Mr. Speaker, America begins the fifth year of war in Iraq.

I am pleased that Speaker Pelosi has scheduled such a thorough debate

of the most important moral and political issue of the day. The war in

Iraq was misguided from the outset, even illegal, and has been

mismanaged consistently ever since.

The resolution we have before us today puts Congress on record

opposing the escalation of troops in Iraq proposed by President Bush

and expressing our steadfast support for our troops.

Let me say at the outset that I intend to vote for this resolution.

It is an important first step. The President's escalation of forces in

Iraq is worse than the stay-the-course strategy so clearly rejected by

Americans. If we pass this resolution, we will be doing more than

repudiating the President's disastrous policy. We will for the first

time be putting Congress on record in a way that will allow us to bring

this war to an end for Americans.

Mr. Speaker, U.S. Armed Forces who are serving in Iraq are heroes.

They are the most finely trained and dedicated group of patriots any

leader could want. But they now find themselves mired in the middle of

intense violence, based on sectarian, political, social and cultural

factors dating back 1,000 years.

The situation in Iraq cannot be solved militarily. Pretending

otherwise only puts our soldiers, marines and others in greater danger.

I have visited them in theater, in Iraq and other countries in the

region and, yes, at Walter Reed Hospital here in Washington.

I have met with their families in New Jersey. The quality of these

men and women, their earnest wish to serve their country makes this

situation all the more tragic.

Mr. Speaker, they were sent to Iraq irresponsibly and in ignorance by

leaders, sometimes improperly equipped, and are now asked to achieve an

impossible mission. There is no way for us to resolve militarily the

emerging multifaceted civil war that is engulfing Iraq.

When he ordered the invasion of Iraq, President Bush unleashed forces

he did not understand and could not control. As the most recent

National Intelligence Estimate attests: ``The term civil war does not

adequately capture the complexity of the conflict in Iraq, which

includes extensive Shia-on-Shia violence and al Qaeda and Sunni

insurgent attacks on coalition forces and widespread criminally

motivated violence.''

Whenever American forces leave Iraq, there will not be a stable

American-style liberal democracy. Prolonging the occupation of Iraq

whose stability has only declined by any measure as our presence goes

on increases the costs we incur in lives, dollars, and international

prestige.

No one will look back and say, if only the American military stayed a

little longer. No, historians will look back and ask what took Congress

so long to recognize a disaster and do something about it. Extracting

American troops from this quagmire will dry up support for the various

insurgencies operating in Iraq, and encourage other nations to take

part in the process of stabilizing the country and promote the domestic

processes necessary for long-term stability.

Given all of those factors, the burden should not be on those who

believe that American forces should be withdrawn. The burden should be

on those who want to continue this endeavor to show any compelling

evidence that is worth sending more Americans to kill and to be killed.

Sending more troops should require the same high standard of evidence

that should have been met to go to war in the first place.

But the President and, I am sorry to say, the previous Congresses did

not apply that high standard. Some of us said 4 years ago that there

was not evidence sufficiently compelling to send Americans to kill and

to die. After the President went to war anyway, I called for withdrawal

early.

Now, Congress must establish standards that we failed to set,

standards of intelligence and evidence, standards of diplomacy,

standards of legislative oversight, so that we do not go to war or

escalate wars based on ideology rather than evidence, bravado rather

than humility, patriotic fervor rather than patient diplomacy.

Congress failed in its constitutional role to exert a check and

balance on the Executive. With this resolution we begin on a new

course, under new legislative leadership. We will audit the books. We

will review the procedures for detaining prisoners, for engaging

civilians, for conducting intelligence.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for President Bush to catch up with the

American people. The American people understand that American forces

should not remain in Iraq to try to quell a civil war they cannot

control. The American people understand that we must refocus our

attention on our real interests. If the President did not, let us show

at least that we do and pass this resolution.