Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for

recognizing me for time.

Mr. Speaker and Members, as a combat veteran, from the bottom of my

heart, I say thank you to the brave men and women who have served in

Iraq, each with great distinction.

Our troops have done an outstanding job. They have done all that has

been asked of them and more. They have performed with the utmost

professionalism, making all of us very proud.

Now, I believe it is past time that we start bringing these brave men

and women home. They should be home with their families, not in the middle

of Iraq's civil war. Moreover, we shouldn't be sending more troops into

Iraq's civil war. Some of our service members have been on two, three,

and even four tours of duty in Iraq already.

This escalation would put too much strain on our military and not

just our troops. Much of our military's equipment is damaged. It will

take years and billions of dollars to repair it and replace it. Nearly

every Reserve and National Guard member has been mobilized. The

escalation is in no one's best interest.

Two weeks ago I joined with my colleague Patrick Murphy from

Pennsylvania, a decorated Army captain who served in Iraq, to introduce

binding legislation to begin a phased redeployment of our troops out of

Iraq. Our bill, which has already attracted 20 co-authors from both

sides of the aisle and has a companion bill in the Senate, provides a

practical and comprehensive strategy for ending our military

involvement in Iraq. It sets a firm deadline for phased redeployment of

our troops beginning May 1 with all combat brigades out by March 31 of

2008. It provides a concrete plan for shifting security

responsibilities to where they belong: with the Iraqis.

I have visited with our troops in Iraq, and I have talked to those

who have been training the Iraqi security forces. They have told me

that the U.S. troops have finished their job and that Iraq needs to

step up and start securing their country. Americans cannot continue to

do it for them.

Our bill recognizes that the President's escalation plan is a

continuation of his failed ``stay the course'' slogan and it would not

allow the increase of troop levels without congressional approval.

Mr. Speaker, the United States cannot win the peace in Iraq. The

Iraqis must be the ones to do that. Our bill recognizes this reality

and creates a surge in diplomacy, not troops, by creating a special

U.S. envoy that will help build relationships between Iraq and their

neighbors. Our bill is a strategy for success in Iraq and is the best

way to bring our brave men and women home as quickly and safely as

possible.

While I strongly believe that today we should be debating and passing

our binding solution, H.R. 787, I know that this week's debate is the

first real debate we have had on Iraq in more than 4 years. In this

week alone, we will more than quadruple the amount of time given to

debate this war since it began.

Thank you, Speaker Pelosi, for bringing this important matter to the

floor. This resolution is a critical step in getting our men and women

out of this ugly mess, a full blown civil war in Iraq. I support

today's resolution, which joins with the American people in sending the

President a loud and clear message that escalation is not the answer.

We need to focus on getting our troops out of Iraq as safely and

quickly as possible and making sure that the Iraqis step up and assume

the security responsibilities for their country.

I also rise to tell those who have served, those who are serving in

Iraq today, and their proud families thank you. Your Nation thanks you

for your great service to our country.