Mr. Speaker, as Members of the 110th Congress we are

about to cast one of our most important votes yet. Americans in my

district of southern Arizona and across the country want their

Representatives to bring closure to the United States' involvement in

Iraq. This vote is the first step towards doing precisely that.

A few weeks ago President Bush gave a nationally televised speech to

the American people to announce his new way forward for Iraq. But it

sounded strangely familiar. The President acknowledged that his

policies and plans in Iraq had failed to yield the promised results,

and yet his only suggestion was to do more of the same.

During my first few weeks in Congress serving on the House Armed

Services Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, I have been

listening, learning, asking tough questions. I have participated in

many hours of hearings and briefings with top administration officials.

Those people include Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Chairman of

the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, Secretary of the Army

Francis Harvey, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, former Congressman

Lee Hamilton, co-chairman of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group

commissioned by the President.

Since being sworn into Congress, I have also been reading dozens of

letters sent to me by my constituents, flying home to my district

almost every single weekend to meet with concerned citizens.

Recently I attended a returning warrior event in Arizona for

Reservists coming back from combat. And last week I visited Walter Reed

Hospital here in Washington, D.C. to speak with wounded soldiers and

their families.

These collective experiences have made me more confident than ever

that the global war on terror and the situation in Iraq are more

complicated than President Bush seems to realize. Common sense dictates

that in order for any plan to succeed it must require the Iraqi people

to calm the sectarian violence and unify behind a workable political

structure.

The President's plan fails to acknowledge the lack of willingness and

capacity by the Iraqi political and religious leaders to achieve these

necessary goals. Sectarian factions are divided more than ever. Without

the serious involvement and motivation of the Iraqi people, the

President's proposals to send more American troops into harm's way

amounts to little more than having 21,000 more soldiers stay the

course.

This I cannot support. The President should consider the views of

many active and retired military generals who advised him to change his

strategy in Iraq. Instead of adding more soldiers, he should instead

focus on some of the best recommendations set forward by the bipartisan

Iraq Study Group that he commissioned.

These recommendations include keeping Iraq rapid reaction and special

operation forces in Iraq to strike al Qaeda militias, setting

performance benchmarks for the Iraqi Government and holding them

accountable, providing economic assistance to Iraq that will help

create jobs, strengthen infrastructure, and improve the Iraqi capacity

to be independent and stable.

Last but not least, beginning a new dialogue with Iraq's neighbors

because they need to be part of the solution. The basic message of the

Iraq Study Group and other credible experts and strategists is that the

situation in Iraq is a political not just a military crisis.

The President's military escalation plan without a political

component is bound to fail. Along with all other patriotic Americans, I

strongly support our men and women in uniform who are risking their

lives to protect and defend our Nation.

Our Armed Forces must have the tools, the training and the support

that they need to be successful in any mission. I have serious

concerns, Mr. Speaker, that our Army, Marine Corps, along with Guard

and Reserve forces are being stretched too thin.

Instead of sending 21,000 more young American soldiers to Iraq as

part of that same failed strategy, the President should focus on the

Global War on Terror. Failure is not an option. America must prevail

against many serious threats around the world, whether in the Middle

East or elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, I will vote to support the resolution before this body

because our brave men and women in uniform deserve a strategy that

honors their sacrifices. The President's plan does not do that.