I thank the gentleman for yielding, the distinguished

chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Obey, for your brilliance in bringing the legislation

to the floor that we have today so we can express ourselves on the

direction of this war, and at the same time, we have the opportunity to

meet the emergency needs of the people of America, the Hurricane

Katrina survivors, our farmers suffering from natural disasters,

children without health insurance, our veterans. Thank you for the

strong commitment you and Mr. Murtha and others have made to military

health, to veterans health and to BRAC. After 10 years of indifference,

we are raising the minimum wage for millions of our hardest-working

Americans. And with the passage of the provisions in the first piece of

this bill, the first amendment, we strengthen our country and address

the health and well-being of millions of Americans who have been

ignored again for too long. The new direction of Congress is keeping

its promise to them.

Mr. Speaker, we have two amendments before us, and I just spoke about

one of them. The other resolution, the other amendment about the war,

the President's request plus the Warner resolution, is really an

inkblot. We are all familiar with the Rorschach test; you look at it

and you see what you see. Some will see one thing; some will see

others. Some will see an opportunity, for the first time, for the

Republicans to say that accountability is needed on the part of the

President of the United States and on the part of the government of

Iraq. And so there are these benchmarks. But these benchmarks by no

means meet the obligation that we have to our men and women in uniform

if they can be as easily waived as they can be in this resolution.

The resolution that the Republicans put forth, I am really glad that

they finally admitted that there is a need for accountability. But what

they haven't done is met that need with something appropriate. This is

like a fig leaf. This is a token. This is a small step forward.

Instead, we should have a giant step forward into a new direction. So

when I look at this inkblot, I see something that does not have

adequate guidelines and timetables; something that does not have

adequate consequences; and something that does not have my support.

Democrats are proposing something much better.

Instead of a missed opportunity, we had hoped that the President

would have accepted our proposals, which we sent to him over and over

again, over and over again, meeting his request, and even doing more

for our troops, for our veterans, and for strengthening our

military in ways beyond the President's request.

We now have our troops engaged in a civil war. There are reports that

the Department of Defense has declared what is happening in Iraq to be

a civil war. The American people do not think that it is necessary for

us to be refereeing a civil war in Iraq. They want our focus to be on

fighting terrorism, retraining the Iraqis, protecting our diplomats and

our forces there, and that is exactly what Democrats have proposed.

Instead, we have a situation where, in refereeing and engaging in

combat in the civil war in Iraq, as the President has us doing there,

we have lost thousands of Americans. The number is hard to measure, but

everyone agrees, easily over 100,000 Iraqis. The cost to our reputation

and our military readiness is incalculable, but it is huge.

We think there should be a new direction. We think what we should be

talking about here today is a different vision for stability in the

Middle East and how our role in Iraq contributes to that. The generals,

including General Odierno, recently stated that any strategy for

success in Iraq must begin with the redeployment of our troops out of

Iraq. That is a general, a retired general, and his voice is echoed by

other generals as well. That, again, is what we are proposing, a change

of mission, a redeployment for a different purpose, fighting terrorism,

which is the threat to our national security.

The focus on Afghanistan must be reemphasized as that situation

becomes more tenuous.

If we went down the path that General Odierno suggests and which

Democrats have proposed over and over again, we would have a

drastically reduced need for American troops in Iraq. Our troops have

performed their duties excellently, excellently. Every opportunity we

get, we must honor them for their patriotism, their courage and the

sacrifices they and their families are willing to make. Time and again,

we do this. And as we go into Memorial Day Weekend, we do it again. And

we convey our condolences to those who have lost a family member in

Iraq, in Afghanistan or any of the other wars we have been engaged in.

And we have honored our veterans not just with words but with

actions. In the last couple of weeks, under the leadership of Chairman

Ike Skelton, Democrats put forth our Department of Defense

Authorization bill. And in that bill, it was dedicated to troop

readiness, with training and equipping our troops so that we don't send

them into harm's way at a disadvantage.

Mr. Skelton's bill also calls for a 3.5 percent raise in military pay

and a $40 survivor benefit to survivors of those who were lost in

battle. Do you know what the President said about that in his statement

of administrative policy? That that increase was unnecessary.

While yesterday, we had representatives of the veterans'

organizations, especially the survivors, telling us that a $40 increase

doesn't nearly go far enough to be commensurate with the sacrifice. We

could never match the sacrifice, but we should at least make a

respectable attempt at it. And for the White House to say a $40-per-

month increase for survivors of those who gave their life in battle is

unnecessary, unnecessary to whom? So if you want to talk about

supporting the troops, how about supporting the troops, our veterans

and their families?

Around the same time, Chairman Spratt brought to the floor the

Democratic budget. This budget has a $6.7 billion increase for our

veterans; $6.7 billion more than the previous budget; historic in its

increase, making veterans a priority, an investment in those who

sacrifice so much for us, an investment in honoring our commitment to

our veterans. And just this week, Chairman Chet Edwards of the

Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans

Affairs put forth the largest increase in the VA in the history of the

Veterans' Administration, 77 years. This is to make up for some

promises not kept, but it is also to say, in our spending priorities,

even within the context of PAYGO, no new deficit spending, no increases

in the deficit; we put veterans at the top of the list and our military

at the top of our list.

This isn't about whether we support our troops. Of course, we support

our troops. We all demonstrated that over and over again.

But it is about opposing this war.

This is not the end of the debate. We have to be here to bring this

bill to the floor so we can go forward. But this debate will go on.

There will be legislation on the floor in the next several months to

change the mission once again from combat to fighting terrorism,

training and diplomatic and force protection. Again, that would require

a greatly reduced U.S. force in Iraq, and coalition force as well.

We will have legislation to repeal the President's authority for the

war in Iraq, to repeal the authority that the President has for the war

in Iraq. We will have that vote.

We will have votes on Mr. Murtha's defense appropriations bills: one

of them the regular order defense appropriation bill; another one, the

supplemental that has been requested by the administration.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today sad that the opportunity we

have has been missed. There is a recognition that we need

accountability, because the American people are demanding it. At least

70 percent of the American people say we have to have accountability.

So instead of putting accountability into the bill, we make a gesture

at it. We could have taken a giant step in a new direction. Instead, we

are taking a baby step. But, as I said, this is not the end of the

debate.

As we think about all of this, I would like to recall the words of a

philosopher. Hannah Arendt once observed that nations are driven by the

endless flywheel of violence, believing that one last, one final

gesture will bring peace. But each time they sow the seeds for more

violence.

That is what President Bush is doing in Iraq. That has been the

deeply flawed policy of President Bush.

Again, Democrats are proposing a new direction. I urge my colleagues

as we go forward, however you see the inkblot, however you decide your

vote, to join in listening to the American people in the coming days,

weeks and months, and bring this war to an end.