

are against this war and they want a successful exit plan. Americans see that we are spending 8 to \$10 billion a month to fight this war, while in our own country we have 47 million Americans without health care insurance and our national debt is almost \$9 trillion.

Mr. Speaker, my Democratic colleagues and I hear the American people loud and clear. They want oversight of this war. They want to know the hard facts of the situation on the ground in Iraq, instead of the rosy picture the Bush administration tries to paint. They want investigations of and an end to the shady contracting in Iraq that has given away billions of American dollars without so much as a receipt. They want assurances that our troops will be protected.

Mr. Speaker, even though it was a mistake of titanic proportions to initiate this war, now that Iraq has been destabilized, what are we to do? The answer cannot be more of the same, because what we are doing is failing to have a positive impact. Our troops have performed the difficult missions given to them in Iraq with courage.

Congress and the American people will continue to support them and provide them with every resource they need. 320 soldiers from my home State of California have died in this war. We can never repay our debt to their faithful service and the sacrifices made by their families.

The failure in Iraq is not a failure of our fighting men and women. It is a failure of command, a failure of political leadership. We must provide our troops and their families with a new exit strategy instead of a new deployment.

The civil war in Iraq is not the product of ad hoc, spur-of-the-moment individual violence. No. It is organized and it is a strategy of various political and sectarian factions in Iraq. Putting our troops in the middle of these warring factions will not end the violence. It will only put our troops in the middle of it. That notion is borne out by the fact that more than 60 percent of the Iraqi public believes that it is a good thing to attack and kill Americans stationed in Iraq.

Proponents of the President's escalation plan act as if the United States has but two options: one, increase the American troops at great cost, both in human lives and financial; or, two, do nothing. But those are not the only choices. We must step up our diplomatic efforts in the region as recommended by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.

Americans should call upon neighboring states in the Middle East to take strong measures to avoid a spread of the conflict beyond Iraq. As Iraq disintegrates into sectarian violence, her neighbors must insist that the factions within Iraq halt their civil war.

We need to remind the countries in the region that stability in Iraq is vital to their interests. If they want to avoid having this war spill out across the

Middle East, they must step up their diplomatic efforts. With the help of the entire region, we can push the Iraqis to help themselves.

Iraqi security forces must be trained in a faster pace so they can be responsible for their own country. There is no guarantee of success in Iraq, nor is there a clear definition of what success might look like; but we do have a moral obligation to make our best efforts to diffuse the chaos the war has created. The solution must be a political and a diplomatic one.

Unfortunately, the President refuses to pursue the diplomatic options endorsed by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group and his own military advisors. As we saw today with the welcome news that diplomatic efforts have led to the de-escalation of tensions in North Korea and an agreement to abandon their nuclear weapons ambition, a conflict is not always the right answer to world challenges.

Even General Abizaid, the outgoing top commander of the U.S. forces in Iraq, does not believe an escalation will increase our chances of American success. The American public has long been ahead of Congress in their opposition to this war.

I am here today to tell the American people that they are being heard. I stand with the majority of Americans who say they have had enough. In the coming weeks and days, Congress will give the President's plan the scrutiny the American people expect and our troops deserve. It is time to bring this war to an end and time to support this resolution.

Mrs. TAUSCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT), my friend and colleague.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, America begins the fifth year of war in Iraq. I am pleased that Speaker PELOSI has scheduled such a thorough debate of the most important moral and political issue of the day. The war in Iraq was misguided from the outset, even illegal, and has been mismanaged consistently ever since.

The resolution we have before us today puts Congress on record opposing the escalation of troops in Iraq proposed by President Bush and expressing our steadfast support for our troops.

Let me say at the outset that I intend to vote for this resolution. It is an important first step. The President's escalation of forces in Iraq is worse than the stay-the-course strategy so clearly rejected by Americans. If we pass this resolution, we will be doing more than repudiating the President's disastrous policy. We will for the first time be putting Congress on record in a way that will allow us to bring this war to an end for Americans.

Mr. Speaker, U.S. Armed Forces who are serving in Iraq are heroes. They are the most finely trained and dedicated group of patriots any leader could want. But they now find themselves mired in the middle of intense vio-

lence, based on sectarian, political, social and cultural factors dating back 1,000 years.

The situation in Iraq cannot be solved militarily. Pretending otherwise only puts our soldiers, marines and others in greater danger. I have visited them in theater, in Iraq and other countries in the region and, yes, at Walter Reed Hospital here in Washington.

I have met with their families in New Jersey. The quality of these men and women, their earnest wish to serve their country makes this situation all the more tragic.

Mr. Speaker, they were sent to Iraq irresponsibly and in ignorance by leaders, sometimes improperly equipped, and are now asked to achieve an impossible mission. There is no way for us to resolve militarily the emerging multifaceted civil war that is engulfing Iraq.

When he ordered the invasion of Iraq, President Bush unleashed forces he did not understand and could not control. As the most recent National Intelligence Estimate attests: "The term civil war does not adequately capture the complexity of the conflict in Iraq, which includes extensive Shia-on-Shia violence and al Qaeda and Sunni insurgent attacks on coalition forces and widespread criminally motivated violence."

Whenever American forces leave Iraq, there will not be a stable American-style liberal democracy. Prolonging the occupation of Iraq whose stability has only declined by any measure as our presence goes on increases the costs we incur in lives, dollars, and international prestige.

No one will look back and say, if only the American military stayed a little longer. No, historians will look back and ask what took Congress so long to recognize a disaster and do something about it. Extracting American troops from this quagmire will dry up support for the various insurgencies operating in Iraq, and encourage other nations to take part in the process of stabilizing the country and promote the domestic processes necessary for long-term stability.

Given all of those factors, the burden should not be on those who believe that American forces should be withdrawn. The burden should be on those who want to continue this endeavor to show any compelling evidence that is worth sending more Americans to kill and to be killed.

Sending more troops should require the same high standard of evidence that should have been met to go to war in the first place.

□ 2100

But the President and, I am sorry to say, the previous Congresses did not apply that high standard. Some of us said 4 years ago that there was not evidence sufficiently compelling to send Americans to kill and to die. After the President went to war anyway, I called for withdrawal early.

Now, Congress must establish standards that we failed to set, standards of intelligence and evidence, standards of diplomacy, standards of legislative oversight, so that we do not go to war or escalate wars based on ideology rather than evidence, bravado rather than humility, patriotic fervor rather than patient diplomacy.

Congress failed in its constitutional role to exert a check and balance on the Executive. With this resolution we begin on a new course, under new legislative leadership. We will audit the books. We will review the procedures for detaining prisoners, for engaging civilians, for conducting intelligence.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for President Bush to catch up with the American people. The American people understand that American forces should not remain in Iraq to try to quell a civil war they cannot control. The American people understand that we must refocus our attention on our real interests. If the President did not, let us show at least that we do and pass this resolution.

Mrs. TAUSCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to my friend and colleague from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE).

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. AL GREEN of Texas). Before recognition, the Chair announces that the gentlelady from California (Mrs. TAUSCHER) has 1 hour and 17 minutes, and the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) has 1 hour and 18 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, the debate taking place here in the House this week is long overdue. We are approaching our fifth year of this war, and this is the first time Congress is debating the strategy President Bush wants to implement in Iraq.

Congress can no longer stand on the sidelines, and the President has to know that to escalate the war in Iraq is simply not acceptable. We have lost too many American lives, seen too many soldiers seriously injured and spent too much of our hard-earned taxpayer money for no good reason. I am proud of my vote against the initial Iraq war resolution, and see this resolution before us tonight as the beginning of the end to U.S. military involvement in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this evening to commend our troops for the valiant work they have done over the last 5 years. I am thinking of them when I voice my strong opposition to the President's plan to send 21,500 additional troops to Iraq.

The President hopes this troop escalation plan will secure Baghdad and reduce the sectarian violence that is ripping the country apart. But there is no evidence to support those hopes.

In fact, on four different occasions the President increased troop levels in Iraq, and every time these plans failed to calm the violence in Iraq. Last summer the President moved more troops into Baghdad and said that he hoped to see some results in a matter of months. By October, General William Caldwell

had publicly stated that the surge was a failure and the operations had "not met our overall expectations of sustaining a reduction in the levels of violence."

Additional troops are not going to make a difference because there simply is not a military solution to the war in Iraq. The devastating sectarian violence is going to continue, but our troops should no longer be asked to serve as referees in a battle between religious sects that have been fighting for centuries.

Mr. Speaker, many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle claim that if you speak out against the President's proposal, you are not supporting our troops, and this is nonsense. And if they listened to the troops, they would know that not even a majority of our troops support the President's plan. According to a poll conducted by Army Times, a weekly newspaper popular with Active Duty and retired Army personnel, only 41 percent of our troops support the President's plan. But they will do whatever is asked of them, regardless of whether or not they agree with the command.

Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of the war, our troops fought without the body armor they needed to protect themselves against improvised electronic devices. It now appears that the military doesn't have the protective equipment needed to properly outfit the troops the President plans to send to Iraq. According to the Army, it lacks not only armor kits for soldiers, but also trucks and vehicles needed to accommodate any escalation in troop levels. Lieutenant General Steven Speaks, the Army's deputy chief of staff for force development, said any additional units of troops sent to Iraq would have to share the trucks assigned to the units now there.

Do supporters of this plan really believe this Congress should allow the President to move ahead without properly investigating whether or not our troops will have all the necessary protective equipment they need?

Mr. Speaker, we also need to realistically look at the distraction that the Iraq war is causing in the overall war against terror. While the administration and the Pentagon focus their attention on Iraq, the war in Afghanistan has been forgotten. The Taliban has significantly grown in strength in Afghanistan, and America needs to focus its attention there, the source of the attacks on 9/11.

Mr. Speaker, I opposed this war from the very beginning, and want to see our troops home. The President should be putting forth a plan for withdrawal from Iraq, not escalation. I am willing to vote to cut off funding for the escalation. I have voted against the Iraq supplemental appropriation bills to send a message that we need to end U.S. military involvement in Iraq. With this resolution, we begin the process of getting out of a place where we should never have been from the beginning.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 3 minutes to just make a brief response to a couple of statements that have been made.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. HOLT referred to our wounded folks in Walter Reed as tragic. They are not tragic. They are American heroes, and they are the people who have bought the freedom that allows us to have this debate today.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to yield some time to three unusual Americans on the Armed Services Committee who all have had sons serving in the Iraq theater. The first gentleman is the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. KLINE), whose son has been a helicopter pilot in Iraq, as much time as the gentleman wishes to consume.

Mr. KLINE of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, of course I rise today in strong opposition to this resolution.

It occurs to me, Mr. HUNTER, that I need to thank you not only for your service, but for your son's service in the Marine Corps. It is one of those little twists of those things that I served my whole life in the Marine Corps, and my son is serving in the Army. You served in the Army, and your son is serving in the Marine Corps. And I don't know if we will ever untwist this. But I thank you and him for his service.

Mr. Speaker, the proponents of this resolution will have us believe that this resolution supports and protects our military personnel while criticizing the President for changing course.

We have listened to several speakers today who, like me, served in Vietnam and witnessed firsthand the micromanagement of the war from Washington. Ironically, they stand here today endorsing the same incompetent policy of interference. Instead of President Johnson choosing bombing targets, however, we have 535 legislators dictating General Petraeus's reinforcement levels; yes, dictating his tactics. It was wrong in 1967, Mr. Speaker, and it is wrong in 2007.

I notice that the distinguished chairman of the Armed Services Committee has risen several times today to point out his belief that what the President is doing is not a change of strategy, it is a change of tactics. And I would say to my good friend, that great gentleman from Missouri, that if that is right, if this is tactics, then in fact this resolution is trying to do just that, micromanage the tactics of this war.

If congressional micromanagement were the only problem with this resolution, I would still argue vigorously for its defeat. But it is not the only problem. Understanding the purpose and intent of this resolution, its proponents have revealed their true intentions in the course of this debate. They intend for this resolution to be the first step on the path to defunding our troops, withdrawing them, and allowing Iraq to become a chaotic, ungoverned space that will act as a training ground for al Qaeda and the radical jihadists that we are at war with.