Mr. Speaker, I support this resolution because it

provides the affirmation and the change that I believe we need in Iraq.

The affirmation is essentially universal in this House. It is an

affirmation that we are irrevocably committed to arm, support, equip,

and protect the troops that we have sent to Iraq. We are committed to

stand by the young men and women who have made the choice to make a

sacrifice for this country. That issue is not an issue.

What is an issue is whether American policy is working in Iraq or

failing in Iraq. I believe it is failing, and I believe that a vote for

this resolution is a vote for change.

We have frequently heard, Mr. Speaker, from the minority side that

they would like to hear a plan. With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, I

suggest they start listening to this debate and to the American people.

Here is how you build a plan: First, you acknowledge reality by

properly defining the problem. The administration persists in rhetoric

that defines the conflict in Iraq as a struggle between forces of

civilization on one hand and the forces which wrought September 11 on

the other. To some extent this characterization is accurate, but to a

great extent this characterization is inaccurate.

A significant portion of the violence in Iraq is not the result of

Islamic violence against American troops, although it exists. A

significant portion of the violence in Iraq is the result of sectarian

violence, Shiia against Sunni, Sunni against Shiia, and occasionally

others against the Kurds. This is not the position of the Democratic

Party. This is the observation of the military and intelligence

leadership in public documents of this country. Sectarian violence is

the principal problem in Iraq.

If the problem in Iraq were that a fragile but legitimate young

government was struggling to hang on but could not overcome the

resistance, then this idea of a troop surge would make sense. The idea

of sending more fighters to defeat the resistance would make sense.

This is not the proper definition of the problem. The troop surge does

not send more fighters to defeat the resistance. It sends more referees

to inject themselves into the violence between Shiia and Sunni militia

and warfighters. The problem in Iraq is largely, not exclusively but

largely, how to stop the sectarian violence.

The second change that we must have is a change that vests the Iraqis

themselves with the primary responsibility and eventually the exclusive

responsibility to defeat that sectarian violence. Sending more American

troops to do the job of the Iraqis is not the answer. Insisting that

the Iraqis do their

own job, defend their own country, fight their own fight is the answer.

Now, the United States should not divorce itself from that effort.

The United States, in my view, should not immediately vest the Iraqis

with all that authority. But sending more young Americans to fight the

fight for legitimacy of the Iraqi Government will not further the

legitimacy of the Iraqi Government. It will defer it. It will weaken

it. It will undermine it. There is one way, and one way only, to

determine whether Iraqis themselves are willing to fight for this

government, whether Shiia are willing to fight Shiia militia, whether

Sunni are willing to fight Sunni militia. And that is to let them do

it, not to give the job to more and more Americans. This is the change

that we need.

And, finally, we need a change which recognizes that the principal

problem in reaching a unity government in Iraq is political

negotiation. Now, this is not to say that diplomats alone can solve

this problem, but it is most certainly to say that if those who are

vested in the outcome of this civil war are not brought to a conference

table, brought to a negotiation, and compelled or encouraged to reach a

solution, I doubt very much that it will come.

The United States has become the guarantor of the status quo in Iraq,

and the status quo is failing. The best way to serve the interests of

the American troops is to engage in the democratic debate for which

they are fighting. Young Americans are fighting and dying so that

Iraqis will have the right to debate their country's future. It would

be sadly and bitterly ironic if we abrogated our responsibility to

debate our country's future over what they should be doing in that

country and how long they should be there.

If you want to serve the troops, have the debate. And if you want to

promote the idea of avoiding failure in Iraq, then change the policy in

Iraq. Do not sustain the status quo. I believe that if you want to

change the policy in Iraq, voting ``yes'' on resolution 63 is the right

first step.

Mr. Speaker, I yield the balance of my time to my friend from

California (Mr. Schiff).