people of this country.

So to say that this is irrelevant is just an absolute attack on the

Constitution and the way this country is supposed to be set up. We must

express our opinion on the most important issues of the day.

Then we come to the next issue, which is, you cannot question the

Commander in Chief. He is the guy in charge, he knows more than the

rest of us. You cannot question him. It undermines everything.

Let me say I express a certain amount of sympathy for the view that

we should place faith in the Commander in Chief. That is a good part of

the reason why I voted for this resolution 4 years ago. A little more

than a year after 9/11, our President was saying to us, To prosecute

the broader war on terror I need this authority. And I had my doubts,

but, by and large, I want to be supportive of the Commander in Chief,

recognizing the power he has.

But the question I have for the minority is for how long? How many

mistakes does this President have to make before we don't have an

obligation, not just a right, but an obligation to express our

disapproval and try to get him to move in a different direction? Books

have been written, more than I can count, about all of mistakes that

this President has made in Iraq; books not written just by opponents of

the war, many of them written by proponents, outraged that they took

their idea, the President took their idea and made such a hash of it.

We have an obligation at some point to stand up and say, enough. Mr.

Commander in Chief, I am sorry, but based on 4 years, we do not trust

you enough to give you a blank check anymore. We have to express our

opinion, and that is what this resolution does.

Let me also assure you, we want to win. We, on this side of the

aisle, recognize everything that has been said on that side about the

threat that al Qaeda and their followers present. We

will fight them anywhere, anytime, because we recognize that threat.

In fact, I believe that there is al Qaeda in Iraq, and we should

fight them.

But what we are talking about specifically today, and Mr. Buyer

mentioned the 21,000 troops, that is the aspect of the plan that we

focused on, precisely because that is the aspect of the plan that is

most wrong, that does the exact wrong thing, sending 21,000 U.S. troops

to fight in a civil war that has been better described by some of my

colleagues, so I won't go into it any further, that they cannot

possibly sort out the bad gays from the good guys is the exact wrong

thing to do.

Given that feeling, and I have personally thought about this a great

deal, I met with the President on a couple of occasions as he outlined

this plan. I talked with many soldiers who served, gotten many opinions

on this, and have come to the honest conclusion that it is a mistake,

that it undermines our ability to win that larger war against al Qaeda,

which is the war we are fighting.

Given the fact that I feel that way, I would be betraying everything

that I said I was going to do when I got elected if I didn't on the

Record express that opinion. That is what this resolution does.

So I know this hope will go unfulfilled, but I would hope at a

minimum that the minority can stop saying that the opinion of this

House is irrelevant. If they feel that way, they should all just go

home. All right, it matters. You may disagree with the opinion we are

expressing. I urge you to vote ``no'' if you feel that way, but I don't

feel that way.

I feel we need to tell the Commander in Chief that he has led us down

one too many blind alleys. We disagree with him. We want him to change

course, and that is the will of the people's House, being expressed by

us. That is not just our right. It is our duty as Members of Congress.

Mr. Speaker, it has been nearly four years since the war in Iraq

began--four-and-a-half since President Bush and his team in the White

House started the effort to launch our nation on the path to this war.

We learned a lot during that time frame, but two things stand out.

First, the war effort has failed to achieve the outcome the President

hoped for, instead creating problems he clearly felt would not come to

pass. Even he admitted that he is dissatisfied with the way the war has

gone. Second, at every step along the way, beginning with the way the

President got us into the war, right up to the President's latest plan

to once again increase the number of U.S. troops in Baghdad, President

Bush and his administration made mistake after mistake--failing to an

almost incomprehensible level to learn from past errors or to

demonstrate even a modest level of competence in prosecuting this war.

Countless books from all points on the political spectrum lay out in

painful detail all the mistakes this administration made in Iraq.

It is way past time for this Congress to stand up and say enough. We

disapprove of what President Bush is doing in Iraq.

But our friends on the other side of the aisle claim that such a

statement is meaningless. This is an astounding assertion. The United

States House of Representatives--the elected voice of the people of our

Nation--stating clearly and on the record how they feel about the

single most important policy issue of our time is meaningless? This

opinion, expressed by the minority party, perhaps explains the utter

lack of oversight and accountability that they employed when they were

in charge--standing by and acting as mere cheerleaders for the

President's actions in Iraq as he made mistake after mistake. The other

side of the aisle at least has a consistent record of believing that

the opinion of Congress, a body our Constitution set up as a coequal

branch of government with the Executive, is meaningless.

As much as I disagree with this conclusion as to the proper role of

Congress in expressing its opinion on the Iraq War, I do understand

this initial reluctance to pressure President Bush to change course. In

a time of war we all want to stand behind our Commander-in-Chief as a

first option, and the powers of the presidency make it difficult for

Congress to, in a clear-cut straightforward manner, direct the

President in the conduct of war. But the President's record of mistakes

in Iraq makes it clear we can no longer cling to this first option,

and, difficulties notwithstanding, the cost of continuing down the same

path the President has been pursuing in Iraq has reached the point

where Congress must at least try to force a change in direction.

This effort should logically begin with a clear statement from the

House that we disapprove of the way the President is conducting the war

in Iraq. That is what this resolution does. With this vote members can

no longer hide behind, ``on the one hand, but then again on the other''

statements. We can all mutter about things we don't like in Iraq, but

an official on the record vote is required to make that disapproval

clear. Do you support the way President Bush is conducting the war in

Iraq? Yes or no.

And make no mistake about it the President's plan to increase the

number of U.S troops in Baghdad represents no change in policy. It is

stay the course, more of the same. In the last year we made large

increases in the number of our troops in Baghdad twice already. Both

times violence went up in the city, and as we have begun the current

increase in troops that violence has once again increased. The lesson

should be clear at this point--United States military might will not

stop or even reduce the violence in that city.

Listening to the arguments against this resolution helps to

understand why our President insists on making some of the same

mistakes over and over again in Iraq. We are told that our fight in

Iraq is a clear-cut battle against the same type of al Qaeda-backed

extremists who attacked our Nation on 9/11 and that we are defending a

worthy Iraqi government against these evil forces. If this were true, I

would support whatever increase in troops was necessary to defeat that

evil force.

But it is not even close to true--it is instead a dangerous attempt

to paint a black and white picture on a situation that is far, far more

complex. Baghdad is caught in a sectarian civil war. Both Shia and

Sunni militias are battling each other as well as United States forces

and the Iraqi government. It is a complex web of frequently changing

alliances and interests that makes it impossible for our troops to

separate good guys from bad guys. This is why our troops cannot stop or

even reduce the violence. And the Maliki government we are being asked

to support spends as much time acting like they are supporting the Shia

side of the civil war as they do acting like they want to bring

Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds together to form a stable Iraq.

Al Qaeda is in Iraq and we should continue to target them, but that

effort will require a far, far smaller U.S. military presence than we

have there today. Currently we are expending an enormous amount of

resources in Iraq, most of which is going towards putting our forces in

the middle of a chaotic civil war where our efforts do not advance and

may even retard our fight against al Qaeda. That massive military

commitment reduces our ability to pursue al Qaeda in the dozens of

other nations where they have influence--most glaringly in Afghanistan

and Pakistan.

This larger, more important fight is not solely or even primarily

military. Diplomacy and other efforts to move disaffected Muslim

populations away from joining al Qaeda are a huge part of our battle,

and we need to enhance those efforts. But we can't, because we're

hamstrung both by a lack of resources--financial and strategic--that

are tied down in Iraq, and because our open-ended occupation of Iraq

continues to undermine America's standing in the world.

Instead of sending more troops to Baghdad the United States policy in

Iraq should be to instruct our military leaders there to put together

plans to as quickly and responsibly as possible reduce the number of

U.S. troops in Iraq. We need our troops to focus on al Qaeda and its

supporters, not to be bogged down in a sectarian civil war that is only

tangentially related to the larger fight against al Qaeda.

The first, critical step in this process of changing our policy in

Iraq is this resolution. Congress must make its disapproval of the

President's policy in Iraq clear and on the record.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Maine (Mr.

Allen).

Thank you, I just want to add, before

reserving the balance of my time, I want to thank Mr. Allen for

offering a very specific plan and to once again remind all of you who

are watching the debate that to charge the Democrats don't have a plan

simply isn't true. We have a large number of them. We are just trying

to get the Commander in Chief to start paying attention to them.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.