Madam Speaker, I come to the floor of this House

today wearing my American Legion auxiliary pin, as I do every day, to

honor the men and women of our Armed Forces who have served and

continue to give the highest service to this country even today in

Afghanistan, Iraq and around the world.

And I rise as a proud American and the representative of the more

than 120,000 people of the United States Virgin Islands who love this

country and desire nothing more than it be the strongest and best it

can be in support of House Concurrent Resolution 63, which expresses

our strong support for the members of the U.S. Armed Forces for their

honorable and brave service in Iraq, but just as forcefully and clearly

states our disapproval of the decision of the President to deploy the

over 20,000 additional troops.

I don't take this position lightly, as we currently have over 100

members of the Virgin Islands National Guard serving in that theater

today, and having recently lost two members of the Guard as well as

four other soldiers who preceded them.

However, Madam Speaker, as the sole Representative of the people of

the U.S. Virgin Islands in the Congress, Americans who have fought and

died in every war and conflict from the Revolutionary War to this and

yet cannot vote for the Commander in Chief, I consider it my solemn

duty to express their views on this, the most pressing and important

issue facing our country.

Madam Speaker, our fellow Americans spoke loud and clear last

November, expressing a desire for a change of direction in Iraq, and by

a more than 2-to-1 margin, they presently oppose the President's plan.

It is important, Madam Speaker, that we engage in this important

debate today. The American people are demanding that we do so. Far from

second-guessing the President's strategy and undermining our troops, as

the White House charges, we are fulfilling our constitutional role and

doing the responsible thing. The last 4 years have demonstrated that

the present course in Iraq is not the correct one, and it is time that

we demand that the President listen to other experienced experts and

responsible voices that are calling for another approach.

This modest resolution is but the first step in that effort, an

effort to support our troops and support our Nation by holding the

President and the Department of Defense accountable, by insisting on an

exit strategy that extricates our men and women from what is now a

civil war, and allows the Iraqi people and their government to take

responsibility for their country's welfare.

We are also told by Members on the other side of the aisle, Madam

Speaker, that if we change course in Iraq, it will be disastrous for

the Iraqi people. But the Iraqis themselves don't think so. Not only do

polls show that 78 percent of Iraqis believe that American troops

provoked more violence than they prevented and that nearly three-

quarters of Baghdad residents would feel safer if American forces left

Iraq, but previous surges have indeed resulted in an escalation of

violence, killing greater numbers of Americans as well as Iraqis.

Instead of beating the drums of war, the President should be engaging

in diplomacy, as the Iraqi Study Group called for, to pursue our common

interest in a stable Iraq, even if it means sitting down with Syria and

Iran, as we have done in the past. Peace and the lives of our men and

women deserve this effort.

With all of the thousands of Iraqis killed and over 3,100 of our

troops having made the ultimate sacrifice, we have paid a far greater

price for the decision to invade Iraq without the proper justification

or an exit strategy and without adequate preparation, training, and

protection for our troops. We have further paid the price of the loss

of respect and esteem by the international community and the loss by

the people of this country of any confidence that what we are told by

the White House is the truth.

While we, sadly, cannot bring back those who have died, we can honor

their memory by restoring truth and restoring this country to the high

respect, regard, and leadership that the brave men and women of our

Armed Forces dedicate and sacrifice their lives to preserve.

House Concurrent Resolution 63 begins that restoration and repair. I

urge my colleagues to adopt this resolution.