Mr. Speaker, let me thank my colleague from California

for yielding and thank all of the Members for what has really been a

very serious debate about our efforts in Iraq.

When we think about what we went through this past spring, the fight

over funding our troops that went on for about 112 days here in the

House, I had thought that we had come to some resolution. Forty-eight

days ago we sent to the President of the United States a bill passed by

this House, passed by the Senate and signed into law that would fund

our troops through the end of September.

That same bill, we asked General Petraeus to report back to the

Congress on July 15 his interim report and asked him to give a more

complete report by September 15 of this year. And here we are some 48

days later saying, we give up.

One can only imagine why this bill is on the floor today. If Members

were serious about this bill, we would have seen it come through

committee, come through the Rules Committee. No, no, this bill showed

up Tuesday night about 9 o'clock out of thin air that we were going to

have this debate this week. One can only look at what is happening on

the floor of the House and describe it as a partisan political stunt,

because that is exactly what it is.

This House voted to support our troops, to fund our troops, and to

fund our effort in Afghanistan and in Iraq. And here we are, once

again, back here posing for holy pictures, as our good friend from

Wisconsin would say.

This bill that we have before us makes our troops pawns in a partisan

political battle. I don't think that is what anyone wants. I think this

bill on the floor today undermines General Petraeus and undermines the

mission that he has to help make Iraq and America safe.

So what we have here is not leadership; it is negligence. My

colleague, the majority leader, my friend from Maryland, and the

Speaker of the House both say we want to fight the terrorists; we want

to fight them where they are. Well, who is our biggest enemy in

Iraq today? Who is the biggest fight that we have in Iraq today? It is

al Qaeda. Al Qaeda is losing, and that is why we see the bigger bombs

going off and the bigger demonstrations and the bigger casualties,

because they are losing and trying to influence public opinion here in

the United States.

But what surprises me about what we are doing here today is the

willful ignoring of the consequences of failure in Iraq. If we fail in

Iraq, we know what happens, we make America less safe. We know that we

will provide a safe haven for al Qaeda to operate around the world out

of their new safe haven that they will have in Iraq. We will

destabilize the Middle East, we will endanger Israel. We will embolden

the Iranians even more than they have already been emboldened, and we

will allow al Qaeda to be stronger and to be able to recruit more

people to kill Americans and our allies around the world. These are

serious consequences for the American people and our allies around the

world, and we can't shrink from our responsibility here.

General Petraeus is making progress. Not as much progress as we would

all like for him to make, but he is making progress on the ground, as

he reported in the report that came out today. The Iraqi government has

made some progress. Not nearly enough, but to just pull the rug out

from under General Petraeus, to pull the rug out from under our troops

that are in Iraq fighting for our freedom and fighting for the freedom

of the Iraqi people at this moment is absolutely the most negligent

action that I have seen this House take yet on this issue.

Why can't we sit back and allow General Petraeus's plan to have a

chance to succeed? Why can't we wait until September 15, as we had all

agreed, for his final report to come forward and to assess the progress

that is being made and what, if any, new direction ought to be taken?

I believe, and I think the American people believe, that we ought to

allow the generals on the ground in Iraq to make those suggestions to

us and not sit back and let politicians here in Washington make

decisions about our future and about our safety.

But while we are sitting here debating this meaningless bill that we

have before us, we could be acting on serious legislation to help make

America safer. There is a giant loophole in the terrorist surveillance

program that means that activity between terrorists overseas cannot be

acted upon and cannot be listened to by this government. There is

information that would help make America safe, that would bring more

terrorists to justice; information that is being left on the table

because of partisan political games in this House. Why don't we bring

the FISA modernization bill to this floor? Why don't we give the NSA

the terrorist surveillance program and other agencies the ability to

track these terrorist activities and these terrorist phone calls and

information movement that we know today that we can't touch and we

can't use?

We all know through reports over the last couple of days that al

Qaeda has increased in its strength. We also know from news reports

over the last couple of days that there has been increasing chatter

among terrorists around the world. And yet here we are debating a

meaningless bill that undermines our troops, ignoring the fact that

there is information that could help keep America safer that we can't

touch because this House will not act. I think that is negligent, and I

think it is irresponsible.

I would urge my colleagues to let's let General Petraeus and the

troops have a chance to succeed. Let's help them in their mission to

help make Iraq safer and to make America safer, and the way we do that

is to take this bill that we have before us and defeat it.