Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman Skelton for yielding.

It has been an honor to serve on his committee.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my strong support for this

resolution. Last November the voters in upstate New York spoke loudly

and clearly in demanding a change in direction in Iraq, and I will cast

my vote in favor of this resolution to fulfill my duty to represent

their will.

As a freshman Member of this new Congress, I can think of no higher

responsibility than to debate the merits of the President's plan to

escalate American involvement in this war in Iraq. And I am pleased to

see that every Member of Congress has been given 5 minutes to voice

their view and to speak on this measure.

Today's debate is not about what is best for Democrats or best for

Republicans. It is about what is best for our troops, for our national

security, and for all Americans, as it should be. I believe the

sentiments will be reflected in the bipartisan support this resolution

will ultimately receive.

As I have traveled throughout my district doing town hall meetings

and ``Congress on Your Corner'' to invite comments from my constituents

and listen to their issues, I hear a consistent message. People say to

me, we need a new direction in Iraq. We need a plan for success. We

need to make sure we bring stability to the region; and when will our

troops come home? All of these issues I couldn't agree with more

strongly. Unfortunately, the President's plan is not a change in

direction. It is, rather, more of the same.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I have had the

unique opportunity to question both Secretary Gates and General Pace

and to listen to their testimony on this proposed escalation. At no

point has anyone from the administration been able to articulate to me

clearly that this is a strategy that will effectively undermine

terrorism, promote lasting stability, and be successful in redeploying

our troops. What is so clear to so many of our military advisers,

former and current military generals, and a majority of this body and

the American public at large does not seem to be shared by this

administration, that the answers in sustaining peace in Iraq lie in the

political, diplomatic, and economic solutions, not in the military

ones.

In our hearings I have worked hard to bring to light whether the

President has a plan for Iraqi oil revenues and reconstruction

contracts to create progress in the economic and political arenas. Both

Secretary Gates and General Pace testified that the President's current

plan has no chance of success unless there is significant progress in

both of these arenas. I call upon the administration to produce a real

plan to ensure each of the sectarian groups receives a stake in the oil

revenues and a plan for oversight and accountability to reduce fraud

and corruption and to disrupt the black market for oil.

Right now only a small portion of the Iraqi oil revenues has been

used for reconstruction; yet billions of American dollars have been

spent. We need accountability and real answers to ensure the Iraqis

leverage the oil revenue effectively to bring all of the parties to the

table.

And where is the accountability with the war spending? We need a

Truman-style committee to investigate these billions of dollars of no-

bid contracts being awarded in Iraq, and we should bring the war

funding process completely under the regular appropriation structures.

We have also not seen a plan to transfer the reconstruction contracts

to the Iraqis. The Iraqi 20-year-olds should be the ones that are

rebuilding the bridges and the roads and the schools and the hospitals,

not fighting each other and not attacking our troops.

And where has the progress been made on the political stability?

Where is the plan to develop a special envoy and to engage others in

the region to bring forth peace and stability?

In my view, the testimony provided in the several hearings that the

Armed Services Committee has had have revealed an insufficient

commitment to these very targets that both General Pace and Secretary

Gates have testified are required for success. Yet the President

continues to push forward and send in more troops.

Our men and our women in the military have served admirably and have

done everything we have asked them to do. They have fought bravely

under daunting circumstances, often at times without the proper

equipment that they need. They have made sacrifice after sacrifice in

leaving their families and loved ones behind to do the job that we have

asked them to do. And how do we repay this sacrifice and patriotism? By

continuing to extend their tours indefinitely, cutting their veterans

benefits when they return home. The dedication and sacrifice of the men

and the women in the Armed Forces deserves responsible leadership. They

have given us everything they have, and in turn we must give them a new

direction for success.

There are those out there that will use this debate as a partisan

wedge. That type of rhetoric undermines the core values of our

democracy. In fact, it was Thomas Jefferson who declared that dissent

is the highest form of patriotism.