I thank the gentlewoman from New York for yielding me

time and for her leadership on the Rules Committee.

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

underlying bill. Today presents us with another opportunity to change

direction in Iraq, a change that is desperately needed. I have opposed

this war from the beginning. I have long supported ways to bring this

war to a responsible close. I urge my colleagues to seize this

opportunity now before we do further disservice to the brave men and

women in Iraq.

The last time I rose in opposition to Iraq policy, I talked about

George and Dee Heath from my hometown of Sacramento. All three of their

sons served in Iraq. Recently, I learned that one of their sons, David,

was hit in an RPG attack on his convoy. Thank goodness he was not

wounded gravely, and he will be coming home to recover.

Mr. Speaker, today's vote is about our responsibility to the Heath

sons and to the more than 150,000 other men and women in harm's way.

They are doing what is being asked of them heroically and

patriotically. It fills me with sorrow that more than 3,600 soldiers

have paid the ultimate price for their heroism, including 385 from my

home State of California.

Our responsibility to them as their elected leaders should be, it

must be, to ensure that their mission is clear and achievable. Today,

we have the opportunity to fulfill our responsibility as the President

has not. Sadly, the President's disastrous leadership is ignoring his

duty to the troops. We cannot sit idly by.

The Iraqi Government is not meeting any of its political, economic,

or military benchmarks. The President's surge policy has had disastrous

results. In fact, 600 troops have been killed and more than 3,000 have

been wounded since he announced this policy.

Our troops are stranded on the front lines without clear guidance and

without a clear mission. In light of such inept leadership by the

President, the American people have lost their patience. Most Americans

support removing troops by April. They want us to refocus on terrorism.

Yet, still the President refuses to reconsider. It is clear from the

President's blind stubbornness that Congress must show the President

the way.

Our troops are at the breaking point. We are refereeing a civil war.

The solution is a political one, not a military one. But in this late

and crucial hour, you have to do more than talk about change. You have

to vote for it. You have to fight for it. Chairman Skelton's bill keeps

the safety of our troops and our Nation's security at the forefront by

changing course in Iraq. I urge all my colleagues to support this bill.