I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Madam Speaker, today tens of thousands of our young men and women are

serving in uniform heading for Iraq. More are headed there as we speak.

They will do what American soldiers do. They will serve our Nation with

courage and pride, and for that they deserve our deep gratitude.

Today in the House we are engaging in a debate on a resolution that

declares their military and humanitarian missions failed. I have seen

this resolution described in the press as symbolic, toothless and

meaningless. I couldn't disagree more. Our consideration of this

resolution, the words spoken on this floor, carry great meaning and

weight.

The actions of this body have consequences. When Members speak, the

world listens: our friends, our allies, our rivals, our enemies and

future enemies alike. What are they hearing?

I remember just 2 weeks ago, during the Super Bowl, seeing the video

of our troops in Baghdad watching the game. Our soldiers watched that

game. Every Member on this floor should know with certainty that our

soldiers surely are watching this debate, and so are their families,

and so are our enemies and so are the loved ones of those who made the

ultimate sacrifice in their service to our Nation.

Instead of showcasing the best partisan rhetoric and working for

political advantage, we should be working together with our Commander

in Chief to honor their service and commitment, to find a way forward

in Iraq that protects our Nation and results in a stable Iraq that can

govern and protect itself.

I know that none of us are happy with the progress of the war. I know

that the American people are struggling with this war. I struggle too.

I am reminded that we have been sent here by our constituents to

exercise our best judgment and to bring our experience to bear on the

most pressing issue facing our Nation, the global threat of a radical

Islamic fundamentalism.

Last week in the House Appropriations Committee on Defense, on which

I serve, I asked the chiefs of staff of the Army about the consequences

of failure in Iraq. I was reprimanded for getting off topic. But that

is the topic. That is the point. Withdrawal from Iraq will have

consequences, both immediate and in the seeds of future conflicts.

What will Congress do if we leave Iraq to flounder and descend into

chaos, and how will we handle the next challenge laid before us, for

there will be others. Do any of us doubt the determination of forces

who are counting on our failure, on our resolve? This is the most

fundamental question that confronts us, not solely the question of

troop reinforcement that is already under way. Our answer to this

question will be the legacy, not just of this President, but of all of

us in this Chamber.

Over 35 years ago I served with the Army in Vietnam. While I never

much advertised this fact, I was proud to serve, even as my father,

then a Member of Congress himself, was subject to many personal attacks

on the home front from those who opposed the Vietnam War.

Like many soldiers then, I wanted to do my time and come back safely.

I promised myself one day that if I had the chance, I would be a better

person, a better elected official, for that military experience. I

promised myself that I would never let our soldiers down wherever they

might be.

Madam Speaker, we are Americans first, and as Republicans and

Democrats, we need to come together to work on solutions in Iraq and

the Middle East. We are a Nation at war, lives are on the line, and we

could do much better than this resolution.