Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding, and I

would point out to our colleagues that the action just described in my

view is not necessary.

I rise in support of the rule, the underlying bill, and in strong

support for ending our combat mission in Iraq and redirecting our

efforts towards stability in the region, including Iraq, but also in

trouble spots like Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Let me make three points.

First, based on firsthand experience from my fourth visit to Iraq

just weeks ago, Baghdad is not safer. True, we have worked successfully

with tribal leaders against al Qaeda in Anbar Province, but the major

population center, Baghdad, the focus of our military surge, is not

turning around. Progress will not be made by a continuation of our

combat mission.

Second, the Skelton bill mirrors a companion bill in the other body

which has impressive bipartisan support. I urge Republicans to support

this measure, and know that some will do so.

The message our constituents want to hear is that 290 of us, a veto-

proof bipartisan majority, insist on a responsible end to our combat

mission in Iraq beginning now with passage of this bill.

Third, though I feel Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff's use of

the words ``gut feeling'' was unwise, I share

the view that our country could be attacked at any time. Al Qaeda has

regrouped in Pakistan and expanded its reach throughout North Africa.

Homegrown cells in England and elsewhere are increasing, and our

assumption must be that they are here as well.

Low-tech, low-scale vehicle-borne attacks are, sadly, not hard to

execute. At a minimum, those, and attacks on soft targets like our mass

transit systems, may be in our near future.

DHS, FBI and our exceptionally talented local police departments are

working overtime, though their ranks are depleted and their equipment

and they are surged in Iraq. But 100 percent protection is impossible.

Mr. Speaker, this is where our attention must be, and our resources.

Pass the Skelton bill.