Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support

of this resolution that supports our troops, but oppose the President's

escalation plan. My opposition to this war has been clear and

consistent. The night before I voted against the Iraq war resolution in

October 2002, I stated on this floor that Congress should not grant the

President power to pursue a war in Iraq for three reasons.

First, Iraq was not an imminent threat to the safety and security of

America, something we now know to be true. There are no weapons of mass

destruction in Iraq.

Secondly, we were acting without real international support. And we

now know that our unilateral action proved to be disastrous to our

standing in the world community.

Finally, I questioned whether the President had an exit strategy.

Now, 4 1/2 years later, it is clear that President Bush did not have

and still does not have an exit strategy for our troops.

Even though I voted against the invasion, I never dreamt that the

President's policies and course of action would be as disastrous as

they have been for Iraq, for the gulf region and for America.

Americans went to the polls in November to send a clear message to

Congress and to the administration. They

are against this war and they want a successful exit plan. Americans

see that we are spending 8 to $10 billion a month to fight this war,

while in our own country we have 47 million Americans without health

care insurance and our national debt is almost $9 trillion.

Mr. Speaker, my Democratic colleagues and I hear the American people

loud and clear. They want oversight of this war. They want to know the

hard facts of the situation on the ground in Iraq, instead of the rosy

picture the Bush administration tries to paint. They want

investigations of and an end to the shady contracting in Iraq that has

given away billions of American dollars without so much as a receipt.

They want assurances that our troops will be protected.

Mr. Speaker, even though it was a mistake of titanic proportions to

initiate this war, now that Iraq has been destabilized, what are we to

do? The answer cannot be more of the same, because what we are doing is

failing to have a positive impact. Our troops have performed the

difficult missions given to them in Iraq with courage.

Congress and the American people will continue to support them and

provide them with every resource they need. 320 soldiers from my home

State of California have died in this war. We can never repay our debt

to their faithful service and the sacrifices made by their families.

The failure in Iraq is not a failure of our fighting men and women.

It is a failure of command, a failure of political leadership. We must

provide our troops and their families with a new exit strategy instead

of a new deployment.

The civil war in Iraq is not the product of ad hoc, spur-of-the-

moment individual violence. No. It is organized and it is a strategy of

various political and sectarian factions in Iraq. Putting our troops in

the middle of these warring factions will not end the violence. It will

only put our troops in the middle of it. That notion is borne out by

the fact that more than 60 percent of the Iraqi public believes that it

is a good thing to attack and kill Americans stationed in Iraq.

Proponents of the President's escalation plan act as if the United

States has but two options: one, increase the American troops at great

cost, both in human lives and financial; or, two, do nothing. But those

are not the only choices. We must step up our diplomatic efforts in the

region as recommended by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.

Americans should call upon neighboring states in the Middle East to

take strong measures to avoid a spread of the conflict beyond Iraq. As

Iraq disintegrates into sectarian violence, her neighbors must insist

that the factions within Iraq halt their civil war.

We need to remind the countries in the region that stability in Iraq

is vital to their interests. If they want to avoid having this war

spill out across the Middle East, they must step up their diplomatic

efforts. With the help of the entire region, we can push the Iraqis to

help themselves.

Iraqi security forces must be trained in a faster pace so they can be

responsible for their own country. There is no guarantee of success in

Iraq, nor is there a clear definition of what success might look like;

but we do have a moral obligation to make our best efforts to diffuse

the chaos the war has created. The solution must be a political and a

diplomatic one.

Unfortunately, the President refuses to pursue the diplomatic options

endorsed by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group and his own military

advisors. As we saw today with the welcome news that diplomatic efforts

have led to the de-escalation of tensions in North Korea and an

agreement to abandon their nuclear weapons ambition, a conflict is not

always the right answer to world challenges.

Even General Abizaid, the outgoing top commander of the U.S. forces

in Iraq, does not believe an escalation will increase our chances of

American success. The American public has long been ahead of Congress

in their opposition to this war.

I am here today to tell the American people that they are being

heard. I stand with the majority of Americans who say they have had

enough. In the coming weeks and days, Congress will give the

President's plan the scrutiny the American people expect and our troops

deserve. It is time to bring this war to an end and time to support

this resolution