Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the outstanding service provided

by our men and women in the armed forces for the terrific job they do

for us across the globe each and every day, often in very difficult and

dangerous circumstances. This is especially true today in places such

as Afghanistan and Iraq.

Active military, guard, and reserves forces from western Wisconsin

have answered the call to service in the most recent conflict with

global terrorism. I have been to numerous deployment ceremonies and

witnessed the anguish in the hearts and faces of family and friends as

they say goodbye to their loved ones being deployed abroad for lengthy

stays. I have also been to numerous welcome home ceremonies to honor

their service and to thank them for their sacrifice.

During my three visits to Iraq, I met with our military command and

troops in the field, as well as numerous Iraqi leaders and civilians. I

can honestly say that nothing made me prouder to be an American than

seeing the performance of our troops in the field. They are well-

trained, well-motivated and an inspiration to us all. They are, in

short, the best America has to offer. I am sure everyone here today

wishes them godspeed and safe travels as they carry out their missions.

Specifically, I would like to take a moment to recognize the soldiers

from the Third Congressional District of Wisconsin who have lost their

lives in the Iraq war: First Lieutenant Jeremy Wolfe of Menomonie,

Major Christopher Splinter of Platteville, Private First Class Bert

Hoyer of Ellsworth, Private First Class Andrew Halverson of Muscoda,

Staff Sergeant Todd Olson of Loyal, Staff Sergeant Andrew Bossert of

Fountain City, Specialist Charles Kaufman of Fairchild, Sergeant First

Class Trevor Diesing of Plum City, Benjamin Smith of Hudson, Private

First Class Anthony Gaunky of Sparta, Sergeant Andy Allen Stevens of

Tomah, and Petty Officer 2nd Class Jaime S. Jaenke of Bay City. I would

also like to recognize Christopher Lem of Lyndon Station who lost his

life while working in Iraq as an independent contractor.

Furthermore, I would like to highlight the good work of the 128th

infantry division out of western Wisconsin; the 1158th transportation

company out of Tomah, Black River Falls, and Beliot; the Wisconsin Army

National Guards' 229th Engineer Company out of Prairie du Chien and

Platteville; the 829th Engineer Detachment out of Richland Center; the

Army Reserve's 652nd Engineer Company out of Ellsworth; and the 32nd

Engineer Company out of Onalaska. These units have served or are

serving in Iraq, and I am extraordinarily proud of their service to our

country.

But as good and capable as our troops are, it is incumbent upon us

policy-makers to do everything in our power to get the policies right.

We must ensure that they are fighting on our behalf for the right

reasons and with the support and resources they need to do their job as

safely and effectively as possible.

That's why this discussion we're having today is a disappointment.

This resolution is a political document timed just before the fall

elections rather than a serious substantive debate about our

involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan and across the globe. Why else would

the majority republican party prevent amendments from being offered or

even the right of the others to offer an alternative resolution. Such

an alternative resolution would more honestly focus on the shortcomings

of this administration's policies, which has been highlighted by

numerous retired military officers in recent months. Only through an

honest assessment of those shortcomings will we have the ability to

find the solutions and make adjustments to the goals being pursued.

As someone who supported the Iraq resolution in the fall of 2002, I

believed it was important that we get weapons inspection teams back in

Iraq to check on the status of Saddam Hussein's WMD capability. I also

believed at the time that Hussein would not allow inspection teams back

in unless there was a credible threat of force hanging over his head.

To this day, those who opposed the resolution have not been able to

explain how they would have accomplished getting inspection teams back

in Iraq or whether they viewed that as an important objective.

After we were successful in getting inspection teams back in,

however, I led the effort in congress, with representative Sherrod

Brown, to send the president a letter signed by 150 of our colleagues

to give the inspection teams more time to do their job. At that time,

we were informed in intelligence briefings that we were cooperating

with those inspection teams by directing them to suspected sites of

WMD. They, however, were not finding what the president suspected

Hussein was hiding.

I felt increasingly uncomfortable with what I perceived to be faulty

intelligence information given to us members of congress and the

manipulation of intelligence to fit a preconceived ideological outcome.

Rather than have the intelligence facts shape our policy, I believe

today that it was preconceived notions or ideology that distorted the

intelligence to make the case for war. Even former Secretary of State

Colin Powell has acknowledged his disappointment with the intelligence

information he used to make the case before the United Nations.

Numerous intelligence officers and State Department Officials have

expressed similar reservations.

I also felt increasingly concerned about the President's haste to go

to war, the lack of real effort to build international support, the

lack of a plan for the day after or even a clear exit strategy once we

got there. We now know by many retired generals, the president ignored

the advice of our military leaders. My big regret is in believing the

president when he said that the decision to go to war would be a matter

of last resort. That is what the resolution required but instead the

president ordered the inspection teams out of Iraq, even though they

wanted to stay and finish their work, and then he ordered our military

in. Today, our troops and our country are paying a very high price in

loss of lives and resources due to this rush to war.

I was concerned that the main threat against the United States, Al

Qaeda, was still a global threat with global reach, and that the person

who was directly responsible for 9-11, Osama Bin Laden, was still at

large and safe. I believed the President was taking his eye off the

ball in Afghanistan and not doing everything in our power to bring

those responsible for 9-11 to justice. It sends a terrible message to

would-be terrorists who may be interested in striking us that all they

have to do is go in hiding and lie low until we get distracted on

another adventure.

Instead, the President should have, with the support of the American

people and international community which we enjoyed at the time, made

it our mission to never rest, never sleep until those responsible for

9-11 were brought to justice. Instead he diverted precious resources

and personnel from Afghanistan and redirected them into Iraq. As a

consequence, Osama Bin Laden is still at large, the Taliban are

reconstituting themselves and Al Qaeda remains a global threat.

But we are where we are today. The question now is how do we move

forward and what is at stake. Now that we have gone into Iraq, I

believe the outcome in Iraq is important, not only for the Iraqi

people, to whom we owe a duty to be responsible, but also for the

region and for our Nation's long-term security interest. If the Iraqi

people are successful in establishing a representative government, a

government that respects human rights, religious tolerance, minority

rights and the empowerment of women in their society, then Iraq could

become a powerful model for change and reform in a region of the world

that's in desperate need of reform.

I believe that a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq today will leave

chaos, bloodshed and civil war in our wake. I believe that setting an

artificial time for withdrawal will force our policy to merely revolve

around that date rather than on the mission to be accomplished. And

I've been informed by our military command in Iraq as well as our

troops, that they do not desire a date certain because we could be

setting them up for failure. They fear that conditions could change on

the ground that they have no control over which might make adhering to

that date difficult or ill-advised. They do not want artificial dates

for the sake of political expediency.

I also believe, however, that this must be a crucial year of

transition for us. Now that the Iraqis have established a coalition

government and now that we have helped train over 250,000 Iraqi

security forces, now is the time to put pressure on the Iraqi people to

take control of their own future, through self-government and security

responsibilities. We cannot do this for them; we cannot stay there

indefinitely as the President proposes; we cannot want a free, stable

and secure Iraq more than the Iraqi people want it. Such a change in

tactics will enable us to begin the redeployment of our troops first

within Iraq, off the front lines, then within the region and eventually

back home to their families. It's time for a responsible and successful

exit strategy to be implemented. In short, it's time to take the

training wheels off.

There have been recent successes in Iraq that we all can applaud.

Thanks should be given to our troops in their successful campaign

against Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, the notorious and ruthless terrorist

whose goal was to create chaos and destruction and fan the flames of

civil war.

The Iraqis should be commended for finally, 5 months after national

elections, forming a coalition government in which to govern, as well

as making the important appointments to the interior and defense

ministries.

Yet, even though our forces have proven they can kill the likes of

Zarqawi, the question remains whether we can defeat Zarqawism? That is

a question that should be discussed and debated.

Purple fingers alone do not make a democracy. Democratic institution

building is vital, yet this administration is slashing funding for

these programs dedicated to creating viable, long-lasting democratic

institutions in Iraq. Getting support for the new Iraqi government from

the United Arab League and the international community is also crucial

to Iraq's ultimate success or failure. But again, it is difficult to

work together and leave together when you didn't go in together.

Clearly, current conditions do not lend for much optimism. Over three

years into this conflict, electricity generation is still below prewar

conditions. Oil production is still below prewar conditions. Access to

safe, clean drinking water is still below prewar conditions. The level

of violence against coalition forces and the Iraqi people are at an all

time high. Sectarian militias within the country and police forces and

growing in numbers and strength. Unemployment, at 45 percent, is at an

all time high which creates abject poverty and provides fertile ground

for militia recruitment and more sectarian violence throughout the

country.

Crime and corruption is rampant and increasing. Iraqi reconstruction

is way behind schedule and infected with corruption and fraud. In my

last visit to Iraq in October of 2005, I specifically sought

explanations for the administration's failure to account for 9 billion

dollars of missing reconstruction funds. No explanation could be given.

We're losing approximately 600 military personnel every month due to

death or injuries. The administration is literally breaking our

military with no plan to save it. We are spending 9 billion a month in

Iraq with no plan on how to pay for it other than more borrowing and

spending and legacy of debt for our children to inherit.

If there is a big winner in Iraq, it is Iran. The record high oil

prices that Iraq helped bring is directly benefiting Iran. Iran

continues down the path of developing nuclear cap ability because we

have no leverage over them. Iran's influence grows in the region with

the majority Shiite population in southern Iraq and their support of

Hamas who recently won Palestinian elections.

What our involvement in the Middle East clearly demonstrates is the

need for a new energy policy for a new century so we can break our

dependence on foreign oil. Today we are financing both sides of global

terror, the huge costs of our military excursions but also, through the

petro-dollars flowing to many regimes in the Middle East, to charities

and schools that support the teaching of radical Islam and helps turn a

new generation of young people against us in the region. And again,

there is no plan by the administration for a new direction.

Equally disturbing is a recent study that shows that anti-Americanism

is rampant and growing throughout the world, not just throughout the

Arab and Muslim world but also in those countries that have been

traditional friends and allies of the United States. No matter how good

and capable our military is, we cannot fight this battle against global

terror without help and assistance in the international community.

And still, here today, there is no plan by this administration to

turn these conditions around. Iraq and these other challenging issues

deserve an honest and open debate. Unfortunately, that opportunity was

taken from us today by the majority who would rather whitewash

conditions and pretend we're heading in the right direction. The

American people deserve better than this, our troops and their families

deserve better than this and this Congress deserves better than this.

We must reassert our role as a co-equal branch of government, capable

of conducting proper oversight, demanding accountability of this and

future administrations, and willing to make policy changes to address

and overcome the challenges we face today.

I end as I began, by offering heartfelt thanks and undying admiration

for our men and women in uniform for their service to our country. May

God provide his special blessings and care for those who fell in the

line of duty. And may God continue to bless these United States of

America.