I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I thank our Speaker and the majority leader for

scheduling this long overdue debate on Iraq. For 4 years we have

suffered from a Congress that was unwilling to lead, and content simply

to follow on Iraq. The previous majority gave the President a blank

check for the war and rubber-stamped the funding. They ignored

oversight, avoided investigations, and stifled debate.

Today in Iraq, the price of this neglect is the loss of too many

American lives caught in the crossfire of a sectarian civil war.

Now our new Democratic leaders and committee chairs are asserting

Congress' constitutional responsibilities on war and peace. We are

reclaiming a congressional role in foreign policy in order to bring a

responsible end to the U.S. military involvement in Iraq. One step is

this resolution, which sends a vital signal of disapproval of the

President's escalation plan. Another is the

ambitious list of long overdue oversight hearings.

In the first 5 weeks of this Congress, we held more hearings on Iraq

than the Republicans held in all of 2006. The next step, we should use

the appropriations bills to shape policy in Iraq.

I strongly support the Skelton-Lantos resolution, which expresses

support for the troops and disapproval of the President's escalation.

Only a political solution, not a military one, will address the

sectarian conflict in Iraq. Yet President Bush has rejected the wisdom

of his military commanders, the Iraq Study Group, and many other

experts by choosing to send more troops into a Sunni-Shia conflict that

we cannot control.

Escalation, we know, is opposed by the majority of the American

people. More telling, it is opposed by a majority of the Iraqi people.

When the White House war plans diverge from the wishes of the people

and leaders of Iraq, we must question the relevance of the mission. Our

statement on the escalation is important, but our constituents also

deserve to know our position on an exit strategy.

We cannot make needed investments in our future until we put our

involvement in Iraq in the past. This war is straining our military and

undermining our ability to deal with domestic challenges. We must force

Iraqis to take responsibility for their own security by directing an

orderly redeployment of the troops and promoting a political solution

in Iraq with a focus on transition to Iraqi control.

Recent experience shows that the U.S. must impose deadlines with

consequences so that Iraqi leaders will be compelled to take

responsibility. An indefinite U.S. military experience in Iraq creates

a climate of dependency that undermines the goal of having the Iraqi

Government control internal security. It is not in our national

interests to have U.S. troops placed between warring factions in a

sectarian war.

To achieve this goal, I support H.R. 645, a bill introduced by

Representative David Price and Representative Brad Miller. The bill

terminates, by December 31, 2007, the authorization for military

operations in Iraq that passed, over my objection, in 2002. The

original mission, eliminating weapons of mass destruction and ousting

Saddam Hussein, is no longer operative.

If the President believes troops should remain in Iraq beyond 2007,

he must come to Congress and justify a new mission, and Congress would

have to vote to approve a new mission. H.R. 645 also requires the

President to submit a plan and timetable for phasing out troop

deployments by December 31, 2007. It prohibits funding for permanent

U.S. bases in Iraq. It authorizes funding for employment, democracy,

and governance programs in that country, and it creates a Special Envoy

for Iraq regional security.

America's servicemen and women who have been sent to Iraq have served

with skill, determination, and courage. We owe them and their families

our gratitude and our unwavering support.

Like every Member of Congress, I have been to too many funerals not

to understand the sacrifice of those who have served, and their

families. Neither H. Con. Res. 63 nor H.R. 645 cuts our funding for

armor and protective equipment still needed by troops in the war zone.

Congress must take a long overdue leadership role in ending this war.

This resolution is an important first step, and I urge all Members to

support it.