Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to the resolution.

Mr. Speaker, it has been my honor to serve as a member of the Defense

Appropriations Committee for 28 years here in the House of

Representatives and too often engage in debates over important issues of

national defense and national security here on the floor of this

Chamber. It has always been my view that partisanship should end at the

water's edge, and that all of us here in this body have a solemn

obligation to consider the best interests of the Nation as we debate

military involvement, especially at times when U.S. troops are involved

in ongoing military actions.

With that said, let me make two points about this debate today over

H. Res. 861. First, the House Leadership has brought this Resolution

before the full membership of the House with the assertion that it will

launch a full and open debate on U.S. policy in Iraq. It is

unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that the process of drafting the Resolution

we are to consider today was totally closed to members of the

Democratic party, and that the expressed intent of the Republican

Leadership, as betrayed by the memorandum that was sent to Republican

members by the Majority Leader, was to demonstrate that the Democrats

are interested in ``conceding defeat on the battlefield'' and that we

as a party ``sheepishly dismiss the challenges that America faces in a

post 9/11 world.'' Mr. Speaker, no political party has a monopoly on

patriotism, and I can state with certainty that no member of either

political party has any interest in conceding defeat or in ignoring

real threats to our national security. This type of partisanship is

unnecessary at any time, but especially in this debate today.

Secondly, if we are to have a full and open debate over U.S. policy

in Iraq, it should be an ongoing activity here in the House, where we

legitimately share the constitutional responsibility to ``provide for

the common defense'' and to provide the funds necessary to adequately

defend our Nation against aggression and any threats to the security of

our people. As any observer of the House of Representatives knows,

since the start of the war in Iraq we have rarely debated the merits of

our policy in Iraq, and we have conducted very little oversight as we

have spent $318 billion, as 2,500 American soldiers have been killed,

and more than 18,000 troops have been wounded in battle. On the eve of

the 2002 elections we were pushed into a premature debate and vote

authorizing the use of force, based on what we now know was inaccurate

or overstated information about the capability and intentions of the

Iraqi government. Since the start of the military action in Iraq three

years ago, we have been called together in this Chamber to debate

resolutions commending the abilities and the bravery of our troops,

which all of us in this Chamber were united in approving. But we have

not, Mr. Speaker, conducted what I believe is the proper level of

oversight of the decisions that took us to war, the decisions about

troop levels at the outset of the conflict, the post conflict mistakes

that were made, the handling of the insurgency and the overall plan for

victory and redeployment of our troops. It is not sufficient to bring

these occasional resolutions to the floor, drafted by the Republican

caucus, intended to express political talking points rather than

stimulate genuine discussion about our policy in Iraq.

So as we debate this particular Resolution today it must be said that

all Members of this House support the troops who have been engaged in

the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that we are all encouraged

when terrorists such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi are brought to justice. To

imply any different in today's debate would be an injustice.

But that is not all that this Resolution states. Nor is it all that

it implies by the words that are printed in it or, even more

revealingly, by the things that are omitted from it. Again, this is why

it is inappropriate to draft a Resolution of this importance without

any input or consultation with Members of the Democratic Party, and why

this exercise today is not, in my judgment, worthy of the trust that

the American people put in their Representatives here in the House.

The Resolution we are debating today, Mr. Speaker, misstates the

mission of the United States actions in Iraq--implying very directly

that there was a direct relationship between the 9/11 attacks and our

invasion of Iraq, in addition to ignoring the use of the WMD threat in

justifying the invasion to our coalition partners and to the American

people. Beyond that, the only actions it says that we, as the House of

Representatives, resolve to promote are actions that support the status

quo, inferring that the Members of this Chamber are clearly satisfied

with the status quo and believe the Administration's policy is headed

in the right direction. I would contend, Mr. Speaker, that very few of

the Members of this Chamber actually are satisfied with the status quo,

and certainly it is clear that the American people, whom we represent

individually and collectively in this House, believe we need to change

course and adopt a new strategy in Iraq.

That is precisely what I believe the House should be doing today,

instead of debating the merits of a partisan measure that effectively

congratulates Secretary Rumsfeld for pursuing a responsible course of

action. We need to change direction. Our strategy in Iraq is not

working. It will not produce the victory we all say we believe in. Nor

will it allow us to see far enough ahead to the time when we can

legitimately redeploy our troops and bring them home. What has been

needed, and what is still required, is accountability, and we can only

accomplish that, Mr. Speaker, by greater oversight, more thoughtful

questioning of the decisions that are made at the Pentagon and in the

field, and more openness in considering new directions and new

strategies, even if it risks conceding that some of the actions this

Administration has taken have been wrong. The Resolution we are

addressing today, Mr.

Chairman, allows for no such questioning and it only assumes that we

are all committed to a strategy that has put us in a position from

which no one can say how long it will be . . . a year, two years, five

years . . . before our mission is accomplished and our troops can

return home.

It is not irresponsible for us to suggest that other members of our

coalition in Iraq should be assuming a greater share of the burden. It

is not irresponsible for us to suggest that we should be scaling back

our role, accelerating the training of the Iraqi forces and encouraging

the new Iraqi leaders to understand that they need to take charge of

their own government, their own security and their own economy. We are

helping, and should continue to help, restore the power grids, the

water supplies and the oil production facilities so the Iraqi people

will see signs of progress that thus far have disappointed them. We

must continue to encourage the new Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki and

his government in its campaign for national reconciliation and in its

effort to disarm the militias, reduce the sectarian violence and bring

social and economic stability to the nation. I remain hopeful about the

future of a Democratic Iraq, but as we work with the new government to

accomplish these objectives, Mr. Speaker, I believe it may be time to

take the training wheels off, and to communicate directly to the Iraqis

that they are running their own nation, as unsteady as it may seem in

the near future.

But above all, what we should be doing today in the House of

Representatives is sending a clear signal to the American people and to

the international community that we are in favor of changing course . .

. of moving beyond the status quo and adopting a new and more

successful strategy to achieve a peaceful and stable Iraq.

This Resolution, Mr. Speaker, unquestioningly endorses the status

quo, and for that reason I cannot and will not support it.