Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I

may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I say to the distinguished chairman of the Committee on

Rules, my very good friend, that I thank him for yielding me this time,

and had it been intended that this would be a bipartisan resolution,

then Members in the minority would have been included in drafting this

resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Missouri (Mr.

Skelton), the distinguished ranking member of the Committee on Armed

Services.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 4 1/2 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I oppose this closed rule because it works against the

values and principles for which American citizens are risking their

lives in Iraq and Afghanistan on this very day.

We are fighting for democracy abroad, but we will not allow democracy

on the floor of the House of Representatives of the United States. The

fact of the matter is, if this had not been a political document, every

Member of this House would follow the line, ``Commends the members of

the United States Armed Forces and Coalition Forces for liberating Iraq

and expresses its gratitude for their valiant service.'' But that is

not all that is in this resolution.

This is not about stopping consideration of the underlying

resolution. It is a pleasure to take the time to pay tribute to the men

and women who distinguish themselves daily in selfless service to this

Nation. I do this, as do all Members on both sides of the aisle, at

every available occasion. But there are other important matters that

are not addressed in this resolution. And the fact that we were not

included in its drafting allows them to be pronounced during the course

of opposing this rule as well as in general debate.

We have not, for example, recognized the efforts of our National

Guardsmen and Reserves, who have left friends and families and civilian

jobs to serve in Iraq. But this completely closed rule does not give

all Members of the House of Representatives the opportunity to

commemorate the outstanding service of all those who have served in

Iraq and Afghanistan.

Once this institution was considered one of the world's greatest

deliberative bodies, and its Members were statespersons rather than

professional self-promoters. Once Members of Congress were brimming

with ideas befitting a proud democracy. But no more, Mr. Speaker. To

all of my colleagues who showed up last night at the Committee on Rules

with amendments that they thought could strengthen this resolution, I

apologize to you for the majority's disdain for your contributions.

Actually, I had an amendment to this resolution that urged the

President to provide Congress a straightforward and honest assessment

of our past and future commitments in Iraq, as well as recognizing the

selfless acts of the men and women in our service, who we all love and

adore and applaud for their courage on a daily basis.

These are some of the many questions for which we are all seeking

answers from the administration. Even

more, there are questions to which Congress has a constitutional

responsibility and obligation to raise and demand answers.

Mr. Speaker, I asked myself last night as the Committee on Rules

Republicans passed yet another closed rule, and 11 have been closed, 1

has been open this year, which stifles debate and shuts off meaningful

contributions from all of the Members of this Chamber, I asked myself,

What is the problem? The problem is that the majority has introduced

this resolution for political reasons. C-SPAN will broadcast today's

speeches and Fox News will run stories professing the patriotism of

those on the other side of the aisle. Thus, the Republican majority

hopes to disguise the neglect and misdirection they have shown in

governing by not making this a bipartisan effort.

The Republicans have not established a record which helps all

Americans, and are relying on photos ops and waving the American flag

to get themselves reelected. It would be much more patriotic to address

the perennially underfunded veterans affairs health care system. By the

Bush administration's own estimate, their policies will exclude

approximately 500,000 veterans from the VA health care system by 2005.

This is shameful. President Bush also proposed an increase in pay fees

and copayments in an effort to shift the burden onto the backs of

veterans and drive an additional 1 million veterans from the system. It

is shameful.

Our troops should be taken care of when we send them into battle, and

be given the respect they have earned when we bring them home.

America's veterans fight and fought for our freedoms, they should not

have to fight for their benefits.

As the Republicans continue to protect the wealthy and act like show

horses in front of the cameras, Democrats are working for the men and

women in uniform and our veterans today as well as in the future. We

will continue to applaud them.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 30 seconds.

Mr. Speaker, I would say to the chairman of the Committee on Rules,

if this is not about foreign policy, then how is it that the chairman

of the jurisdictional foreign policy committee brought it to the

Committee on Rules? If it is not about foreign policy, why is the

language for the Iraqi Liberation Act of 1998 referenced in this

resolution? If it is not about foreign policy, why is the mention of

the 16 previously adopted United Nations Security Council resolutions

in this matter? If it is not about foreign policy, why is the

Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution 2002

referenced in this resolution? The other side of the aisle is trying to

defend the indefensible.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr.

Lantos), the ranking member of the Committee on International

Relations, who may be able to tell us why it is not about foreign

policy.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 15 seconds to

say to my distinguished friend from Florida that I do not believe that

the families of the people of Spain or Morocco or Turkey where bombs

have gone off feel safer. So maybe they are in this world.

Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to yield 3 1/2 minutes to my good

friend from California (Ms. Harman), the distinguished ranking member

of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence with whom I work

regularly.