I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to add my voice to the debate on this

resolution on Iraq. I will vote for House Resolution 861 because I

strongly support our troops.

Mr. Speaker, I recently returned from Iraq, which was my second trip

to that war zone. I am tremendously proud of all the men and women

serving there, especially all the North Carolinians who have served and

continue to serve there. I am pleased that we have made progress in

training the Iraqi military to begin to provide for that country's

security needs. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of work to be done

to train Iraqi police, government and other civil institutions that are

critical to a stable and functioning society. There is a long way to go

to make Iraq a sustainable, peaceful country, and the administration

must change course to build coalitions with our allies and all peaceful

nations of the world to cooperate in rebuilding Iraq.

Although I strongly support our troops, I have serious concerns about

the administration's current policies regarding Iraq. I believe the

ultimate goal must be victory in Iraq. We need more burden-sharing

support from other countries because the whole world has a tremendous

stake in a stable Iraq and a peaceful Middle East. The administration

must do a better job of providing for our soldiers in the field and our

veterans and military families here at home. Specifically, the

communities surrounding Fort Bragg in my district need more Federal

funds to build new schools to meet the needs of the children of our

service members. I have voted every time to approve the funds to rebuild

Iraq, but if we can spend billions of American tax dollars on building

new roads, water treatment plants and schools in Iraq, we can invest

some public resources in our urgent infrastructure needs here at home.

Congress has played a critical role in issues like providing armor

for our troops and their vehicles, improving pay and incentives for

better recruitment and retention of our troops and care for their

families and creating the Homeland Security Department to protect our

people from the threat of terrorist attack. I call on Congress to

reject the administration's proposed cuts to our vital National Guard,

and I will continue to work on the U.S. House Committee on Homeland

Security to support our first responders who keep our people safe.

I will vote for this resolution because I support our troops, but I

have serious concerns both with certain provisions in the resolution

and the administration's approach to Iraq. Specifically, the resolution

states support for the goal of a ``unified Iraq.'' I do not believe

that the Congress should dictate the contours of the map of the Middle

East. As long as they do so in a peaceful manner, the Iraqi people

should be free to decide whether or not unity, confederation or

independence is the best form of government to meet their needs. And

the administration's failed approach of going it alone and refusing to

hold high level officials accountable for clear mistakes must end.

Stubbornness is not a strategy and slogans will not win this conflict.

Let me state clearly that last week's elimination of terrorist leader

Abu Musab Al Zarqawi by American special forces is an important

accomplishment. I commend our military personnel who carried out the

operation. This success points out the importance of human intelligence

methods and demonstrates the usefulness of offering awards of large

sums of money for information on America's enemies. This success stands

in sharp contrast to the administration's continued failure to find

Osama bin Laden. We should immediately double the bounty on bin Laden

and continue to increase it at regular intervals until the terrorist

mastermind is defeated.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I regret the partisan manner in which this

resolution has been brought to this floor, which my North Carolina

colleague Republican Congressman Walter Jones has rightly termed ``a

charade.'' From the very beginning, the Bush White House and Republican

congressional leadership have exploited the Iraq war for partisan gain.

I believe the blood of our soldiers should be off limits for political

gamesmanship, and with more than 20,000 American soldiers killed or

wounded in Iraq, the American people deserve better than petty politics

on this issue.

I will vote for this resolution because I support our troops, but we

can do so much better.