Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman for

yielding.

Mr. Speaker, every day I am inspired by the unwavering will and

determination of our fighting men and women who continue to serve with

valor in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their commitment to serving our country

represents the very best America has to offer and we owe them our debt

of gratitude.

Mr. Speaker, I, too, wondered how this resolution would affect our

troops. In recent hearings of the House Armed Services Committee, of

which I am a member, when asked about the impact of this debate on our

troops, General Peter Pace, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

a man I hold in very high regard, said, ``From the standpoint of our

troops, I believe that they understand how our legislature works and

that they understand there's going to be this kind of debate.'' But

most importantly he told us, ``There is no doubt in my mind that the

dialogue here in Washington strengthens our democracy. Period.''

Mr. Speaker, I had two Iraqi war veterans in my office this afternoon

and I asked them about this resolution. They said, ``Congressman, let

me tell you

what the guys over there think about. They think about doing their job,

they think about staying alive, and they think about getting home to

their families.''

General Pace and these soldiers are right. Our democracy is

strengthened when we engage in vigorous debate about solutions to the

challenges that we face, and there is not a more pressing, more

important challenge before us than this war right now.

But let me be perfectly clear: I strongly and I unequivocally support

our troops, and I challenge anybody that questions my patriotism. As a

result, we must provide the equipment and the resources that our troops

on the ground need to meet their mission safely. Their safety should

never be compromised by our disagreements here in Washington, D.C.

Despite our differences, I believe the President is sincere in his

desire to bring a successful end to the war in Iraq, but he has failed

to convince me that sending these 21,000 additional troops represents a

new or successful strategy. We went to Iraq under a failed plan in

2003, and we can't afford to take the same failed path.

More importantly, we owe our fighting men and women better than what

we are giving them. We need to know the goals for success are well-

defined; that benchmarks are in place for both the Iraqis and for

America; and that the Iraqi government will live up to their end of the

bargain. So far they have not, and there is no indication that says

they will now.

For too long, Mr. Speaker, our country has gone without questioning

whether there is a better way forward in Iraq, and before we send these

21,000 men and women into harm's way, we must ask ourselves these

questions. And I remind you, I asked General Pace these questions

myself and asked him to look me in the eye and answer these. Does this

plan produce less violence and fewer roadside bombs? Does it ensure our

military can meet the other threats to our security and homeland across

the country? Does it move us closer to the day when our fighting men

and women can come home and America is at peace? I don't believe this

plan answers any of those in the affirmative or with a yes.

Over the last few weeks, I have listened to generals, I have heard

from constituents and talked to military families, and after countless

hours of consideration, my gut tells me that I can't believe that this

plan is the answer.

Unfortunately, this plan still gives no clear indication of the

consequence if the Iraqis fail to meet their commitment that they made

to us over the last few years. To date, our military has done

everything we have called on them to do. Yet the Iraqi leaders have not

lived up to their commitments.

I believe the time has come for the Iraqi government to step up and

halt the sectarian violence, find the political will to solve their own

problems and take charge of their own destiny. That is ultimately the

key to finding a successful conclusion to this war and bringing our

brave men and women home.