I thank my friend for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I do rise in support of the resolution before us. It is

a very simple and straightforward resolution. It expresses our support

and gratitude to our troops and our disapproval with the President's

escalation plan in Iraq. I have believed for some time now that we are

in desperate need of a new direction and not an escalation in Iraq.

It is not like we are confronted with a new plan by the President

here today. We have tried three troop surges in the last 2 years alone,

without the desired result. I don't know what the President sees or

hears today that leads him to believe that the fourth time is a charm.

No, from the beginning, this has been the wrong war at the wrong time

for the wrong reasons. We now know that Saddam Hussein did not, in

fact, possess weapons of mass destruction. He had no involvement in the

attacks on September 11. He had no links with al Qaeda. I believe then,

as I do today, that while he may have been potentially dangerous, he

was eminently containable.

But I too must share some responsibility for having supported the

Iraq resolution in the fall of 2002. I did so while believing the

President when he stated that the goal was disarmament and not regime

change, that war would be a last resort and not a convenient option,

that he would work through the U.N. Security Council and with the

international community rather than taking unilateral action.

But I also believed that it was important at that time to get weapons

inspection teams back in Iraq to search for weapons and to keep an eye

on Saddam so he didn't develop capability to do harm. I also believe

that we could not accomplish that goal without a threat of credible

force hanging over Saddam's head.

When, in fact, we did accomplish it and got inspection teams back in

with unfettered access, I was sitting through administration briefings

asking them if we were cooperating with them and directing them to

suspected sites. Of course we were, they said, but they are not finding

anything.

That is when that pit in my stomach first formed, that perhaps Saddam

did what he said he did all along, and that is disarm. That is when I,

along with my friend and colleague, Sherrod Brown, drafted a letter

signed by 150 of our colleagues in January of 2003 asking the President

to give the inspection teams time to do their job and not rush in

because they were not finding anything.

But instead of heeding our advice, he ordered the inspection teams

out, sent our troops in with insufficient forces to secure the peace,

with no plan for the day after, with no clear objectives and with no

exit strategy, all contrary to the Powell Doctrine. Now we are where we

are today with over $500 billion already spent, over 3,000 lives lost,

over 23,000 injured who have returned home. And we are faced with no

good options.

Yes, we do need a new direction and not an escalation. It is time for

us to turn over responsibility for security to the Iraqi people so we

can begin a redeployment of our forces, first within the country, let

us get them off the front lines and off the main streets of Baghdad,

where they can still play a support role, but which could also lead to

a redeployment eventually out of country. We can then refocus our

energies on the real national security threat, and that is dismantling

the al Qaeda global network that we face, making sure we don't lose

Afghanistan, making sure the Taliban doesn't reconstitute themselves

and making sure that we bring those who are directly responsible for

September 11 to justice, like Osama bin Laden, who is still at large

and roaming free today. Ultimately, this conflict cannot be solved

militarily, but only by tough political compromises between the Sunnis,

Shia and Kurds. We cannot do this for them.

We also need to get the Arab League involved, because they can help

with reconstruction, they can help with security, and they can help add

legitimacy to the Iraqi government. It is not in their interest to see

the Sunni-Shia conflict spread outside of the Iraq borders and sweep

the region, which is a very real threat today. Nor is it in Iran and

Syria's interests to be on the opposite sides of a civil war that may

break out in Iraq. That is what a plan, a new direction should look

like, one that we should be pursuing, rather than just more of the

same, stay the course.

Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity on three occasions to visit

our military command and our troops in the field in Iraq. I also

visited our troops during the height of our military engagement in the

Balkans. Nothing has made me prouder to be an American than seeing our

troops in action, because they are so very good. They are well

motivated, they are well trained. They are the best our Nation has to

offer.

I have had 18 military funerals in my Congressional district alone,

most of which I personally attended. If I don't have to attend another

military funeral, if I don't have to pick up the phone to call another

grieving family, I will be one of the happiest people in the world.

They are a constant reminder of the human toll this is having, not only

with our troops but with their families and our communities. There is

not a day that goes by when I am not concerned about the safety and

welfare of our troops.

That is exactly why we should be debating this resolution, because it

is imperative that war is a last resort, that we as policymakers do

everything we can to get the policy right because of the impact it has

on our troops, their family, and our communities. It is important that

we give them a mission with which they can succeed.

It is time to stop asking our troops to babysit a civil war. It is

time to ask the Iraqis to stand up. It is time to support this

resolution and give the President a clear indication of where this

Congress stands.

I was at the same meeting and I heard the same message from

the ambassadors in the region. No one here is advocating an immediate

withdrawal, just a different direction and a different strategy rather

than what has failed in the past.