Mr. Speaker, I am going to bring it back down

a notch for a minute.

On Tuesday, I had the privilege to spend time with some of our

Nation's finest. I traveled to Walter Reed Army Medical Center and

talked with some of our soldiers who dedicated their lives to protect

our Nation and gave their hearts, souls and bodies to the cause of

freedom.

As I was driving out to the hospital, I reflected upon the changes in

Iraq in the year-and-a-half since my first visit to Walter Reed. During

that visit, IED was not a regular part of the American vocabulary, Mr.

Speaker. Fatalities were shocking. The mounting death toll was

disturbing.

Today, there are insurgent attacks almost every day. Iraq has

descended into a deadly civil war, and almost every American has become

familiar with the term IED and the deadly impact they have on the young

men and women that we send to fight for us in this war.

The terms of war that my good friend from Indiana so well knows, the

casualties, death, kidnappings, injuries, helicopter crashes, bombs,

amputations, good-byes, sorrow and pain have all become commonplace.

We hear that another helicopter was shot down or that three more

soldiers died today in Iraq, and soon enough we become numb to the true

impact that

this war is having on our troops and their families.

These young men and women represent true honor, courage and

selflessness. They also represent the incalculable cost of the war, the

price tag that is not mentioned, the lives, limbs, hopes and dreams.

They are soldiers like a young man I met Tuesday who was travelling

on foot with his convey when an IED exploded, and as he put it, blew

him up. He had served in Iraq twice before, and on his third tour of

duty, Mr. Speaker, he became a double amputee, lost his arm and leg.

Clearly, his total experience will change him completely.

Another young soldier was spending time with his family when I

visited. He has a 6-year-old little boy who talked to me excitedly

about how his daddy was finally going to come home forever after

August. He, too, had two previous tours and fell severely ill this

third time. Amazingly, this soldier hopes to go over and finish his

tour with his company when he is better.

As a mom of 7-year-old twins, my first thought when meeting this

delightful little boy was that his dad had missed half his life so far,

half his life. I could not help but worry that if we do not get it

right soon in Iraq it will not be long before this little boy and my

twins will be part of this conflict.

And finally, there are soldiers like the young man who shared so much

with me and who sincerely explained to me that he was actually glad

that he was badly injured, as opposed to his gunner, because his gunner

had a wife and kids and he did not want his buddy's family to have to

look into his eyes like that. He told me he wants to run for office one

day, and our Nation will be better for it.

America's future depends upon this generation of Americans, but while

they fight to protect our country, they are depending on us to protect

them. They are counting on us, the United States Congress and this

President, to have a plan, a strategy that gets us somewhere and to

help get them home and not endlessly commit their lives and their

families' lives to this war.

So, Mr. Speaker, today I join an overwhelming majority of the

American people, a bipartisan majority of Congress and some of the

President's own military leaders to raise my voice and to be the voice

of the constituents, the thousands of people who I represent in the

20th district of Florida, against escalating this war in Iraq.

But more importantly, I raise my voice for my generation and for all

the little boys and girls in America whose mommies and daddies are in

Iraq and Afghanistan fighting for this country and for freedom.

This President owes the American people, but more importantly, these

brave troops, a strategy that makes sense, that will do the job and

that will help get them home. The President's policy fails that 6-year-

old little boy with a heart of gold and a smile that lights up the room

who only wants his daddy to come home forever.

I support this resolution because the explanation the President has

given the American people is not good enough. I cannot help but think

about the way this war is affecting not only my generation, Mr.

Speaker, but the generations following mine. They, too, recognize the

sacrifices that our men and women in uniform are facing.

Students from two schools in my district, Nob Hill Elementary and

Silver Ridge Elementary, made Valentine's Day cards for the soldiers,

and I got a chance to deliver them Tuesday during my visit to Walter

Reed. One of these cards reads, the one right here: ``Thank you for

protecting our country and me. You're the best. I would never have had

the guts to fight with guns anyways. You are my hero. Forever and ever.

Get well very, very soon.''

These young children recognize the service and sacrifice that these

warriors are making. As Members of Congress, we owe them no less.

It is our responsibility to provide for the common defense, and that

includes vigorous debate, informed discussion and responsible public

policy.

I support this resolution because it does just that, and Mr. Speaker,

I support this resolution because the gentleman from Indiana knows

better.

It does not require words to question patriotism. We have had plenty

of implication throughout this debate on this floor on the other side

of the aisle, and death by a thousand cuts is the same as direct words.

It is irresponsible and unconscionable that the other side of the aisle

has questioned the patriotism of the Members who disagree.

It is Congress' job to disagree. It is our role in the system of

checks and balances, as our Founding Fathers envisioned them,

unfortunately a role that was absent for the last 12 years.

I thank you for yielding.

I was just taking my opportunity. You have had more than 45 minutes

to an hour of your own time to discuss your own view, and each us would

like that same opportunity. It is 12:40 in the morning. So I appreciate

you yielding.

I can tell you, as I just mentioned in my remarks, that it does not

require express words. By implication, there are many Members on your

side of the aisle who have questioned the patriotism of any of us who

disagree with the President's policy. The President's policy is

inappropriate, and it is Congress' role to question to engage in

vigorous oversight. That is a role that was absent for the last 12

years, and that is why the American people elected Democrats to lead

this chamber on November 7 and move this country in a new direction,

which unfortunately you have neglected to do.

Would the gentlewoman yield?

Does the gentleman not understand that when

words are used, that they don't actually have to be exact words to

suggest a particular opinion on the part of the Member? And do you

really think that it is beyond question that any of the Members on your

side of the aisle as they engaged in this discussion and debate did not

question the patriotism of our Members? I mean, me thinks thou dost

protest too much, as the gentleman stated earlier. I yield to the

gentleman.