Mr. Speaker, I support the troops, their

families, and those who have sacrificed so much in this war. But like

others who supported the Iraq efforts in the past, I have serious

reservations about the President's new way forward.

On Friday, this House will vote on a resolution asking Members to

support our troops but oppose the President's plan to send 21,500 more

troops to Iraq. For me, this will be a sobering moment. I have spent

many days agonizing over the issue, and I do not take lightly the

judgment to rebuke the decision of the President, our Commander in

Chief. But I have sent off and welcomed home thousands of soldiers at

Fort Benning. I have seen the anguish on the faces of families as they

watch their loved ones march off towards the uncertainty and peril that

awaited them in Iraq and Afghanistan. I have seen the troops return

home to those same families, their faces reflecting the elation,

relief, and joy of seeing their loved ones safe at home. I have seen

the veterans return with Purple Hearts, having lost arms, legs, and

suffering from the mental trauma that results from war and the adverse

impacts on their families. I have also stood and listened to Taps

played over the bodies of too many who have returned in flag-draped

coffins. Mr. Speaker, it is time for a change.

The situation in Iraq has become very grave. Like General Schoomaker

and countless others, I believe we should not surge without a purpose,

and that purpose should be measurable in its outcome. Thus far, the

President has not set forth a clear marker against which the purpose

and the outcome can be measured. Previous increases in troop strength

have not brought a reduction in violence or quelling of sectarian

strife. Rather, the problems have intensified, casualties have

increased, and political situations show more cracks, corruption, and

signs of instability every day.

There are those who say we should not oppose the President's plan

without presenting an alternative. I think that may be a fair

challenge, but there is another way. We need a new strategy that is

based on redeployment rather than further military engagement, one that

is centered on handing Iraq back to the Iraqis. As Congressman Murtha

has stated: Iraq cannot make the political progress necessary for its

stability and security until U.S. forces redeploy. To achieve stability

in Iraq and the region, we must redeploy from Iraq.

Why, you might ask? 91 percent of the Sunnis, 74 percent of the Shia

want us out. 70 percent of Americans want us out. 72 percent of

Americans who served in Iraq last year believe that we should be out by

now. 61 percent of Iraqis approve of attacks on U.S. led forces. They

see us as occupiers and want us out. The longer we stay, the more

troops we send, the more violence we see, and the more we help

recruiting of radical extremists. So we must redeploy first from

Saddam's palaces in Baghdad, then from the cities, the factories, and

universities. We must give the country back to the Iraqis and let them

govern themselves and rebuild.

Next, we must execute a robust and diplomatic effort, and we must

regain our credibility by denouncing aspirations for permanent bases.

We must shut down Guantanamo and bulldoze Abu Ghraib prison. These are

black eyes on the face of our international credibility. We must

articulate clearly a policy of no torture, no exceptions. Then, we must

engage dialogue with Iraq and all of its neighbors to promote

investment of resources and cooperation for security by the other Arab

countries in the region.

Most importantly, we need to repair and restore our strategic

military reserves that have already been stressed to the breaking

point. Because of the large force already in Iraq, Army ground forces

here at home are not mission ready. This is because of both equipment

and personnel shortages. The National Guard that remains at home is

woefully unready to meet their statutory obligations based on natural

disasters, wildfires, terrorism, and other threats to the homeland. The

large presence in Iraq has drained readiness and equipment and

personnel from the rest of our military. The surge will cost us dearly

in billions of dollars and time, and we desperately need to repair, to

reconstitute, and to reset our forces to face other significant threats

at home and around the world.

We cannot stay the course we are on. We must change. Support our

troops and our long-term national security by voting for this

resolution.