Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join so many other proud

and patriotic Members of this body, including a number of our military

veterans, in support of this bipartisan resolution.

Just over a year ago when I was in Iraq on my second trip to the

region, I shared the optimism and the assessment of many that,

following three consecutive elections in 2005 with increasing turnout

among Iraqi voters in each, 2006 would be a key transitional year

militarily, politically, and economically.

However, a year ago this month, the sectarian strife in Iraq began to

worsen, and our inadequate planning for possible and likely scenarios

that could unfold in this war continued to catch up with us and

continued to narrow our strategic options. As initial and important

political developments did eventually unfold throughout last summer,

sectarian violence did not abate but intensified, particularly in

Baghdad. In response, U.S. forces were part of as many as four

different efforts to enhance security in the capital in order to ease

the path toward further essential political compromise. None of these

efforts proved successful because of the limitations of the Iraqi

security forces and police and the restrictions imposed by Iraqi

Government leaders.

I had serious concerns when the President proposed last month to

increase the number of troops in Iraq, and I hold them still today. I

have serious concerns regarding the ability of Iraqi security forces

not only to act as a reliable partner in the efforts to secure Baghdad,

but to take on and maintain the lead in such efforts, concerns echoed

in the most recent National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq.

I have serious concerns regarding whether this plan is sufficiently

different from previous efforts to secure the Iraqi capital,

particularly when Prime Minister al-Maliki's initial proposal presented

to the President in December did not envision additional U.S. troops as

part of the effort. I have serious concerns about the further erosion

of the commitment of our coalition partners and other allies, if indeed

Iraq is the central front of our battle against terrorism.

Now, there is no doubt that al Qaeda in Iraq and elsewhere poses a

real and serious threat to our security in the Middle East and to our

national security here at home. But the security situation in Iraq has

evolved to include a complex civil war, described as ``a self-

sustaining intersectarian struggle'' by the NIE, for which additional

U.S. troops should not be on the front line to resolve.

The Iraqi Government needs to understand they are on borrowed time

and they must take greater control of the future of their own country

through political reconciliation to quell the sectarian violence.

Iraq's neighbors and the international community must be more engaged

diplomatically to end the sectarian strife so as to prevent the spread

of it and the instability in the region that would result.

Moreover, as recent oversight hearings have revealed, such a large

escalation of both combat and support troops undoubtedly will have an

impact on our overall military readiness. And despite their unwavering

commitment to serve when called, there may be serious consequences for

National Guard and Reservists, as redeployments of full units will be

required to implement the troop surge, according to Secretary of

Defense Robert Gates.

So after carefully reviewing the President's proposal to increase the

number of U.S. troops in Iraq, hearing testimony from senior members of

the military, and analyzing the public statements of combatant

commanders, and speaking with many of those from my home State of South

Dakota who have served or who have loved ones who are serving in the

war on terror, I conclude we should not stay this course. I remain

unconvinced that sending additional troops to Iraq is the best way

forward. Some who support the escalation have described it as ``our

last best chance to win.'' To me, that is a clear acknowledgment that

the President's plan further narrows rather than expands our strategic

options.

And let me add this: This is an issue that demands a bipartisan

approach, and it is most unfortunate that the administration has made a

decision that dismisses the recommendations of the bipartisan Iraq

Study Group. I believe this bipartisan, narrowly crafted resolution

reflects the public's and Congress' assessment that increasing our

military's combat role, especially in the midst of an intensifying

sectarian struggle, is not the answer.

For those who would attack this limited resolution and the debate

surrounding it or to suggest and ask, Whose side are you on, I would

refer them to the comments of Secretary Gates from his testimony in the

House Armed Services Committee last week in which he said that the

troops are ``sophisticated enough to understand that . . . the debate's

really about . . . the path forward in Iraq. They understand that the

debate is being carried on by patriotic people who care about them and

who care about their mission.''

Lastly, I want to reemphasize the first part of today's important

resolution. Congress and the American people will continue to support

and protect members of the U.S. Armed Forces who are serving or who

have served bravely and honorably in Iraq. We have a new generation of

veterans returning from Iraq. As a subcommittee Chair on the House

Veterans' Affairs Committee, I will work with all of my colleagues to

ensure that the tens of thousands of young people coming home, some

after their second, third, and fourth tours, many with severe and

debilitating physical and mental wounds, return to the democracy which

they fought to protect, with a government that recognizes their service

and sacrifice with more than just words of gratitude, but with action

that fulfills our Nation's collective duty and obligation to them as

veterans who take their place alongside the other fighting men and

women who have kept America free and safe.