Mr. Speaker, the Republican leadership today demonstrates

that they have no sense of decency left. No question before Congress

requires a more measured, thoughtful discussion than matters of war and

peace. Our national security and the lives of our soldiers, sailors,

airmen and marines depend on our ability to fulfill our constitutional

responsibilities with dignity and respect.

That measured, thoughtful discussion will not occur today, because

the Republican leadership does not want it to occur. They want a quick

vote, with limited debate, on a same-day resolution that they hope will

divide Democrats. They have taken Representative Jack Murtha's

proposal, rewritten to make it irresponsible, and brought it to the

floor for a vote.

Almost everything we were told by the advocates of invading Iraq

before the war has turned out to be false. This administration and its

congressional allies hyped the threat and manipulated American

intelligence about Iraq's nuclear program and its alleged connection to

al Qaeda.

Today, there is only one question about our occupation of Iraq. It

weighs on the minds of almost all Americans, especially those with

loved ones in the military. That question is, simply, when and under

what conditions will we withdraw our troops and bring them home?

Opinions differ. After 2\1/2\ years, over 2,000 deaths and 15,000

wounded, millions of Americans and many Members of Congress believe it

is time for us to start the process of withdrawal from Iraq. Some

believe in a date certain for beginning or completing the withdrawal.

Some believe our withdrawal should be tied to achievement of certain

benchmarks of progress. President Bush appears to believe that only

total ``victory over the terrorists,'' whatever that is, would justify

withdrawal.

The historic task of this Congress in foreign policy is to

participate in a constructive debate that will inform the decisions of

the administration and others.

The Republican leadership has dishonored the people's House by

foregoing debate on alternatives, not just debate but hearings, in

favor of bringing one resolution to the floor in the hope of dividing

critics of the administration's ``stay the course'' war strategy.

I voted against giving President Bush the authority to invade Iraq

without building a broad international coalition and obtaining explicit

U.N. authority. I did not believe he would do anything, given the

authority from Congress, but rush to war. And that is what he did.

No Member of Congress is more respected or more knowledgeable about

the American military than Jack Murtha of Pennsylvania. His statement

yesterday calling for withdrawal of our troops from Iraq, including his

conviction that we cannot accomplish more militarily, deserves

thoughtful consideration. He will not get that today.

Instead, Jack Murtha, decorated Marine, distinguished Member of

Congress, has been vilified by the Speaker of this House, who wrongly

accused him of adopting ``a policy of cut and run'' and preferring that

``the United States surrender to the terrorists.'' The White House

spokesman accused Mr. Murtha of endorsing ``Michael Moore and the

extreme liberal wing of the Democratic Party.''

I doubt that Jack Murtha knows Michael Moore, and no one here that I

know ever called him a liberal. We call him Mr. Murtha because he is

one tough Marine.

If I were the author of his resolution, I would have written it

somewhat differently. I would have called for the withdrawal of

American forces to begin next year and be concluded except for a very

small training force of advisors in 2007. We cannot allow Iraq to

become a failed state where al Qaeda forces can be trained with

impunity. Therefore, some rapid reaction force in the region, as Jack

Murtha suggested, should be available.

But on the big picture, Jack Murtha is right. Our troops have become

not only the targets of the insurgents, but the inspiration for the

insurgency. Political success for the Iraqi government and people is

still possible, but it will have to be won largely by political means.

The Administration is, as he said, pursuing ``a flawed policy wrapped

in illusion.''

The Republican Leadership has rigged this debate to serve their own

political interests. I believe that the Murtha resolution calling for

withdrawal is the right policy going forward, though we should continue

to debate timing and benchmarks. A vote against the Murtha resolution,

if it were offered, could be interpreted as support for the

Administration's flawed and failed ``stay the course'' policy.

Jack Murtha is on the right track. The President is not. Our national

security and the lives and well-being of our troops depend on changing

course, not doing the same old thing in Iraq.

If the Murtha Resolution had been brought to the floor today, I would

have voted in favor of it.