Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 157 provides for comprehensive

consideration of H. Con. Res. 63. It provides all of the Members of

this House with 3 full days of debate on this important matter. It is a

momentous day for us, Mr. Speaker.

This is the debate that many of us have yearned for for at least 4

years, and our constituents have long suffered the lack of this debate.

Every Member who wishes to speak on the resolution will have the

opportunity to do so.

The rule also, in addition to the time in the rule, allows the

majority leader at any time, after consultation with the minority

leader, to extend the debate when necessary.

On January 10, President Bush announced an escalation of the Iraq war

that will put as many as 50,000 more of our men and women in harm's

way. Why 50,000 and not 20,000? Because the number of support groups

who have to be there to support the troops adds up to nearly 50,000.

This body owes them an explanation for why at this moment in history

the sacrifice is justified. Democrats and Republicans alike are

determined to defend our Nation from harm and are wholly committed to

supporting and protecting the members of our Armed Forces. But numerous

military officials of the highest ranks, like General Colin Powell,

General John Abizaid, and many, many others, have expressed a strong

belief that increasing the number of combat troops in Iraq will not

improve the situation in the country.

Two-thirds of the American people believe that further escalating the

war is the wrong path to follow. This morning, 67 percent of them

polled said we should get out at once. Even respected Members in the

House and the Senate have been quick to state publicly that they oppose

any troop escalation.

Republican Representative Steve LaTourette best explained this broad

bipartisan opposition to the President's plan. Like many Americans, he

recently said, I desperately want America to succeed in Iraq and I

would welcome a fresh approach, but this is not a fresh approach. This

is more of the same.

For 4 years, through the deaths of 3,126 American service people and

nearly 60,000 Iraqi civilians and 25 to 30,000 grievously wounded,

through the forced dislocation of millions of Iraqi families, through

numerous troop escalations, and $379 billion appropriated by this

Congress, through unbearable strain stretching our National Guard and

Army Reserve, their members, and their families to the breaking point,

more of the same has never worked.

As of last June, only 25 percent of the Iraqis had clean water to

drink. The oil production has fallen by nearly half since the war

began. The unemployment rate in Iraq as of December ranged between 25

and 40 percent.

Sixty-seven more innocent civilians were killed just yesterday in yet

another bombing. Eighty-four of our troops were killed last month.

Forty-one have been killed in the last 2 weeks alone. My district has

suffered six casualties since 2005, and 140 men and women from my State

of New York have been killed so far in Iraq.

Every piece of evidence suggests that the strategy currently employed

by this administration is failing in Iraq. The only argument being used

to support an escalation of the war would be one of trust. If we just

give the President one more chance, we are told, things will be

different.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the American people and the military

leaders who know what war really is and a broad majority of this

Congress are tired of giving this administration one more chance and

have no reason to give it our trust.

The Pentagon Inspector General recently reported that statements made

by Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith, during the runup to war,

were ``inconsistent with the consensus in the intelligence community

and drew conclusions that were not fully supported by available

intelligence.''

Mr. Feith joins the President of the United States, the Vice

President of the United States, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Rice, and

many others who made statements which simply misled us into war. So why

should we trust the administration's assessments of Iraq?

Why should we trust the President to give the new troops that he

wants to send the protection that they need to come back home unharmed?

Despite all the President's rhetoric in support of our Armed Forces, a

second Pentagon report released at the end of January bluntly states

that for years in Iraq and Afghanistan ``servicemembers experienced a

shortage of force protection equipment and were not always equipped to

effectively complete their mission.''

In fact, the report speaks of soldiers having to trade off Kevlar

vests because there were not enough for each of them. This is what is

happening today, Mr. Speaker. We were aware when we first went into the

war that we were ill prepared, but 4 years later it is no better.

The Washington Post noted just yesterday that many Humvees still do

not have the armor needed to protect them from the bombs that are

killing and injuring 70 percent of our troops abroad.

While our troops have gone unprotected, corruption exploitation and

incompetence has squandered billions of dollars and allowed vital

reconstruction projects to be handed to well-connected companies that

failed to fulfill their duties. Unbid contracts proliferate. Despite it

all, for years the administration treated accountability as if it were

a dirty word.

And why should we expect that without a radical change, of course,

that things will suddenly improve?

Mr. Speaker, changing a broken course in Iraq is not going to

demoralize our troops or abandon them. Frankly, they must wonder what

it is we have been doing here all along. To the contrary, it is the

only way to support the troops.

Changing a broken course will not provide our enemies with

encouragement either. If our strategy is not working, then why would we

help our enemies by resolutely adhering to the failing plan?

Now, that is a question that needs to be asked again. If our strategy

is not working, why would we help our enemy by resolutely adhering to

the failing plan?

Democrats are insisting on a new level of accountability in Congress,

calling 52 hearings since January 4. But we also need a new course in

Iraq. We need to oppose this escalation and stubborn adherence to a

failing strategy.

We need to shift our focus and footprint in the region and to accept

what so many observers have known for years: The conflict in Iraq will

only be solved politically, not militarily.

As strongly as I feel on this matter, Mr. Speaker, I recognize that

many of my colleagues in the House have a different perspective.

What is needed is a serious discussion conducted by serious people.

The first step of such a discussion is a focused, clear and full debate

on the question of the escalation itself. We need an unambiguous up-or-

down vote on the escalation. We are keeping this rule and

this bill so straightforward in order to best achieve that result.

I want to emphasize that this is the first step, and Congress will

have many opportunities during discussions of the supplemental funding

request, for example, to debate the numerous dimensions of this war and

to present new ways forward.

But we must first know where we stand. Our goal this week is to

establish whether Congress disagrees or agrees with the President's

current approach to Iraq. If the answer is no, then we will have the

basis for forcing the President to work in a bipartisan way with us to

change that approach.

The obvious truth is that a failure to achieve such a change will

seal the fate of this war as one of the greatest blunders in America's

history.

I urge a ``yes'' vote on the previous question and on the rule.

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