Mr. Speaker, I rise today to make a few comments about

the resolution we are considering today in recognition of the one-year

anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The resolution before us on

the floor has significant shortcomings that I want to point out for the

Record.

On March 19, 2003, offensive U.S. military actions were initiated

against Iraq. Just two days later, on March 21, 2003, the House of

Representatives approved a resolution which expressed ``the unequivocal

support and appreciation of the Nation for our troops and their

families.''

Only 8 minutes before passing this feel good resolution, however, the

House of Representatives passed a budget, which I voted against, that

included a $28 billion cut over 10 years to veterans health care,

disability compensation and pensions. While the Republican Party is

able to eloquently express their support and admiration for our men and

women in uniform via non-binding congratulatory resolutions, their

follow through is non-existent.

Here we are a year later, and this ``unequivocal support'' has not

been translated into substantive action. Congress must deliver on this

promise of support by providing our troops with the equipment and

training they need. And, Congress must deliver on this promise by

providing our nation's veterans with the health care and services

they've earned and deserve.

Words in a non-binding resolution will not provide a single soldier

with the body armor necessary to protect his or her life nor will they

ensure a single veteran can see a doctor in a timely manner or receive

the disability compensation they've earned. Our soldiers and veterans

need action, not words.

Unfortunately, the actions of the President and his allies in

Congress have repeatedly short-changed our men and women in uniform and

the veterans who have served our nation honorably.

Thousands of troops in Iraq remain in danger because the Pentagon

leadership has failed to secure an adequate supply of body armor.

Thousands of troops remain in danger because of inadequate supplies of

armored Humvees and devices to disable roadside bombs.

According to a recent article in USA Today, U.S. military officers

are having to dip into their own unit's funds in order to get this

critical protective equipment because ``bureaucratic delays'' in

Washington, DC, have short-changed troops.

I saw the dangers confronting U.S. troops first-hand during my recent

trip to Iraq. I cannot understand why the President and the civilian

leadership at the Pentagon would put our troops in harms' way without

adequate protective equipment despite preparing for war with Iraq for 2

years prior to the actual invasion and despite $400 billion in annual

Pentagon spending.

Yet, the resolution on the floor today will do nothing to solve this

problem.

Further, our citizen-soldiers in the National Guard and Reserve

continue to be subject to second-class treatment. When I recently

visited Fort Hood, Texas, I discovered that the 2nd Battalion, 162nd

Infantry of the Oregon National Guard was sent to train without the

basics: fuel, ammunition, toilet paper, field radios and other

essentials, and they were housed in moldy, crumbling barracks.

Media reports have documented that over 1,000 wounded Army National

Guard and Army Reserve soldiers, evacuated from Iraq to Fort Stewart,

Georgia, and Fort Knox, Kentucky, were housed in sub-standard concrete

barracks with no air conditioning, indoor toilets or running water,

while they were forced to wait weeks and sometimes months for medical

care.

Yet, the resolution on the floor today will do nothing to solve these

problems.

Next week, the House Republicans will present their budget on the

House floor. Like last year's budget, this year's budget will fail to

fully meet the needs of our troops and veterans.

The budget resolution, as currently drafted, underfunds veterans

programs by $1.3 billion below the level requested by the Republican

Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

The budget fails to repeal the age-62 penalty for military widows

under the Survivor Benefit Plan. Yet, stand-alone legislation on this

issue has 291 cosponsors, including 120 Republicans.

The budget fails to fully fund repeal of the disabled veterans tax

immediately for all veterans despite the fact that stand-alone

legislation to repeal the tax, H.R. 303, has 377 cosponsors, including

185 Republican cosponsors.

The budget fails to fund an expansion of the military health care

program TRICARE to cover uninsured members of the National Guard and

Reserve.

The budget fails to provide wage support for National Guard and

Reserve members who are forced to leave civilian jobs with higher pay.

These families are forced to do more with less.

The budget fails to provide additional compensation for soldiers who

are forced to stay in the U.S. military through stop-loss orders

despite having plans to retire or otherwise leave the service after

fulfilling their time commitment under their enlistment contract. I

have drafted legislation to provide a monthly bonus of $500 for

soldiers subject to stop-loss orders, orders that amount to an

involuntary draft.

The budget fails to fund an extension of imminent danger pay and

family separation pay for troops in Iraq past the end of this year when

even Pentagon officials admit that U.S. troops will be in Iraq for the

next several years.

And, the budget cuts funding for military construction and quality-

of-life improvements for U.S. troops by $1 billion from the levels

approved before the Iraq war.

The resolution on the floor today will do nothing to address these

challenges.

Finally, the resolution on the floor today fails to acknowledge the

deaths of more than 550 American troops or the more than 3,000 wounded

American soldiers.

The resolution fails to acknowledge the deaths and injuries suffered

by American and Iraqi civilians, United Nations personnel, and soldiers

from allied countries.

The resolution fails to adequately acknowledge the service and

sacrifice of tens of thousands of National Guard and Reserve soldiers

and their families.

However, I intend to support this resolution. There is no doubt that

Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator. He oppressed and killed his own

people. He invaded his neighbors, and he used chemical weapons. The

Iraqi people and the world are better off without him.

But, the fact that I am glad he's out of power and in U.S. custody

does not mean I agree that the Iraq war was necessary. The war was not

necessary. It was elective. I voted against the authorization for war.

It was obvious even at the time of the vote, which occurred months

before the war actually started, that the Administration had hyped,

manipulated, and misrepresented the intelligence regarding the threat

posed by Iraq and that the Administration had not planned adequately

for post-war Iraq. The Administration's rosy scenario for post-war Iraq

has not come to pass. Instead, the U.S. is bogged down in a costly--

both in terms of dollars and lives--and lengthy occupation of Iraq.

I believe that America and the world would have been better served if

the Administration had not become distracted by Iraq. Saddam was safely

contained and defanged by sanctions supported by a broad international

coalition. The sanctions prevented Iraq from redeveloping chemical or

biological weapons, and made it impossible for Hussein to achieve his

ultimate goal of developing nuclear weapons.

The Administration should have kept its focus on the single gravest

threat to our society--al Qaeda. It was al Qaeda, after all, who

attacked the U.S. on September 11, 2001, not Iraq. It was al Qaeda who

bombed U.S. embassies in Africa. It was al Qaeda who bombed a U.S.

warship in the Persian Gulf. And it is al Qaeda that continues to plan

and carry out attacks against Americans and our allies around the

world. The Administration should not have shifted intelligence and

military resources away from the documented threat--al Qaeda--in order

to invade and occupy Iraq.

However, I will support this resolution because it is merely

hortatory. The resolution does not set national policy. It is not

legally binding on anyone or anything. It commends the Iraqi people for

their courage in the face of the brutal Hussein regime and commends

their adoption of an interim constitution. It also commends the members

of the U.S. military for their valiant service. I am voting for the

resolution because I want to express my support for the nascent

democracy in Iraq and for our soldiers.

I would urge the House Republican leadership to spend less time on

resolutions like this, which offer merely words, and more time pushing

through legislation that would actually provide our soldiers and

veterans with the equipment, training and benefits they need and

deserve.