Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you, some days it is very

interesting to watch what happens in a place like this. This is the

most serious issue that this Congress will confront this year, and this

motion is addressing that issue in the most unserious manner possible.

This motion is presented by the distinguished ranking minority member

of the committee, and then he says he is going to vote against his own

motion. I would like for a moment to remind the body of what this House

is supposed to be.

The core purpose of this Congress, the main reason for its existence

is to deal with issues like this. Today, the United States Congress is

supposedly regarded as the greatest deliberative body in the world. We

exist today, if we remember our history, we exist today because almost

800 years ago our British forefathers placed the first limitation on

the absolute use of executive power in the history of the English

speaking world when they forced the English monarch to sign the Magna

Carta.

Over 500 years later, that evolved into the United States

Constitution, which created three branches of government, with checks

and balances designed to prevent arbitrary and unilateral exercise of

unchecked executive power in order to protect liberty.

Because of that Constitution, and under the procedures defined by

that Constitution, we are here in the fifth year of a war which this

country was led into under false premises. And we are debating how the

Congress should respond to the President's escalation and

intensification of our involvement in an Iraqi civil war. We are also

debating his request for another hundred billion dollars to continue

that war.

He is also asking for billions of dollars in additional spending for

other domestic and international activities, including flood control,

nutrition programs, education and cultural exchanges, disease control

in Southeast Asia, and salaries for U.S. marshals. The majority of both

Houses have voted to try to bring about a change in direction in that

war. We believe, at least those of us who supported the bill two weeks

ago, we believe that our soldiers won the war that they were asked to

wage, but that it is unrealistic to expect them to do something that

they have no power to do, which is to force Iraqi politicians to make

political compromises necessary to end the carnage in that country.

By this bill, we are attempting to put enough pressure on those Iraqi

politicians and those Iraqi factions to make the compromises necessary

to allow our troops to end their involvement in that civil war. And to

do that, we have in the legislation now before us conditioned our

continued presence in Iraq on Iraq's meeting certain performance

benchmarks, which were first laid out by the President himself.

This motion, which has now been offered by the gentleman, is an

example, I think, of people falling off both sides of the same horse at

the same time because we have people who say they don't want us to put

limits on the President's conduct of the war, now insisting that in

fact we adhere to the very proposals that we passed just 2 weeks ago.

I want to say that this is, I think, despite the fact that it is an

unserious motion, I intend to accept it because it is simply, in

essence, a re-vote of what the House committed itself to 2 weeks ago.

The reason we have timelines in this bill is because we want to give

General Petraeus the ability to use Congress as sort of a bad cop/good

cop routine in order to convey to the Iraqi politicians that they must

resolve their differences if they expect us to remain there for any

significant length of time at all. There is no way that we can create

that kind of pressure on Iraqi politicians unless we maintain the

proposals that we made in this House bill.

The President wants none of these limitations to pass. I find it

interesting that people who say that we should proceed to compromise

are now offering a motion which in essence tells us not to compromise.

In the end, we know that both sides are going to have to compromise;

but in the interest of getting us to conference so that we can begin

that long arduous process, which I fear will take many months, I am

going to accept the motion of the gentleman, even though I regard it as

a very quaint way to move to a position of compromise between the

President and the Congress.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 3 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to understand what this war has

really done. This war has gutted our influence in the Middle East, it's

gutted our influence in the world, it's divided our own country, and

it's united our enemies. Outside of that, it's been a terrific idea.

Our troops won the war clearly, cleanly, and quickly. But now they

are stuck in a civil war. And as the gentleman from Pennsylvania points

out, the only solution to that civil war is a political and diplomatic

compromise, and there are no American soldiers who can get that done.

Although it certainly isn't intended to do it, this motion in fact

carries out the comments made by Secretary of Defense Gates, who

testified before our committee, before Mr. Murtha's subcommittee, that

the war was militarily unwinnable, that it could only be won on the

political and diplomatic front. In fact, The Washington Post carried

this paragraph this morning. It said: ``Secretary Robert Gates told

reporters traveling with him in the Middle East that congressional

demands for withdrawal had been constructive. `The strong feelings

expressed in Congress about the timetable probably had a positive

impact, in terms of communicating to the Iraqis that this is not an

open ended commitment,' Gates said.''

When the bill was before us the first time, our Republican friends

did not bother to offer a recommital motion. Why? Because they were

divided about how to proceed. They could reach no agreement. They had

no policy. Now they are offering a motion which they say they are going

to vote against. Is that the best they can do? We have heard talk about

a surrender date.

The only surrender that is involved here today is the surrender of

the obligation of this Congress to oversee Presidential and executive

branch policy. The only surrender is the total surrender of our

obligation and our authority to a White House that has demonstrated

from day one that it had not a clue of what it was getting into, and it

today has not a clue about how to get out.

We have to provide better leadership than that, and that is what this

bill before us tries to do. I would urge support for the gentleman's

motion.

Then let me yield myself 2 minutes before the gentleman

closes.

Mr. Speaker, 2 nights ago I was watching the Public Television series

on the Iraq War, and I saw one of the gentlemen who is generally

regarded as being one of the intellectual architects of that war,

Richard Perle, say the following: ``We do not leave the battlefield

with the first casualty.''

I would simply note that an awful lot of people who have never seen a

battlefield or been anywhere near one seem to be awfully anxious to

make that kind of a statement.

When I heard that comment, I was reminded of a comment of my old

friend, the philosopher, Archie the Cockroach, who said once that there

is always a comforting thought in time of trouble when it's somebody

else's trouble.

But as the gentleman from Pennsylvania has pointed out, there has

been no sense of shared sacrifice in this country over this war. The

only sacrifice most Americans are being asked to undergo is to take a

tax cut.

Well, it seems to me that we ought to start asking whether it is

right and indeed whether it is moral to allow a tiny band of American

citizenry, military families, to bear the entire burden of this war

that so many noncombatants seem to be so enthusiastic about. It seems

to me we need to bring about a different policy that will indeed have

equal sacrifice.

There are a lot of people who are apparently willing to fight to the

last drop of somebody else's blood. I think it is time for that to

stop.

We, on this side of the aisle, choose to take seriously the

gentleman's motion, even though he himself indicates he does not intend

to take his own motion seriously because he intends to vote against it.

I would urge that every Member on this side of the aisle, and I hope

on the other side, would take this motion with the deadly seriousness

that it deserves. Because lives are at stake. They are the lives of

innocent Iraqis and they are the lives of innocent American troops who

are simply being asked to carry out a policy which is increasingly

futile.

I urge an ``aye'' vote on the gentleman's motion.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.