Madam Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California. I

rise today in strong support of this resolution.

Recently at a town hall meeting that I had, a man approached me,

pulled out a picture of his son, said that he had just died in Iraq 6

months ago. His wife won't come out of the home. He said, ``I want you

to promise me that when you go to Washington, you will do everything

you can to make sure that this never happens to another family.''

Three days later, I called the family of Senior Airman Daniel Miller

of Galesburg, Illinois, who lost their son to a roadside bomb explosion

outside of Baghdad 2 weeks prior to when he was supposed to be coming

home. I hope and pray I don't ever have to make another phone call to

another grieving family. That is why I come to the floor this evening

in strong opposition to the President's decision to deploy 21,500

additional troops in Iraq, and I strongly support this resolution.

The current situation in Iraq is grave, and it is rapidly

deteriorating. The sectarian conflict is the principal challenge to

stability in Iraq, and caught in the middle of this civil war are

approximately 140,000 of our bravest troops. Over 3,000 troops have

already lost their lives, while over 22,000 have been wounded.

Our current strategy has not made significant impact on reducing the

violence. In fact, December 2006 was the third deadliest month since

the war began. The cost of this war, both in the number of lives lost

and the amount of dollars spent, has had a profound effect on Illinois

and my congressional district. Out of the 3,128 deaths, 95 have been

from Illinois, and eight soldiers from the 17th District.

But not only will an increase in troop levels not solve the

fundamental cause of violence, it places us at a great disadvantage

here at home. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the troop

surge could require as many as 48,000 troops and as much as $27

billion, which is five times the amount of the President's request of

$5.6 billion. Also the U.S. military will be forced to deploy many

combat units for their second, third, and even fourth deployments in

Iraq, and extend the redeployment of others.

Currently as we sit in debate on this resolution, 16,000 single

mothers are serving in Iraq. This troop surge would only extend the

time their children are left at home alone, with their mother or their

father.

Since the military is already short thousands of vehicles, armor kits

and other protective equipment, a troop surge threatens the readiness

of our forces. In fact, if you saw the paper recently, a soldier was

quoted saying he had to go to the junkyards to dig up pieces of rusted

scrap missile and ballistic glass so they could armor the vehicles and

make them combat ready.

While only a first step, this resolution is a good start. It does not

give up on our troops or declare defeat in Iraq, but offers a new

forward direction towards a nonpartisan goal of bringing our troops

home safely, quickly, and securing stability in the region.

Already, this Democratic-led Congress has had 52 oversight hearings

on various issues related to this war, and many of my colleagues have

introduced several bipartisan measures that promote political and

diplomatic engagements.

A person this evening said, Where do we go from here? I would

strongly suggest that this administration try something it hasn't tried

yet: diplomacy. It can work. You just have to have the courage to try.

In the coming weeks, I am hopeful that Congress will consider a

comprehensive measure such as H.R. 787, the Iraq War De-escalation Act,

of which I am a cosponsor. In addition to requiring the responsible

redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq and allowing basic force

protection, it launches a comprehensive regional and international

diplomatic initiative. I am thoroughly convinced that the only way we

will attain peace in this region, in Iraq, is through diplomatic

initiatives.

This legislation also makes the Iraqi Government responsible for

their own destiny by establishing benchmarks concerning Iraqi military

readiness to police their own country without United States assistance.

Finally, as a veteran myself, I also hope as we move forward we will

adequately prepare for the return of thousands of new veterans. Our

number one priority should be to fully fund the cost of veterans health

care and PTSD benefits.

This administration's budget calls for cutting prosthetics by $2

million and severely cuts funds to the VA at a time when it is

proposing an increase in troop levels. Without full funding for the

Department of Veterans Affairs, our veterans are left without the

services they were promised when they pledged to defend this Nation.

Madam Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues on both sides of the

aisle to support this resolution as the first of many steps towards

bringing our troops home and securing our success in Iraq. As I told

the gentleman at my town meeting, I promised him I would do everything

I could so this would never happen again. That journey begins this

evening