Mr. Speaker, I thank our leader from the Homeland

Security Committee for yielding.

No congressional decision is more difficult than a vote related to

war, and this vote is no different. It is especially difficult when you

disagree with the President of your own political party.

I voted to support this war because I believe Iraq presented a direct

threat to the United States. Iraq had, was developing, and was

attempting to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq was, at a minimum, cooperating with the funding and harboring of

terrorists committed to our destruction. Saddam Hussein was repeatedly

defying U.N. resolutions, contesting no-fly zones and blocking WMD

inspectors. Our intelligence estimates, never 100 percent accurate, in

any case, apparently overstated the immediate risk.

But the basic facts remain the same. Knowing what we know now,

perhaps we could have waited another 6 to 12 months, which would have

given us valuable time to solidify position in Afghanistan. But the

decision to go to war was still the right decision, just possibly

premature.

I would not have supported this war had the initial selling point

been a goal of establishing democracy in Iraq. Advancing freedom has

always been an ideological goal of our Nation ever since our founding.

We have long supported, from the days of Jefferson and Monroe, the

causes of dissident freedom fighters. We did this in occupied Eastern

Europe, in Saddam's Iraq and Soviet-occupied Afghanistan.

But there is a difference between aiding people fighting for freedom

and doing most of the fighting for them. I stated from the beginning

that after removing the direct threat of the Saddam government, it

would be in our national security interests if a republican form of

government, a unity government respecting the rights of others, could

be established in Iraq. If this government of diverse Iraqis could

prevail,

it would be a model for the entire region. We needed to give them a

chance for self-governance. But, and this is a big qualifier, it would

ultimately be their decision, not ours.

On the news we often see Iraqis saying that Americans need to do this

or that to provide security. Men and women from Fort Wayne and the rest

of Indiana and America can do most of the fighting for the freedom of

Iraq only for so long. It is the Iraqis' country.

We should have known this would not be easy. It is self-evident that

democracy in the Muslim world is not common now nor in the past. A

little bit hubris and more humility when we sent our soldiers into this

conflict would have been helpful. This is not just hindsight. For

example, the distinguished senior Senator from Indiana, Senator Richard

Lugar, raised concerns over and over again that pre-planning was

insufficient.

Certain basic arguments being made by the administration are simply

not accurate. To insist that the war in Iraq is not a civil war when

the entire world and the Americans all understand that it is, continues

to undermine the credibility of those who make it.

From the beginning, it had elements of a civil war. The Sunnis had

persecuted the majority Shia as well as the Kurds. Vengeance was

inevitable. The United States correctly demanded that the sectarian

militias be eliminated from the Iraqi national police and the military.

I, like many other Members, was asked by the administration to deliver

such messages to Iraqi government officials during my visits to Iraq.

Our government knew full well that a civil war was going on, even

among people we selected to run the government. We had hoped that the

early smaller scale civil war could be countered by a strong central

government. It is now a large scale civil war, eroding the already

limited power of the Iraqi Government. It is now absurd to deny it is a

civil war.

Making exaggerated statements of progress in Iraq also does not pass

the basic credibility test. While we have made sporadic progress, a

school or a project here and there, it is apparent to any Member of

Congress who visited Iraq a number of years ago and again recently

visited that security has deteriorated.

Baby boomer Americans especially tend to see everything as Vietnam. A

government that denies basic realities has little hope of persuading

even its friends. We want our government to tell the truth, pleasant or

not. These facts are foundational to the fundamental question currently

before us.

It is not whether a surge can root out terrorists. Our brave men and

women can do this in door-to-door bloody combat, if necessary, and we

may be able with extra troops to stabilize some areas temporarily. But

then what? The President has also said that unlike past efforts, this

time we will hold our gains. With whom? With what?

This is the basic underlying issue. Assuming some militias are

defeated and others just melt away, how do we plan to keep them from

coming back? Is the surge permanent? Even if it were so, far fewer

troops are required to root out terrorists than to hold gains. Will we

need tens of thousands of additional soldiers to hold any gains?

The obvious premise offered by the President is that the Iraqis

themselves can hold the gains. Based upon everything we have seen to

date, other than in isolated cases, there is no evidence that the

Iraqis will fight and die to defend their central government. I have

repeatedly heard from returning soldiers that when the gunfire starts

the Iraqis by and large disappear. They only seem dedicated when Shia

get to kill Sunnis and vice versa.

By being bogged down as the main security force in Iraq and

increasingly hostile cities, we are undermining our long-term potential

to fight the war on terror.

For years, we have now been utilizing our National Guard and our

Reserves as if they were regular military. Many are about to enter

their second 12-month-plus tour of duty in combat, something

historically many regular military veterans did not do. Because of the

heavy usage, we are starting to short training funds and repair funds

for those units. We are finding that employers are getting increasingly

nervous about disruptions to their firms. Family objections are

becoming more intense. Recruiters are running into increasing

resistance.

As for our overused regular military, they are facing near

exhaustion. What will be the long-term impact on these forces? What

impact will this continued burning up of huge sums of military dollars

do to our long-term ability to fight?

It has been said many times by defenders of this surge that Iraq is

the place the enemy has chosen to fight, and this is the place that we

must fight. That is partly true. Hezbollah has chosen to fight us on

many fronts. Iran is a threat itself, not just in funding Iraq.

Terrorists attacked in Madrid, London, Afghanistan, Pakistan and many

other places throughout the world, and they continue to try to attack

us in the United States. Iraq is not the only place terrorists have

chosen to fight.

Furthermore, we face threats from North Korea, as the new Castro,

Hugo Chavez, presents other challenges. We are sobered by the recent

destruction of a satellite by China, potentially the most significant

threat we face.

If we burn up the support of the American people, our military's

ability to recruit, the usage of our Guard and Reserves in Iraq, how do

we defend ourselves elsewhere?

It is not that this effort in Iraq is a failure, as some liberals

claim. We have seen the governments in Libya and Pakistan significantly

alter their ways when it comes to supporting terrorists. Hostile

governments that harbor terrorists have to ask themselves whether it is

worth the risk of military action by the United States, something Iran

appears to be debating. And, most importantly, this fact is

indisputable: Since 9/11, terrorists have not succeeded in any attacks

on American soil.

Because of the bravery and valor of our soldiers in Afghanistan and

Iraq, we have disrupted the terrorists' ability to gather and plan new

methods of attacking us. If they surface, we get them.

During this period, we have had time to make significant progress in

homeland security. While you may have heard that our Southwest border

is not exactly airtight, progress certainly has been made. Every month

we make additional progress. Our airports are more secure. Our ports

are more secure. The PATRIOT Act has given us the ability to track and

hunt down terrorists. We have improved both inside the U.S. and around

the world our ability to track finances, communications and movement of

terrorists.

The sacrifice of our brave men and women in the military and their

families bought the United States Government valuable time to further

prepare our domestic and worldwide ability to cope with terrorism. We

will never achieve 100 percent success. But the wars in Afghanistan and

Iraq took the battle to them, rather than requiring us to fight at

home.

But we cannot sustain this intense effort indefinitely. Complete

victory over terrorism is unlikely ever to occur. Sometimes you have to

reposition and prepare for the broader battle, not exhaust yourself on

just one front and then risk defeat in the overall conflict.

I beseech our President, Secretary Gates, Secretary Rice and others,

never to give up the war on terrorism, but to understand that without

significant tactical drawdowns in Iraq our entire counterterrorism and

military efforts are threatened. Our Nation can ill afford another

decade of defeatism and retreat that seized the United States after

Vietnam.

All this said, I am going to vote ``no'' on the resolution. The

resolution is no surge protection. The battle has already begun. Most

of us have individually clearly stated our views and continue to do so.

For the United States Congress as a corporate body to deliver a

public rebuke to the Commander in Chief during a battle that is already

commenced would potentially put our soldiers at additional risk and

confuse the world.

It is one thing for us to argue about strategy and tactics. It is

another to have Congress openly defy the President. The world already

knows we have deep divisions in America. The terrorists already know we

disagree. But they also need to know that when the

fight starts, as Americans we stand united.

The fact is while I do not believe that the surge will succeed, none

of us actually knows that it will not work. At this point it seems to

me that our position as a Congress should be to encourage success in

this mission. We need to support the Iraqis as they take increasing

responsibility. What the world should see from us at least is shared

hope for victory, not defeatism.

But the President does need to understand that opposition to the

surge is not just among Democrats. It is even among his strongest

supporters. Some of us who deeply share his passion to fight terrorism

fear that he is potentially endangering his past successes, as well as

our Nation's ability to continue the war on terror beyond this

administration.

I hope and pray that the surge succeeds. But if it does not, we need

to try a dramatically different approach that does not totally abandon

Iraq, the region or the war on terror.