Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of our men and women

in uniform, and in support of this resolution.

Nearly 230,000 Americans are currently deployed to the Middle East

fighting the war on terrorism. Three thousand of those are from my home

State of Oklahoma. These men and women are fighting for their country,

not as Democrats or as Republicans, but as Americans.

I was not in Congress nearly 4 years ago when the war in Iraq began,

but in the 2 years since I have served here I have not once encountered

a colleague who does not support our troops. We have our disagreements

over strategy, spending and even the war itself, but when it comes to

support for the selfless Americans serving in uniform, we are

unanimous.

For anyone, and I repeat, anyone to suggest anything to the contrary

just distracts from this serious, serious debate.

As many of my colleagues have already noted, our troops are not the

problem. They have done an outstanding job executing the mission that

they have been given. The problem is with the administration's

strategy. We owe it to the men and women of our Armed Forces to pursue

a policy that offers them the best possible chance at success, not a

plan that repeats past mistakes.

The President's decision to deploy an additional 21,500 American

combat troops to Iraq is not the first time that we have had a surge of

troops in this conflict. In April of 2004, January and October of 2005,

and again in October of last year, we saw temporary escalations that

provided no long-term reductions in violence. I am concerned that this

latest plan is a renewed effort

for more of the same that does little to encourage the Iraqis to take

responsibility for their own future. As one general told the Iraq Study

Group, ``All the troops in the world will not provide security if the

Iraqi Government does not make political progress.'' Rather than laying

out a plan that establishes solid benchmarks for Iraqi security and the

corresponding redeployment of U.S. troops, the President is pursuing a

strategy that history shows does not work.

Former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin

Powell, Commander of the U.S. Central Command General John Abizaid,

Marine Corps Commandant General James Conway, and many other current

and former military leaders have said more troops is not the answer.

Our Nation's military is already stretched thin. This open-ended plan

to increase American troop levels in Iraq would exacerbate the

overextension of our Armed Forces and cripple our ability to respond to

other crises around the world. Because we don't know what the future

holds, we have to be ready for anything.

U.S. and coalition forces successfully removed Saddam Hussein from

power, and the world is a better place for it. But we now find

ourselves locked in the middle of an Iraqi civil war. The Iraq of today

is vastly different from the Iraq we entered nearly 4 years ago, yet

our strategy remains the same. We need to succeed in Iraq, but we need

to redefine what success really is.

For over a year now I have joined our great chairman, Chairman

Skelton, in his call for solid benchmarks in Iraq. We need a mechanism

to measure our progress toward an Iraq that is responsible for its own

security. It is in our interest, it is in Iraq's interest, and it is in

the interest of the region to ensure that Iraqi personnel are trained

and ready to take control sooner rather than later. Realistically, some

of the more than 140,000 troops we already have in Iraq to secure the

Iranian border would do more to further our goals in Iraq than sending

more Americans into Baghdad. And that is a plan, my friends.

At the end of the day, military command decisions rest with the

Commander in Chief. This resolution and this debate are not about

micromanaging the war or forcing a withdrawal of troops. Public opinion

polls should not dictate war strategies. The facts should. And the

facts are that surges haven't worked in the past and experts agree it

won't work this time.

The President knows we are all in this together. That is why I was

very disappointed to see the administration move forward with such a

dramatic escalation despite strong bipartisan opposition in Congress.

Without a clear mission or effective benchmarks, it is too big of a

gamble to take with so many American lives.