Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to welcome this much

needed debate, on perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing our

generation, our country, this war in Iraq. I intend to support this

nonbinding resolution not because I believe it is perfect, rather in

fact I feel it is probably imperfect.

But I am supporting it because I hope this will be the beginning of a

rational, bipartisan dialogue for a new direction to be employed

together with the House of Representatives, with the Congress working

together with the President.

For after all, Mr. Speaker, we are the people's House. The choices

that we have before us today are more than simply cut and run or stay

the course. For after all, we know a long time ago that was nothing

more than a sound bite, and the American public understood that it was

nothing more than a political sound bite. We are a wonderful country.

We have tremendous resources, ingenuity, and we have credibility

notwithstanding our difficulties today throughout the world.

And therefore, as the world's greatest super power, we have resources

and means in which we can offer alternative choices to bring together

people, not only in the Middle East, but allies throughout the world

that supported us in the past.

Everyone who has talked about this nonbinding resolution talks about

the cost. We all talk about their support for our men and women in

uniform, our support to continue to ensure that they are properly

funded and to ensure that we always, always remember the current costs

that have been expended, over 3,000 lives, over 23,000 that have been

injured, and a fiscal accountability that has gotten lost in the checks

and balances of the Congress, a war that initially was advertised to

cost us $60 billion is now in excess of $379 billion, $8 billion a

month, with a supplemental request for another $235 billion.

Mr. Speaker, we do not need nor should we micromanage the war. But we

should, as an equal branch of Government, require and demand

accountability. That is why I stood up on this floor 2 weeks ago

supporting the Blue Dog Accountability Act to ensure that we have an

opportunity to review on a regular basis the conduct of the war, the

no-bid contracts, the single sourcing, putting our troops in harm's way

without adequate armament.

Let us not forget, for almost 4 years our President and the course

that he conducted and the case he has made has had a blank check,

literally a blank check to conduct this effort as he saw fit.

And it has only been in the last 6 months when it became abundantly

clear in the last year that it was determined that a new course or a

new direction would be needed. But, unfortunately, so much of this new

course that the President offered last month is more of the same and,

unfortunately, too little too late.

I told the President that I was doubtful on this surge. Why? Because

we have had previous surges, back in August of last year a surge in

Baghdad with six brigades that was promised by the Iraqi Army. They

delivered two. They weren't very good. We neutralized Sadr City. Maliki

got political pressure placed on him. We were asked to leave.

Unless we have a robust political effort that accompanies this surge,

I fear, unfortunately, more of the same will occur, which is why I

asked the Secretary of State last week what is plan B?

We are, whether we like it or not, in the middle of a sectarian civil

war. And unfortunately, the folks that we are trying to referee are

more concerned about how power is distributed and how oil revenues are

distributed as opposed to instituting a democracy in the Middle East.

And therefore, we need a new direction.

Have we not learned the lessons that many of us remember from the

Vietnam War? Secretary Powell knew those lessons well. Remember what

Secretary Powell advised our President? He says, Iraq, Mr. President,

is like a Pottery Barn. We break it, we own it. Unfortunately, how true

those words have come.

But Secretary Powell knew from his experience as a general that the

Powell doctrine invoked four principles, one, to have overwhelming

support of the Nation; two, in fact, to ensure that we

had a broad international coalition; three, that we went in with

overwhelming force; and, four, that we had an exit strategy. None of

those are in evidence.

So let me close. I believe that a new direction is evident. I believe

America is less safe today than it was before the 9/11 attacks. And as

violence in Iraq climbs and the costs continue to soar, we need a new

direction in Iraq in a bipartisan fashion.

I ask my colleagues to work on this bipartisan manner, evaluating the

facts, not on rhetoric, to create a real plan for security in Iraq,

stability in the Middle East, and let's not forget Afghanistan, the

problems that exist in Lebanon today, and let's come together as a

nation. Our troops deserve better.