Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, there are two sets of issues before us, the President's

request for almost $100 billion to finance the cost of the war in Iraq

for the remainder of this fiscal year, which ends October 1.

There is a second set of issues which relate to urgent needs for this

year, additional funding for State Children's Health Insurance Program

to prevent many thousands of poor children and some of their parents

from losing health coverage; gulf coast recovery after Katrina; drought

relief for farmers and the 70 percent of the U.S. counties that the

President named as disaster areas; and other areas where we believe we

must do more than the President wants to do; defense health, such as

efforts to provide more help to veterans with traumatic rain injury;

veterans' health, to help veterans overcome ridiculous backlogs;

homeland security, to strengthen our ports, our borders and our cargo

inspection systems; full funding for BRAC, the base realignment

requirements; additional funding for military housing needs; and

greater resources to wage the effort to root out al Qaeda in

Afghanistan.

Dealing with these issues is complicated by the fact that this

country and this Congress are deeply divided on our involvement in the

Iraqi civil war, which has dragged on now for more than 4 years.

Several weeks ago, House Democrats tried to use the President's

funding request to establish a process to responsibly end our

involvement in that Iraqi civil war. To that end, we passed and sent to

the President a plan that spent almost $4 billion more than the

President wanted on the health and safety of our troops. It established

limits on how much sacrifice could be asked of U.S. military units when

no one else, except for military families, are appreciably sacrificing

anything in this so-called war effort. It also sets standards for

judging the success or failure of the administration's policy.

Now, why did we do that? Because we agree with virtually every

general who has said that this civil war will not be resolved

militarily. It will be resolved only politically and diplomatically by

Iraqi factions making the compromises necessary to bring that civil war

to a conclusion.

The President vetoed that proposal. To override the veto, we needed

two-thirds of the House and the Senate to concur. We didn't get it for

a simple reason, that Democrats did not have two-thirds of the seats in

Congress.

Next we tried to send another proposition to the President and gave

the President a limited amount of money and tried to set another more

flexible set of standards for proceeding with this war. That failed in

the Senate.

At that point, like it or not, we ran out of options for using this

fiscal year 2007 supplemental to force a change in administration

policy.

On Friday we met with the administration and offered to drop all

domestic items if the administration would accept meaningful benchmarks

and timelines for ending our involvement in that civil war. They flatly

refused. That leaves us with the Senate-passed plan, which sets a much

weaker set of benchmarks than those passed by the House.

It is clear we do not have the 60 votes necessary to end debate in

the Senate and force a policy change on the administration by using the

fiscal year 2007 supplemental. Because there are only months left in

the fiscal year, no serious person can expect that it is possible to

redeploy our troops during that time.

So the question becomes, how do we continue to press for an end to

our involvement in that war on a reasonable time frame? The proposition

now before us shifts the debate to the President's budget request for

the next fiscal year, which begins on October 1.

Weak as it is, the Senate-adopted Warner amendment, with its 18 new

benchmarks, at least does end the totally blank check that previous

Congresses have provided. Weak as it is, it does at least give Members

of Congress whose feet are not firmly planted in the status quo another

opportunity to review the futile administration policy by establishing

a requirement for two reports to the Congress, one in July and one in

September.

The proposal before us will mean that, in September, using the

required reports, the Congress will have an opportunity to decide what

course of action to take on this war. That decision will be just 4

months away.

Meanwhile, we also insist that the President accept the fact that

there are other pressing needs, to which we have an obligation to

respond.

This proposal contains a long overdue increase in the minimum wage

for America's lowest-paid workers, a wage which may not bother many

people in this Chamber but a wage which unconscionably has been frozen

for a decade. It will contain $17 billion that the President did not

want for added defense and veterans' health care, for BRAC, for

military housing, for Homeland Security, for Katrina, drought relief

and State Children's Health Insurance Program. Some items it should

contain, it does not.

For example, low-income heating, home energy assistance and funding

for the pandemic flu.

This proposition falls far short of containing everything that it

should on both the Iraqi war and on our own domestic needs. But I take

some comfort in the knowledge that even Babe Ruth struck out more than

1,300 times. But weak as it is, this proposition does provide a

structure and a process to continue the fight, and it recognizes

reality.

I intend to vote against the first proposition that contains the

President's military request and the Warner benchmarks because I

believe they are far too weak, and I believe it is important to

maximize the pressure on Iraqi politicians to compromise by having as

many votes as possible for a stronger proposition. I expect to vote for

the second proposition, which contains the minimum wage increase, and

$17 billion of the $21 billion that we sought to respond to crucial

national needs.

This proposition will transfer the Iraqi fight to September on the

President's fiscal 2008 defense supplemental request, and it will

require a vote on a proposition that would require the funds

appropriated to be used to redeploy troops on a responsible time

schedule. I am sure we will also address the issue on Mr. Murtha's

defense appropriation bill, on the regular bill that will come at us as

we return from the Memorial Day recess.

This proposition is apparently the best that we can achieve given the

votes that we have. It is my hope that, when these votes occur in

September, a firm majority in both Houses will see through the

smokescreens being produced by the administration and send an

unequivocal message to both the administration and Iraqi political

leaders that our patience is over.

Now, some news stories have said that Democrats have ``given up on

the time line.'' That is patent nonsense. There has never been a chance

of a snowball in Hades that Congress would cut off funding for troops

in the field.

Now, some people say to us, why don't you do what you did in Vietnam

and simply cut off the funds even while the troops are in the field?

Well, I've got news for you, that is not what the Congress did in

Vietnam. I know; I was here. When Congress passed the Addabbo

amendment, there were less than 500 American troops left in Vietnam.

What the Addabbo amendment did was to cut off American aid to the South

Vietnamese Government.

Even if the Congress were to cut off aid to troops in the field, the

President undoubtedly would not abide by that. He would simply assert

his Commander in Chief authority to manage the troops any way he

wanted, and we would be tied up challenging that in the court for

months, long past the time period covered by the fiscal year 2007

supplemental which this legislation addresses.

The last proposal we sent to the Senate attempted to limit the amount

of money available to the President to 2 months' operating expenses,

fencing the rest to try to force a policy change.

All we are doing by this arrangement is to slip the timetable an

additional 2 months from that proposal, shifting the debate from the

2007 supplemental to the 2008 supplemental. That means our Republican

friends who continue to support the President on this misbegotten war

will have to face votes in July and in September on the same issue.

We are not giving up. We are simply recognizing that no one believes

that it is possible, given the Senate's inability to produce 60 votes

to shut down debate, to change course during the remainder of this

fiscal year. That may not be a pleasant fact, but it is a reality.

Opponents of the war need to face this fact just as the President and

his allies need to face the fact that they are following a dead-end

policy which we will continue to make every possible effort to change.

What's the gentleman's question?

Well, let me make two points. First of all, this is not all

that unusual. It was not done during the time that the Republicans ran

the House, but it was done often prior to that. All we have to do is to

take a look at the history of the Hyde amendment and take a look at

several other conference reports that were adopted, one in 1996, for

instance.

With respect to the two questions, or the question about the two

amendments, technically, it's my understanding that they do not apply

to amendments, or that the rules do not apply to amendments.

To my knowledge, there are none.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 1/2 minutes.

The previous speaker just complained about the fact that this has

taken 110 days to finish. If I am not mistaken, he was the majority

party whip when his party controlled this Chamber last year, and it

took 110 days before the Republican-controlled Congress could get a

supplemental to the President. So I think it comes with considerable

ill grace for the gentleman to be calling the kettle black.

Let me also suggest that if there has been any delay whatsoever

associated with this process, it is due to two things: Number one, it

is a little thing called democracy. You know what? We don't have a

rubber-stamp Congress anymore. If we did have a rubber-stamp Congress,

we could have finished this in 1 day. But that is not what our

obligation is.

And, secondly, and even more fundamentally, any delay in the process

was not caused by the Congress. We had this job done 3 weeks ago. The

delay was caused by fact that the President blocked the funds going to

the troops when he vetoed the bill. So I would suggest that the

gentleman recognize where the true responsibility lies.

We have a right and an obligation to spell out what we think is in

the national interest of this country. Pardon me if it takes a few

days.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute.

I intend to yield the remainder of my time to close debate to the

Speaker.

Before I do that, and before the gentleman closes with his last

speaker, let me simply thank the committee staff.

Let me thank the CBO staff, the legislative counsel staff, even the

White House staff, who worked with us to fashion together this package.

Regardless of how Members feel about it, it took a tremendous amount

of work by people whose names never get in the papers, whose pictures

never get in the papers, but who do their darnedest to see to it that

the will of this House is carried out with as much clarity as possible.

I appreciate their work. I appreciate their dedication to this

institution and this country.

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