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

and I rise to express my appreciation to my friend from Worcester for

yielding me the customary 30 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, as I listened to my long-time Rules Committee colleague,

the gentleman from Worcester, I am reminded of a great speech that was

delivered last Friday. Last Friday, our very distinguished colleague,

the Senator from Connecticut, Joe Lieberman, in an address, said

something that I think encapsulates exactly what we just heard from my

very good friend.

Senator Lieberman, in speaking of the Democratic Party, and he is now

an independent Democrat, sometimes I see him listed as a Democrat, I

know he organizes with the Democrats, he is listed as an independent as

well, he said, ``The Democrats are emotionally invested in a narrative

of defeat.''

Mr. Speaker, I have got to say as I listened to the words of my

colleague from Worcester, I can't help but think that Senator Lieberman

was right on target when he used that language, ``emotionally invested

in a narrative of defeat.'' I was so struck with that when I heard it

that I committed it to memory, and I think, again, it really takes on

exactly what we have just heard.

It comes as no surprise that I rise in very, very strong, vigorous

opposition to this rule and the underlying legislation as well. We have

had 40 votes on Iraq policy, and today's bill brings us to vote No. 41.

Not one, Mr. Speaker, not one of the withdrawal bills went through the

normal legislative process. Not one, not one of these 41 measures is

the product of a committee markup. Not one got its own hearing. Not one

has been brought up under an even slightly open process, allowing for

amendment, and consequently not allowing for any kind of real debate.

Mr. Speaker, most telling of all, not one has been enacted into law.

Now, we all know that the Democrats control both the House and the

Senate, and still they cannot produce a single legislative victory on

Iraq. Not once, not twice, not 10 times. Forty times. Mr. Speaker, 40

times we have gone through the motions of their failed, bankrupt

strategy. I can't recall a more naked display of demagoguery.

Now we come to vote No. 41. It has all the hallmarks of the

Democratic majority's work: no deliberation, no gesture towards

bipartisanship, and no hope of being enacted.

But there is something different about the vote this time, and that

is context. We are considering this vote in a much different context

than we have the 40 previous votes that we have addressed on this. In

fact, our colleague in the Senate, Johnny Isakson, Senator Isakson,

said this debate was understandable in May. He said in July, it was

questionable. He said now it is absolutely ridiculous.

For many months, the situation in Iraq has been very bleak. While

there were many promising signs of progress, the turnaround in al Anbar

province most notably, the overall picture was one of great challenges

and struggles. I have argued repeatedly that a precipitous withdrawal

would only create more challenges, and, Mr. Speaker, I have highlighted

the signs of progress amid the struggles all along.

But today, the tide is turning in Iraq. We are seeing far more than

pockets of success, as my friend has said. We are seeing a dramatic

shift in the landscape. It began in al Anbar, as I have said. The Sunni

sheiks there turned on al Qaeda, joined with the largely Shiite Iraqi

army and with coalition forces, and reclaimed the province. Ramadi, its

capital, the city that we have all heard of described as the most

dangerous city in the world just a year ago, hasn't had an attack in 3

months. The city and the province are rebuilding. They are constructing

small business centers so that the entrepreneurial spirit of Iraqis can

flourish once again.

A delegation, including the Anbar governor, the Ramadi mayor, several

prominent religious leaders and Ahmed Abu Risha, the brother of Sheik

Sattar Abu Risha, the father of the Sunni Awakening, was just here in

Washington a couple of weeks ago. They came here, Mr. Speaker, to spend

several days receiving training in institution building, good

governance, transparency and the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, these are Anbar's political, business and religious

leaders, not coming here to seek security assistance, not seeking

military assistance. They have achieved security in al Anbar. Now what

they want, Mr. Speaker, is help from us in their quest to build a

democracy. But, most important of all, they are serving as a model for

the rest of Iraq.

Prior to their trip, they participated with Shiite leaders in a

summit in Karbala. Sheiks from Karbala and Najaf, Iraq's two holiest

cities for Shiite Muslims, reached out to their Sunni brothers in Anbar

and asked for their help in combating al Qaeda. This comes at a time

when Sunni and Shiite leaders in Baghdad are reaching out to each other

to begin the process of reconciliation as well.

Baghdad's notorious Adhamiya neighborhood that we have heard so much

about, formerly the site of some of Iraq's worst sectarian violence, is

now a place where Sunni and Shiite sheiks are meeting regularly to

discuss how to bring their people together, just the things that my

friend from Worcester said are so imperative. They are taking place at

this very moment.

Now, all of this has been possible, Mr. Speaker, because of the

dramatic drop in violence brought about by General Petraeus'

counterinsurgency strategy. This strategy, which included the surge,

has resulted in months of plummeting IED attacks, plummeting American

troop deaths, plummeting Iraqi civilian deaths, and plummeting

sectarian attacks.

Many of my colleagues have pointed out that this has been the

deadliest year for American troops yet in Iraq, and, Mr. Speaker, I

will acknowledge that this has been the deadliest year for American

troops in Iraq. And it is true over the past year we have tragically

seen that great number. But that does not reflect what is happening now

in this post-surge world.

The past few months have seen the most dramatic decline in the deaths

of American troops because we have had a new strategy. Mr. Speaker, we

have had a new strategy, and that strategy is working. And perhaps most

important for all of us, that strategy has enabled our military

commanders to begin a drawdown in U.S. troop levels.

Not because of artificial timetables. Not because of the

micromanagement of Members of Congress from the comfort of our offices

thousands of miles away from the front lines. But by empowering our

commanders on the ground, they have created a stable security situation

that is allowing for both the beginnings of Iraqi reconciliation and

the safe withdrawal of our troops.

Mr. Speaker, the big question for today is this: Will the dramatic

improvement in Iraq prove to be a true turning point or nothing more

than a lull in the war? I don't know the answer to that. Neither

outcome is a foregone conclusion. Whether it is a major turning point

in the war or just a lull, no one knows for sure. What we do know now

will profoundly affect the future of Iraq. Will we fund our troops and

empower our commanders to continue to do what is best for our long-term

interests? Or will we pull the rug out from under them now at the

precise moment they have achieved what we have asked of them?

As one of my friends just said to me, it seems like our friends on

the other side of the aisle want defeat before we can win.

For my colleagues who would resort to the latter option out of

political expediency, Mr. Speaker, let me remind them of another war

our men and women are fighting. Today our troops are also battling a

very real enemy in Afghanistan.

We got a terrible reminder just a few days ago of the viciousness of

that fight when six of our counterparts, members of the Afghan

Parliament, were brutally targeted in the worst attack in Afghanistan's

history, and I would like to express my appreciation for the bipartisan

support that my colleague, David Price, and I offered as leaders of the

House Democracy Assistance Commission.

We have been working with those parliamentarians in Afghanistan, and

we are hoping to work with those in Iraq as soon as possible. And we

once again express our condolences to the people of Afghanistan who

have suffered the single worst attack in their nation's history when a

week ago yesterday six parliamentarians and 44 other people were

brutally murdered.

Let me also remind my colleagues that this war that we are seeing in

Afghanistan is not our first war in Afghanistan. Many of us were

intricately involved in their war against the Soviets in the 1980s,

many Members who are still here today. And what did we do after the

Soviets were defeated? We withdraw and left the Afghans to fend for

themselves.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot forget that democracy is hard work. For over a

decade, unfortunately, in Afghanistan we indulged in the luxury of

ignoring what was going on there. And then on a sunny Tuesday six

Septembers ago, 3,000 Americans paid a horrible price for that mistake.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot refuse to learn from history or we are doomed

to repeat it. Our support for our troops in Iraq has earned us a far

more stable, secure situation. And yet what does the Democratic

leadership propose to do? Their bill would reward our military

commanders' success by cutting them off.

It would provide constitutional protections for terrorists, while

leaving our veterans, including Iraq veterans, without funding. It

would force the same disastrous, shortsighted withdrawal that led to

the terrorist sanctuary in Afghanistan. It would do all of this at a

time when we are achieving not just pockets of success in Iraq but

broad-based improvements, and at a time when Republicans have been

trying every possible means to get an appropriations bill for our

veterans to the President, which he will certainly sign if we can ever

get it to him.

Mr. Speaker, the Democratic majority's priorities, foolhardy

policies, and constitutional rights for terrorists have never been so

out of whack. I suppose we can take comfort in the fact that this is

all a meaningless charade that will never be enacted, because we all

know this will never be enacted. But that is a hollow comfort when we

consider our troops in harm's way and our veterans in need.

Mr. Speaker, it is a very cruel comfort for the families of those who

have made incredible sacrifices in this war.

I often think of my good friend, Ed Blecksmith, a former marine and

the father of JP Blecksmith, also a marine, who died in November 2004

just 3 years ago in the very famous battle of Fallujah. I have talked

about the Blecksmith family here on the House floor many, many times. I

didn't know JP, but from everything that I have read, and I have a

recent article that has just come out about him, he was a very talented

young man with a very bright future. He had so many opportunities

before him, and he chose to be a marine because he wanted to serve as

his father had done. His family proudly, but soberly, supported him. As

a

former marine, Ed Blecksmith knew in a very real way the cost of war.

JP Blecksmith would not return to his family, having made the ultimate

sacrifice.

And his father said something to me that I will never forget. He

looked me in the eye and asked me to make sure that we complete his

son's mission in Iraq. He has said to me on countless occasions, You

must complete the mission or my son JP will have died in vain.

Mr. Speaker, it is deeply heartening to see the beginnings of

victory. And no, I am not saying ``mission accomplished'' or anything

like that because we know full well that we have difficult days ahead.

But it is deeply heartening to see the beginnings of victory in Iraq,

for JP's sake and for the sake of all who have paid a very dear price.

We have a profound responsibility to allow our commanders to continue

on this path.

Mr. Speaker, after 41, 41 wasted efforts, I can only hope that the

Democratic leadership will finally abandon empty demagoguery for

substantive legislation, meaningful debate, and a quest at

bipartisanship so we can work with the President to come to an

agreement. Until that time, I urge my colleagues to reject this closed

rule and the terribly wrongheaded policy that it seeks to shield.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute.

I will say to my colleagues that it's very interesting to listen to

this debate, because as we've proceeded, I have yet to hear the word

``victory'' come from the other side of the aisle at all. I have yet to

hear anyone interested in trying to build a democracy.

Now, we saw three elections take place in Iraq, as we all know, with

a 70 percent voter turnout.

We know that there are problems there. My friend from Worcester

correctly said that we have problems with corruption in government in

Iraq. We've had corruption problems in this country as well. But the

fact of the matter is we have seen dramatic improvement. There is no

doubt about the fact that we've seen improvement.

And I've got to say, Mr. Speaker, that we continue to hear this term

``redeployment.'' That means one thing. It doesn't mean victory. It

doesn't mean build a democracy. It means withdraw and lose. And I will

tell you, Mr. Speaker, we are determined to ensure that that doesn't

happen.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 15 seconds, and I do so to

say I still have yet to hear the term ``victory'' come from the other

side of the aisle. I still have yet to hear anyone talk about the

notion of building a democracy in Iraq so that self-determination and

the rule of law and the building of democratic institutions can, in

fact, have a chance to succeed. And there is no recognition of the fact

that we have seen a tremendous number of reduction in IED attacks, and

the number of overall attacks has dropped dramatically.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I've still not heard the term ``victory'' or

``building democracy.''

I would inquire of the Chair, how much time is remaining on each

side?

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 15 seconds.

I'm very sorry that my friend wouldn't yield so that we could engage

in debate. And I will say, victory means ensuring that our children

don't face the threat of another terrorist attack like what we saw on

September 11. We know that Iraq is the central point for al Qaeda, and

I am absolutely determined to ensure that we achieve victory.

There have been tremendous achievements when it comes to democracy

building. We can't ignore that. But we want to bring our troops home as

soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Let me just first say this has been an interesting debate and I do

think that victory, a dramatic reduction in the number of attacks, the

fact that reconciliation is, in fact, taking place in Baghdad is

something that cannot be ignored.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today, before the House voted for the 12th time

to allow the House to go to conference with the Senate on the Veterans

Affairs funding bill, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. Diaz-Balart) and

I had a brief colloquy after which a Member on the other side of the

aisle claimed that we had misrepresented the facts about this

Congress's track record on getting the Veterans Affairs appropriations

measure signed into law.

Well, I take this as akin to being accused of lying. Here is what we

said, and, Mr. Speaker, I will say it again: The House passed the

Veterans and Military Construction funding bill on June 15, 2007, by a

vote of 409-2, with the Senate following suit and naming conferees on

September 6. Unfortunately, the majority leadership of the House has

refused to move the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs

appropriations act to conference and has refused to name conferees.

So whether the majority likes it or not, that is a fact. Now, the

gentleman from Texas (Mr. Edwards) and the gentleman from New York said

that we were misrepresenting the facts. How is this so? For 68 days,

Mr. Speaker, the message from the Senate requesting a conference has

languished at the Speaker's desk without action. How is this fact

disputable? Just look at the

calendar and count the days between September 7 and today, and you'll

come up with 68. Every day the Democrats choose not to act to move this

bill forward, our Nation's veterans lose $18.5 million.

Those are the facts surrounding this bill in this Congress. The

gentleman from Texas went on earlier to malign Republicans for what we

did or didn't do concerning veterans funding over the last 12 years,

which begs the question, what does the last 12 years have to do with

this year? Are Democrats trying to use past Congresses' shortcomings as

excuses for their own failed policy? Otherwise, how is this even

relevant?

I am sure that the gentleman from Worcester would stand up and

attempt to deflect this plea by criticizing Republicans, just as his

colleagues before him, and touting the increases in funding for our

veterans provided by this Congress which all but two Members of this

body voted for. The sad fact is that this Congress hasn't provided the

funding that the gentleman has espoused. Why is that? That's because

not one dime will flow from the Treasury to the Department of Veterans

Affairs until the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs

appropriations bill is signed into law, and in order to do so, this

House has to go to conference with the Senate and send a bill down to

the President to sign. So let's finally get that process started.

Mr. Speaker, anyone who is concerned about funding for our veterans

must join us in voting against the previous question so that I can

amend the rule and we can go to conference with the Senate on this

much-needed and far-delayed funding measure.

I ask unanimous consent to have the text of the amendment and

extraneous material appear in the Congressional Record just prior to

the vote on the previous question.