Mr. Speaker, we are a coequal branch of government. We do

not work for the President or the administration; our job is to

thoughtfully consider the issues before us, and to work with the

President and with the administration. When we agree, it is our

responsibility to work together for the best interests of our country;

and where we cannot agree, however, we have an equal responsibility to

make the case of why we disagree, and offer responsible and thoughtful

alternatives. This resolution does not meet that test.

Some may say that is what we are doing in the House this week,

disagreeing with the President and offering alternatives to the plan.

This resolution fails. There is no plan offered.

Certainly the resolution before us includes a statement on which we

all unequivocally agree: support for our brave men and women in the

Armed Forces who are serving or who have served in Iraq.

Yet it also includes a statement of disapproval on the plan for Iraq

offered by the President, a statement of disagreement to which, again,

no alternative is offered. If we disagree with the President's plan, we

should be offered reasoned, responsible alternatives. Instead of

speaking today as Democrats or Republicans, we should come together,

speaking as Americans who are seeking to answer the questions of how to

move forward with success in Iraq.

Under the process today, we have only one option from the other side

of the aisle. Is that what the American people expect from this House?

No. The American people expect more. What is so amazing to me and in

this Congress, you voted, this Congress voted and passed legislation

last year that set our country on a course to find our way forward in

Iraq. We have to look no farther than the report of the bipartisan Iraq

Study Group to find a way forward, a new approach for Iraq, an approach

that can bring us victory.

That is what we should be considering today. The recommendations of

this distinguished group can bring us to a consensus and unite the

Congress and the Nation on Iraq. I have been to Iraq three times, and

since there, I continue to be deeply concerned.

So when I came back from my third trip, I offered this idea of an

independent bipartisan commission we called fresh eyes on the target,

and many Members on your side have been hailing it, yet you would not

permit this to come up for a vote. Why would the Rules Committee shut

down something that many of you ask for over and over? And there are

Members on my side who don't like it, but it is the only balanced plan.

This legislation was set up, the 10 Members, bipartisan, five

Republicans, five Democrats, Jim Baker, former Secretary of State; Lee

Hamilton, who served here and has probably, quite frankly, forgotten

more about this issue than any Members on your side or any Members on

my side. A 10-0 decision, Leon Panetta, Ed Meese, whose son will serve

with General Petraeus, they came up with this idea.

Yet the Rules Committee has shut this down not to permit a vote. They

worked for more than 8 months supported by expert working groups, and

senior military advisors in the areas of the economy, reconstruction,

military, security and political development. The study's report was

issued on December 6 and was hailed, but yet it is not permitted to

come up for a vote.

Because of the importance of this group, I introduced a sense of

Congress resolution in support of the recommendations. I asked the

Rules Committee late last night to make my resolution in order to be

considered during the debate. By doing so, I believe the House will be

working to meet our responsibility as political leaders to seek a

bipartisan consensus on the issue of war and peace.

But the request, not on my behalf, but on behalf of the American

people, was turned down by the Rules Committee. Believe me, just for a

second, maybe our side at times treated you wrong; but, believe me, you

are getting to be a fast learner, because every time you seem to speak

over here, the Republican side of the aisle is shut down from offering

anything. This is the major issue of war and peace. Can you imagine if

this were 1937 or 1938 or 1939 in the House of Parliament, and it was a

resolution like this with Nazi Germany pouring over Europe, there would

be some resolution, and everyone else, Churchill would have been shut

out because he wanted to offer something constructive to make a

difference.

Let me read from a letter penned by Jim Baker and Congressman

Hamilton. There is no magic formula, they said, to solve the problem of

Iraq. They basically say there are actions to take. The political

leaders need to establish a bipartisan approach. They go on to make the

report, the consensus report as to work that they have done. We

recommend their report, and then they end by saying, ``Yet, U.S.

foreign policy is doomed to failure--as is any course of action in

Iraq--if not supported by a broad, sustained consensus.'' Then they go

on to say how dangerous this is.

I ask you, why? Why couldn't we get a vote? Why couldn't the American

people get a vote on something that many on your side may not like, but

most do, and some on my side may not like, but most do, and I ask, this

body ought to be voting on the Iraq Study Group to show the American

people that we can be successful