I come to this House debate deeply frustrated over the

chaos in Iraq. I voted against authorizing President Bush to take us to

war in Iraq. I believed in 2002, and am more certain today that this

war has been a grave mistake.

Mr. Speaker, I have nothing but respect for the honorable American

service men and women who have been put into harm's way. However, the

goodwill I feel for these brave Americans is contrasted by my lack of

confidence in President Bush and the Defense Department leadership.

Once they got us into this war, they have, time and again, ignored

sound military planning and blatantly disregarded the violent, grinding

reality that has steadily descended on Iraq over the past 3 years.

As members of Congress, it is one of our highest duties to hold the

civilian and military leadership accountable when they take our nation

to war. To date, 2,500 American service men and women have been killed,

and more than 18,000 more have been injured. There are no higher stakes

than these. Unfortunately, H. Res. 861 does nothing to demand that the

Bush administration correct its disastrous policies in Iraq.

Earlier this year, General Anthony Zinni, former Commander of the

U.S. Central Command, pointedly expressed the views of many, many

Americans about Iraq when he said, ``We are paying the price for the

lack of credible planning, or the lack of a plan. Ten years worth of

planning were thrown away, troop levels dismissed out of hand. . . .

These were strategic mistakes, mistakes of policy made back here.''

Mr. Speaker, my constituents and people across the nation want a

clear plan for success in Iraq. Americans want to believe that there

can be a successful end to this conflict, and that our soldiers,

marines and other personnel will return home soon. Unfortunately, it is

hard to hold onto this hope given the President's stubborn refusal to

acknowledge the failures in his Iraq policy. We must change course.

The United States has a critical role in helping Iraqis to build a

peaceful, democratic society. I am certain, however, that an open-ended

U.S. military presence in Iraq will not accomplish peace and stability

there. Furthermore, waving the flag, with Congressional resolutions

like H. Res 861, accomplishes nothing.

With mounting casualties and the $320 billion in spending on this

war, Americans deserve to hear the unvarnished truth from their

President and elected representatives. I firmly believe that

Congressman Murtha has the right idea with his resolution to redeploy

our troops. We must make it clear to Iraqis that we support their

transition to a peaceful and prosperous society. Hard-nosed diplomacy,

Iraqi institution-building and support from the international community

are better tools than the U.S. military to accomplish this goal.

I still seek answers to questions I asked Defense Secretary Rumsfeld

in appropriations hearings earlier this year: What is your plan for

success in Iraq? When and under what conditions can our honorable men

and women serving there come home? The House debate on H. Res. 861 will

not provide the answers, and I am still waiting for a thoughtful and

credible response from Secretary Rumsfeld.