Mr. Speaker, at the opening of the debate, Mr. Skelton

asked the House to observe a moment of silence for the 2,500 troops

that we have lost in the war in Iraq. The number is a staggering one,

but we warned them one person at a time. I hope their families live

with great pride. I know they will live with great sorrow.

My uncle was killed at the Battle of the Bulge, and for my father's

entire life it was as if it had happened yesterday. As if it had

happened yesterday. We know that experience has been repeated over and

over again across our country.

In remembering those who died, and their families who mourn them, let

us also salute all of our men and women in uniform who are doing their

jobs with great courage, with great patriotism and dedication, and

their families who are making enormous sacrifices; 2,500 killed, 18,000

wounded, more than half of them permanently, straining our military

readiness and eroding our reputation in the world.

The President of the United States says, stay the course. Stay the

course? I don't think so, Mr. President. It is time to face the facts.

On every important aspect in the Iraq war, President Bush and his

advisors have been wrong: wrong on the reason to go to war, wrong on

the reception our troops would receive, wrong on the rapidity with

which the Iraqi economy would be able to pay for the war and

reconstruction, and wrong on the willingness of the international

community to join in efforts to stabilize Iraq.

But don't take my word for it. This gross incompetence has driven

some of our fighting generals to level devastating public criticism. MG

John Batiste, who led the 1st Infantry Division in Iraq, has said: ``My

own decision to speak out goes back to watching firsthand the arrogant

and contemptuous attitude of Rumsfeld as he ignored the advice of

military experts during preparations for war, and then living with the

impact of those strategic blunders as a division commander in Iraq.

Secretary Rumsfeld and his team turned what should have been a

deliberate victory in Iraq into a prolonged challenge.''

That is why over 2 years ago I asked for the resignation of Secretary

Rumsfeld, and I do so again today. No one has been held accountable for

all of these mistakes in Iraq.

The incompetence comes at a great cost. The Bush administration is so

obsessed with the effort to paint an optimistic picture of the

situation in Iraq that it refuses to face the facts. The facts are

these: more than 2,500 American troops have been killed. Again, more

than 18,000 have been injured, half of them permanently. And as the war

costs have grown to over $400 billion, key construction projects remain

unfinished.

As defense and intelligence expert Anthony Cordesman recently wrote:

``The U.S. aid process has failed. It has wasted at least half of the

$22 billion in U.S. funds and much of the $34.6 billion in Iraq funds

it attempted to use to secure and develop Iraq's economy.''

I repeat: defense and intelligence expert Anthony Cordesman recently

wrote: ``The U.S. aid process has failed. It has wasted at least half

of the $22 billion in U.S. funds and much of the $34.6 billion in Iraq

funds in an attempt to secure and develop Iraq's economy.''

This is outrageous. Where is the accountability?

In fact, Mr. Cordesman concludes that the U.S.-managed Iraq

reconstruction efforts have been as failed as the U.S. response to

Hurricane Katrina.

The Bush Iraq policy has diverted resources and attention from what

should be the focus of our effort against terrorism in places like

Afghanistan. The lack of stability and the deteriorating security

situation in Afghanistan is a casualty of the war in Iraq. The war has

not made our country safer. It has not made our military stronger. It

has caused great damage to our reputation in the world, and it has

hindered the fight against terrorism.

In face of all of this incompetence and the cost of the war, I

repeat, the President urges us to ``stay the course.'' Stay the course,

Mr. President, is not a strategy. It is a slogan.

I will vote against this resolution because it is an affirmation of

the President's failed policy in Iraq, and in doing so I will be

pleased to join Mr. Murtha and Mr. Skelton. And I would like to at this

moment salute them for their patriotism and their dedication to our

country. They are second to none, as Mr. Skelton said in his remarks.

They are second to none in this Congress and in this country in looking

out for the troops and being concerned and knowledgeable about troop

readiness, about the strains on our military this war is putting on

them and in deterring our ability to respond to other threats.

I salute them for their leadership and, in fact, their courage.

Because here we have the Republicans putting on the floor a vacuous

resolution, a challenge that if you say that you support the troops,

you have to vote for this. That day is over. That day is over. The

credentials on real security for our country, be it homeland security,

be it willing to project military might to protect America's interests

at home and abroad, we all share a that. So don't put something on the

table that says you either vote for this if you support the troops or

you don't.

This resolution is one thing and one thing only: it is an affirmation

of President Bush's failed Iraq policy. The American people know the

policy has failed. The American people know that. Hopefully, it will

dawn on the President, and he, instead of stay the course, will change

the course. He will stop digging the hole he is digging in Iraq and

come out and see the light of day as to what is the right direction.

Across the country, Americans have had free and open debate about

this war. But when the time came to debate Iraq in this Congress,

Republicans shut down debate with a closed rule. This is not only an

affront to the Democrats; it is an affront to the American people.

Closed rule. Limited debate. Twice as many people on our side of the

aisle would like to have spoken, but there wasn't enough time. There

wasn't enough time to give Members of Congress the opportunity to give

voice to the concerns of their constituents about a matter as important

as sending and keeping our troops at war.

What a sad commentary on our democracy. We supposedly are going to

Iraq to promote democracy, yet we don't even have it on the floor of

the House of Representatives. What is sad about that is that we owe so

much better, so much more to the American people, particularly to the

brave men and women we have sent to fight in Iraq.

Democrats are calling for a new direction in Iraq. Our new direction

would say to the Iraqi people that we will not be in your country

indefinitely, we will not construct permanent bases, and we will not

control the flow of your oil. We will work with you and your neighbors

diplomatically to ensure that the reconstruction of Iraq is successful.

We will do as Mr. Murtha advocates. We will redeploy and be ready.

Republicans in Congress continue to try to mislead the American

people by suggesting a link between the war in Iraq and the war on

terror. They are distinct, as Mr. Skelton has repeatedly and eloquently

stated. They are distinct. And efforts to portray one as part of the

other are a disservice to the truth and to the men and women sent to

fight in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Ramadi. The huge cost of the Iraq war in

lost lives, life-altering wounds sustained, and billions of dollars

spent demand better of us.

The defense authorization bill, as was quoted again by Mr. Skelton,

enacted last year, declares 2006 to be a year of significant transition

to full Iraqi sovereignty, creating the conditions of the phased

redeployment of United States forces from Iraq. That is in the 2006 DOD

authorization bill: the phased redeployment of United States forces

from Iraq. That is the law of the land. You all voted to support it.

We are halfway through 2006, significant transition has not occurred,

and the only redeployment has been of U.S. forces into Iraq, not out.

The war in Iraq has been a mistake. I say a grotesque mistake. It must

be our resolve

to end the war as soon as possible and to resolve to not make similar

mistakes in the future. We owe it to the American people. We owe it to

the young men and women that we send in to fight the fight.

Again, Democrats take our responsibility to provide for the common

defense very seriously. We are proud to have leaders like Mr. Murtha

and Mr. Skelton to lead that charge for us.