I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the strongest possible opposition to

this rule.

In the panoply of public policy issues, there is no more important

question than starting or ending an armed conflict. The decision we

make today will determine whether men and women will live or die, not

only on the battlefields of Iraq but also potentially in the cities of

Europe and America.

The discussion that we conduct today should transcend crass political

partnership and narrow ideology to reflect our deepest concern for the

Nation and, indeed, for the community of nations.

The House of Representatives today should be prepared to engage in a

free and fair debate regarding all of the potential options for the

future conduct of combat operations and diplomatic initiatives in Iraq

and the broader Middle East. We should be discussing the

recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group. We should be

examining some of the ideas laid out by Senator Lugar. We should be

considering the suggestion of Congresswoman Heather Wilson and I that

we made to the President recently encouraging him to convene a high-

level summit of Iraqi sectarian leaders. We should exclude no viable

alternative, even that offered by my colleague from Ohio (Mr.

Kucinich).

The legislation we will consider later today does have the potential

to serve as a starting point of determining a new course of action in

Iraq, but it is badly flawed, and it needs substantial improvement, and

unfortunately, that will not be possible. The rule the Democrats have

laid before the House today demonstrates their motivations are, at

core, political. And I remember when politics ended at the water's

edge.

They do not offer us an open rule, allowing full and free debate.

They don't even allow us a structured rule, permitting, at the very

least, discussion of some of the major alternatives that I've outlined.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that certain parties want things from this

debate today. They've already recorded their robo calls, purchased

airtime for their attack ads. They've scheduled buses for their rent-a-

mobs. And the last thing they really desire is a free, open and

informed debate that might result in a unified policy regarding our

Nation's future efforts in Iraq. They seek not to unite our Nation but

to divide it.

The people who bring this rule to the floor today do not allow

amendments because they're afraid. They're afraid that some of these

amendments might prevail. They're afraid that, given viable

alternatives, some Members of their own party will choose cooperation

over confrontation.

Mostly, they are afraid they might lose a major issue for their

campaign to maintain their majority. Their fear may or may not be

justified, but its very existence is a sad commentary on their faith in

the Members of their own party, this body, and the American people.

I remind my colleagues that the only thing we have to fear is fear

itself. Reject this cynical rule. Vote ``no'' on the previous question.

Let's have a full and fair debate on this, the most critical issue of

our generation.