Mr. Speaker, September 11, 2001, was a day I will never

forget. From my office window I saw the smoke rise from the Pentagon

shortly before my staff, several constituents and I were evacuated. A

few hours later, I would learn that a young naval petty officer from my

district named Nahamon Lyons was among the casualties in that attack on

the Pentagon. Picking up the phone and calling his mom, Mrs. Jewel

Lyons, back in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, was one of the most difficult

calls I have ever had to make.

There was no one who wants to put an end to terrorism more than I do.

That is why I supported our President when he chose to send U.S.

military forces to Afghanistan to go after those who attacked our

Nation on 9/11.

I met with the President at his invitation in the White House on

September 26, 2002, to hear his case for a preemptive strike in Iraq. I

kept my notes from that important meeting, and this is what the

President told us. He said that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass

destruction; he said that Saddam Hussein trains terrorists on weapons

of mass destruction; and he said that if military force is used it will

be fierce, swift and tough. We now know that none of that information

was accurate.

I do not know whether the President intentionally misled our Nation

or received bad intelligence. Perhaps we will never know, but

regardless, both possibilities trouble me.

Had I known that the information the President shared with me on

September 26, 2002, was not accurate, I would have never given him the

authority to use force in Iraq. At worst, the President misled us, and

at best, our intelligence failed us.

There is not a more difficult decision Members of Congress must make

than whether to send our brave men and women in uniform into harm's

way. And when we are asked to make those decisions, we must know that

our intelligence is correct.

We have all been personally touched by this war. I have a brother-in-

law in the United States Air Force who is currently serving in the

Middle East. My first cousin was in Iraq when his wife gave birth to

their first child.

I have also traveled to Walter Reed Medical Center and met with

countless soldiers who have suffered life-altering injuries in combat,

many from my home State of Arkansas. The most recent was a U.S. Marine,

Staff Sergeant Marcus Wilson of Dermott, Arkansas, who recently lost

his leg in Iraq.

And I have visited with too many families of soldiers who are not

coming home.

On August 11, 2004, I visited Iraq when the 39th Infantry Brigade of

Arkansas had over 3,000 soldiers stationed there, and if the President

gets his way with this escalation of the war, they will be back in Iraq

by early next year.

Let me be clear on one very important point. I strongly believe that

as long as we have troops in harm's way we must support them. I also

want to see to it that our government keeps its promises to our

military veterans.

When we invaded Iraq, the President said we were doing so with the

intent of removing the evil regime of Saddam Hussein from power and to

find and eliminate his weapons of mass destruction. We have since

learned that there were no weapons of mass destruction, and not only

has Saddam's evil regime come to an end, but he has now been put to

death.

So I ask, why are we still there? We now find ourselves spending

nearly $9 billion a month to try and force our way of life on a people

who live a long way from Arkansas.

Had I known then what I know now, I would never have voted to give

the President authority to use force in Iraq and, instead, would have

directed the full strength of our military to Afghanistan to go after

Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, those who actually attacked our Nation on

9/11.

It is my duty as a U.S. Congressman to demand accountability from

this administration, accountability for the decisions that are being

made in Iraq, accountability for how these decisions are carried out,

and accountability for how our hardworking taxpayers money is being

spent.

Sending 21,000 new troops into Iraq is not a new direction. It is

simply an escalation of the war.

I am not advocating that we leave Iraq tonight, but we must begin to

accelerate the training of the Iraqi Army and police force and replace

American soldiers on the front lines of this war with Iraqis.

I rise this evening in support of this resolution to stop the

escalation of this war. We can no longer tolerate more of the same, and

we must demand from this President, our Commander in Chief, a new

strategy and a new direction in Iraq.