Mr. Oberstar, thank you very much. The circumstances

are difficult.

Mr. Speaker, it is more than 5 years that we are into the global war

on terror. Since the horrific attacks to our country on September 11,

we are fighting a faceless enemy, an unbelievably ruthless enemy, an

enemy who is undeterred in their hatreds for our freedoms and our way

of life.

We must remain strong in our resolve to defeat the enemy, and it is

no accident that our Nation has not been attacked since September 11.

It is not because the enemy and its supporters have not wanted to bring

destruction to America, it is because we as Americans have remained

committed to the defense of our homeland.

It is because we have remained vigilant in working with our

international partners to prevent terrorists from being successful, and

it is mostly because of our brave men and women in uniform, who have

taken the fight to the enemy. Likewise, our commitment to the troops on

the battlefield, whether in Iraq or Afghanistan, or wherever the global

war on terror may take our brave young men and women, must run deep.

Our commitment must include that our soldiers have all the necessary

equipment and armor that they need.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the well, to the podium today very troubled.

For 3 days, the majority will have us debating the very critical issue

of the war in Iraq, but this debate is really without real substance.

This debate is without an alternative strategy that many of us

acknowledge we desperately need to be discussing. This debate will not

bring about one positive change for our men and women in harm's way,

and will rather likely result in the wrong message to many of our

soldiers, our partners and, avoidably, the enemy.

I believe this debate is dividing the Congress. I believe this debate

is dividing the American people and sending the wrong message to our

soldiers in the field, who may question our unwavering support on their

behalf. I continue to be awe struck and proud of the valor of our

servicemen and -women of Iraq. However, this debate sends a mixed

message to them, their families, and the families of those who were

lost in the global war on terror. We could have, and we should have had

a debate that sends a strong message to support our troops in their

commitment, but the majority has chosen against us.

While I do not support the President's latest strategy, I believe the

American military should not serve as a referee in the sectarian

conflict that has lasted for centuries. It is the responsibility of the

Iraqi Government to take a stronger role to set benchmarks and not let

the American military and our forces be caught in the middle. This

resolution is silent in its requirements to the elected Iraqi

Government and to the Iraqi people, and holding their own destiny in

their hands.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, I have listened to the

generals and military experts, administration officials, tell us that

Iraqi forces are ready for greater responsibilities in securing Iraq.

However, after being to Iraq five times myself, and talking with a

number of soldiers in the field, the reality on the ground is that

Iraqi forces are not being used to the extent that they should at this

point. I think that needs to change.

I would like to also say that it is with great regret that I will not

be here at the conclusion of the debate this week. Unfortunately, my

father-in-law passed away after a battle with cancer, and I will be

heading out to the funeral with my wife and the family.

I wanted to be on record before leaving as to what this critical

motion means. This debate cannot and should not be the end of what we

are talking about, and for the reasons stated before all future debates

must be substantive on policies. It is clear to me the majority has a

strategy that many have talked about that reflects far beyond just the

surge in Iraq and what it may mean, but has implications for funding.

Mr. Speaker, let me make it perfectly clear. I support the troops,

but on the basis of the message that this is sending to our partners,

to the troops, to their families on this nonsubstantive resolution, I

cannot support it.

I will close by saying that I received a call from a father, who has

two children that are in Iraq. One felt so strongly that he sent a

letter to our local newspaper, Specialist Matthew J. Smith of Hopewell

Township, and I have just a few excerpts from his letter. ``I

personally feel as if I am here

for a great purpose and goal that our Commander in Chief has ordered us

to achieve. I have never felt it would be an easy task, nor should

those at home living their comfortable lives. Have we forgotten that

this great country of ours was not handed to us on a silver platter? I

am asking everyone, please don't allow those of us who have died to die

in vain. When we have completed the mission and have been successful in

defending freedom, we will come home.''