Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this rule and the

underlying bill, H.R. 2956, the Responsible Redeployment from Iraq Act.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this House ought to voice its gratitude to the

distinguished chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Mr. Skelton,

for bringing before this House a thoughtful, responsible bill that

outlines what we must do next in Iraq.

The bill clearly notes that our uniformed men and women have carried

out and completed their mission for which they were authorized by

Congress. The search for weapons of mass destruction is over. There

were none, not a single one. The regime that put Iraq in an impossible

international position no longer exists. So it's time that we draw down

our troops from Iraq and require this administration to clearly define

what the troop requirements and costs will be for the next phase of

U.S. involvement in Iraq, a far more limited mission to root out al

Qaeda and protect our diplomatic personnel inside Iraq.

The bill also promotes the kind of active diplomacy with Iraq's

neighbors necessary for achieving a more lasting climate of stability

in Iraq and throughout the region. Much, much more, Mr. Speaker, must

be done. I expect to see stronger legislation in September, but this

bill puts us on the right path.

For 5 long, deadly years, this Congress has done nothing but rubber-

stamp a tragically flawed policy. It is shameful. Whatever the cause

the President and many Members of Congress thought they were pursuing

in Iraq, it is lost. Political leaders inside Iraq appear incapable of

putting national interest ahead of sectarian and personal agendas.

Iraqi security forces operate more like sectarian militias. And despite

their best efforts, the additional military forces we have poured into

the Baghdad region have not been able to change the equation.

Over 3,600 of our troops have lost their lives to this battle.

Thousands more have been wounded. It is wrong, Mr. Speaker, simply

wrong to ask them to continue to sacrifice their lives and their limbs

for this failed policy.

The war in Iraq is breaking the back of our military. It is causing

severe damage to the Federal budget to the tune of $10 billion each

month, and causing grave harm to the future fiscal health of our

Nation. It continues to undermine our most important political,

diplomatic, military and strategic alliances. It saps our ability to

focus on global terrorism and to safeguard our own people. And it has

contributed to the chaos inside Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, it is past time for change. And while President Bush

keeps scorning deadlines and promising

breakthroughs that never come, it is clear that he lacks the vision,

the wisdom or the courage to chart a new course. It is frighteningly

clear that the President plans, instead, to stay the course and dump

this mess on the next President.

It is time for Congress to step up to the plate and change direction

in Iraq. It is time for every Member of this House to work together to

draw down our forces and bring our troops home to their families and

their communities.

For too long Congress has been complicit, and the American people are

frustrated, and they are angry. We don't need more studies or

commissions. We don't need more excuses. We don't need more delay. Too

many lives are being lost. What we need is for Members of Congress to

make a choice, to stand up and be counted. Will you continue to rubber-

stamp the current disastrous policies in Iraq or will you vote for

change?

We must act now, Mr. Speaker. This is simply too important to wait

any longer. Too many lives are on the line.

All of us, no matter how we originally voted on the war, share in the

responsibility in what is happening in Iraq. All of us, by not voting

to change course, are responsible for sending so many of our brave men

and women into a civil war where far too many of them have been killed.

If the President of the United States will not respect the will of

the American people and end this war, then Congress must.