Mr. Speaker, this Congress had a great opportunity today

to pass a defense authorization bill that is good for the American

people, a bill that reflects the very best of American values. Foremost

among those values is our desire for peace, our capacity for global

leadership, and our compassion for the people of the world. We could

have reflected those values by utilizing the defense bill as a means of

voicing our opposition to prolong the war in Iraq. The Rules Committee,

however, prevented me from offering just such an amendment to the

defense authorization bill.

My amendment expressed the sense of the Congress regarding the war in

Iraq in two parts. First, it instructs the President, the Commander in

Chief of the United States Armed Forces, to develop a plan to bring the

members of the U.S. Armed Forces home from Iraq and to bring the plan

to the congressional defense committees.

It is clear that we need to begin the process of bringing our troops

home because, among many other reasons, the presence of nearly 150,000

American troops in Iraq is an obvious rallying point for dissatisfied

people in the Arab world, making the situation in Iraq worse and not

making the U.S. any more secure.

The second part of my amendment describes how the United States

should support Iraq once our troops have come home. The amendment

directs the United States to engage the international community,

including the U.N. and NATO, to establish a multinational interim

security force for Iraq. The U.N.'s Department of Peacekeeping

Operations actually is particularly well suited to this task.

Next we would have shifted our role from that of Iraq's military

occupier to its reconstruction partner. By working with the Iraqi

people to rebuild their economic and physical infrastructure, we can

give Iraq back to the Iraqis and help to create Iraqi jobs and Iraqi

security.

Finally, my amendment urged the President to involve the United

Nations in establishing an international peace commission comprised of

members of the global community who have experience in international

conflict resolution so that they would oversee Iraq's post-war

reconciliation process, beginning Iraq's long road to recovery after

years of sanctions and war.

The House should have been able to debate the importance of ending

the war while we helped to stabilize this war-torn nation.

Unfortunately, this Congress had other priorities, priorities like

authorizing another $50 billion to continue a devastating war in Iraq

that has already taken the lives of more than 2,400 American soldiers,

countless tens of thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians, and forever

shattered the lives of another 16,000 injured and wounded American

troops.

Priorities like authorizing another $10 billion, that is billion with

a ``B,'' on a still unproven missile defense system that can't stop the

greatest threat we face, nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists,

and has never even been able to stop the missiles it is designed to

destroy.

It is beyond dispute that this administration, in tandem with the

Republican Congress, has been, to put it mildly, less than fiscally

responsible.

Earlier this month I introduced new legislation called the

Commonsense Budget Act of 2006 that finally put some sanity back into

the Nation's fiscal policy. This bill already has the support of almost

40 cosponsors.

The Commonsense Budget Act would trim $60 billion in waste from the

Pentagon budget and put it to work on behalf of the people and programs

that truly strengthen America.

These programs include $10 billion for the modernization of every

public school, $12 billion for health insurance for every child in

America, $10 billion to invest in renewable energy and energy

efficiency programs, $13 billion to feed the hungry, $5 billion to

improve homeland security, and $5 billion to start the reduction of our

deficit.

We need to change the way we think about national security, Mr.

Speaker. The return on the investments I have proposed as part of the

Commonsense Budget Act will benefit the entire society, and they won't

cost us a dime more than we currently spend on our bloated national

defense.

Any change in budget priorities, though, has to go hand in hand with

change in policy on the ground. The very first of those needs to be an

end to the war in Iraq. For the sake of our soldiers, their families

and our national security, it is time to bring our troops home.