Mr. Speaker, with regard to the current

debate on the floor on Iraq policy, I would like to offer the following

observations.

First, I respect the President's constitutional role as Commander in

Chief of the Armed Forces, and I appreciate President Bush's offer to

entertain suggestions from Congress regarding Iraq policy.

I understand that success in Iraq depends on bipartisan support at

home.

I applaud U.S. troops who are serving in Iraq with professionalism

and bravery. They deserve the support of all Americans.

It is becoming self-evident that multiple, extended deployments to

Iraq and Afghanistan have strained the military. Current deployments

and those to come will have lasting impacts on recruiting, retention

and readiness of the all-volunteer military.

Unfortunately, sectarian violence in Iraq between Sunni and Shia

Muslims is increasing, and the failure of Iraqis to reach political

settlements and support a unified government greatly contributes to the

increased violence.

I believe it is time for Iraq's government and security forces to

step forward and bear primary responsibility for internal security.

As the gentleman from North Carolina noted, the former head of the

U.S. Central Command, General John Abizaid, told Congress last November

that sending in more U.S. troops would not contribute to success in

Iraq because it would prevent the Iraqis from taking more

responsibility.

It is clear that Iraqi public sentiment opposes the continued U.S.

troop presence.

In November, the Iraq Study Group called for new diplomatic and

political efforts in Iraq and the region and a change in the primary

mission of U.S. forces that will allow the United States to ``begin to

move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly.''

Unfortunately, the Iraqi Government has made little progress toward

assuming more responsibility for security, disbanding militias,

reconciling sectarian differences and improving essential services.

Therefore, I have reluctantly concluded that I have to disagree with

the President's plan to send in an additional 21,000-plus combat

troops. While I applaud the President's reassessment of U.S.-Iraq

policy, I joined with several of my colleagues in January in informing

the White House that I did not support an expansion of American troop

strength on the ground, and

nothing that I have learned since has caused me to reconsider my

position.

Nevertheless, Congress should not take any action that would endanger

U.S. military forces in the field, including the elimination or

reduction of funding for troops in the field.

Most Americans fundamentally understand the long-term security

interests of the United States would be best served by an Iraq that can

sustain, govern and defend itself and serve as an ally in the war

against extremists.

Overall U.S. military, diplomatic, and economic strategy should not

be regarded as an open-ended commitment but should be conditioned upon

the Iraqi Government's meeting benchmarks, including the deployment of

additional Iraqi troops in Baghdad, equitable distribution of resources

without regard to sect or ethnicity, the use of oil revenues to benefit

all Iraqi citizens equitably, and granting military commanders

authority to make decisions without political interference.

Mr. Speaker, with very minor edits, the remarks you have just heard

from me summarize the resolution on Iraq offered by Senator Warner in

the other body. It is one of the alternative resolutions we should be

debating here today. Unfortunately, the majority leadership does not

want to allow a full and fair debate on Iraq.

When the Democrat leadership in the other body tried to force a vote

on the resolution without an opportunity to offer meaningful

amendments, the minority was able to insist on their right to a real

debate rather than this phony pretense. Unfortunately, we do not have

that ability in this Chamber.

So I will vote in favor of the resolution before us as offered, as

narrow and as inadequate as it is, but I cannot help but express my

frustration that the leadership of the House has squandered an

opportunity to allow a full and fair debate with real amendments, not

just to Republicans, but to all Members of the House, including their

own Members whose voices are stifled by this decision to put political

calculations ahead of the national interests and a robust debate.

I am not sure what the leadership of the majority party is afraid of.

If they have the votes to reject alternatives, then they lose nothing

by allowing them to be offered. If they do not, they will quickly

learn, as we did, that if you need to use procedural games to avoid a

tough vote, you have already lost on the underlying issue.

I thank the gentleman from North Carolina for allowing me to be a

part of this debate.