Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the rule

governing the debate of H.R. 1591, ``U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans'

Health, and Iraq Accountability Act.'' There is no more important issue

facing the Congress, the President, and the American people than the

war in Iraq. It is a subject upon which no one is indifferent, least of

all members of Congress. Beginning with the distinguished gentleman

from Pennsylvania, Mr. Murtha, many good ideas have been advanced by

members of Congress to bring to a successful conclusion the American

military engagement in Iraq.

It is in that spirit that I commend the leadership and the Chairwoman

of the Rules Committee, Ms. Slaughter, for their patient and careful

crafting of the Iraq Emergency Supplemental that will come before us

later today. I support this rule and I support the supplemental because

I support our magnificent servicemen and women in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, nearly every decision reached by a legislative body is a

product of compromise. The rule and bill before us are no different. If

it was left solely to us, any of us could no doubt add or subtract

provisions which we think would improve the bill. For example, I

offered four amendments to H.R. 1591. Let me describe them.

Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1 terminates the authority granted by

Congress to the President in the 2002 Authorization for the Use of

Military Force in Iraq. The resolution is terminated because

the objectives for which the authorization was granted have all been

achieved. Let me explain.

Congress authorized the President to use military force against Iraq

to achieve the following objectives:

1. to disarm Iraq of any weapons of mass destruction that could

threaten the security of the United States and international peace in

the Persian Gulf region;

2. to change the Iraqi regime so that Saddam Hussein and his Baathist

party no longer posed a threat to the people of Iraq or its neighbors;

3. to bring to justice any members of al Qaeda known or found to be

in Iraq bearing responsibility for the attacks on the United States,

its citizens, and interests, including the attacks that occurred on

September 11, 2001;

4. to ensure that the regime of Saddam Hussein would not provide

weapons of mass destruction to international terrorists, including al

Qaeda; and

5. to enforce all relevant United Nations Security Council

resolutions regarding Iraq.

Thanks to the skill and valor of the Armed Forces of the United

States we now know for certain that Iraq does not possess weapons of

mass destruction. Thanks to the tenacity and heroism of American

troops, Saddam Hussein was deposed, captured, and dealt with by the

Iraqi people in such a way that neither he nor his Baathist Party will

ever again pose a threat to the people of Iraq or its neighbors in the

region. Nor will the regime ever acquire and provide weapons of mass

destruction to international terrorists.

Third, the American military has caught or killed virtually every

member of al Qaeda in Iraq remotely responsible for the 9-11 attack on

our country. Last, all relevant U.N. resolutions relating to Iraq have

been enforced.

In other words, every objective for which the use of force in Iraq

was authorized by the 2002 resolution has been achieved, most with

spectacular success thanks to the professionalism and superior skill of

our service men and women. The point of my amendment was to recognize,

acknowledge, and honor this fact.

The Armed Forces of the United States have performed magnificently.

They won the war they were sent to fight. Their civilian leadership has

not succeeded in winning the peace. Rather than undertaking a misguided

and futile surge in troops, the United States should surge

diplomatically and politically.

That is why Jackson Lee Amendment No. 2 called for the creation and

appointment of a high-level Special Envoy for National and Political

Reconciliation in Iraq (SENPRI) to launch a new offensive on the

diplomatic front. This Special Envoy--who would be an individual of the

stature of former Secretary of State Colin Powell, Madeleine Albright,

or James Baker--would be commissioned to undertake the peaceful

reconciliation of the major stakeholders in a free and democratic Iraq,

particularly the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds.

The SENPRI shall meet with any and all such persons, organizations,

and entities, and make such recommendations as he deems necessary and

expedient for bringing about national and political reconciliation in

Iraq, including recommending the assistance of a bona fide

international peacekeeping force where necessary.

A real diplomatic surge requires a full-court press designed to

engage all six of Iraq's neighbors--Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Saudi

Arabia, and Kuwait--more constructively in stabilizing Iraq. These

countries are already involved in a bilateral, self-interested but

disorganized way.

As the Iraq Study Group report makes clear, none of these countries

wants to live with an Iraq that, after our redeployment, becomes a

failed state or a humanitarian catastrophe that could become a haven

for terrorists or a hemorrhage of millions more refugees streaming into

their countries. To avoid this catastrophe, there needs to be national

reconciliation between the contending factions in Iraq. A Special Envoy

dedicated to achieving this goal would help a great deal in bringing

about this reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker, as I have stated, the Armed Forces of the United States

have performed magnificently in Operation Iraqi Freedom. This fact is

deserving of effusive praise and explicit acknowledgment in H.R. 1591.

My third amendment did this.

The brave servicemen and women of the United States toppled the

repressive Baathist regime, deposed one of history's greatest tyrants

and gave the Iraqi people the chance to draft their own constitution,

hold their own free elections, establish their own government, and

build a future of peace and prosperity for themselves and their

posterity.

But the cost of America's magnificent gift to the people of Iraq has

been high. It has been paid for with the lives of more than 3,000

service members and the limbs of countless thousands of other. It has

been paid for with the hard-earned tax dollars of the families of

America.

The cost to the United States has also been high regarding the new

and neglected needs of the American people. Operation Iraqi Freedom has

exacerbated the backlog in Veterans Administration health care facility

maintenance; placed an undue strain on the delivery of medical

treatment and rehabilitative services for current and new veterans; and

exacted a heavy toll on the equipment, training and readiness

requirements, and the families of the men and women of the United

States Armed Forces. My amendment acknowledged the sacrifices made by,

and the debt of gratitude, we and the Iraqi people owe to Armed Forces

of the United States.

Last, Jackson Lee Amendment No. 4, changed the troop reference date

for redeployment set forth in section 1904 from March 1, 2008, to

December 31, 2007. What this means, Mr. Speaker, is that the Government

of Iraq will have had more than three years since the United States

turned over sovereignty to establish a sustainable government with

secure borders that can protect its people. If the allied forces could

win WorId War II

in less than four years, certainly that is enough time for the

Government of Iraq to provide for the security of its people, with the

substantial assistance of the United States.

But Mr. Speaker, we ought not let the perfect become the enemy of the

good. The emergency supplemental may not be perfect but it is better--

far better--than any legislation relating to the war in Iraq that has

ever been brought to the floor for a vote.

For the first time, Mr. Speaker, the Congress can go on record

against an open-ended war whose goal line is always moving. The vote

today will put the House on record as squarely against the Bush

Administration's policy of looking the other way while the Iraqi

government fails to govern a country worthy of a free people and with

as much commitment and dedication to the security and happiness of its

citizens and has been shown by the heroic American servicemen and women

who risked their lives and, in the case of over 3,000 fallen heroes,

lost their lives to win for the Iraqi people the chance to draft their

own constitution, hold their own free elections, establish their own

government, and build a future of peace and prosperity for themselves

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States Armed Forces.

The emergency supplemental acknowledges the sacrifices made by, and

the debt of gratitude, we and the Iraqi people owe to Armed Forces of

the United States. More than that, it makes a substantial down payment

on that debt by providing substantial increases in funding for our

troops. For example, the supplemental provides $2.8 billion for defense

health care, which is $1.7 billion above the President's request.

Additionally, another $1.7 billion is provided to address the

maintenance backlog at VA health care facilities. We provide $2.5

billion to ensure that our troops are properly equipped and trained.

Because after all, when American troops are sent into harm's way,

America has an obligation to do all it can to minimize the risk of harm

to the troops. That is why I am pleased the bill directs the President

to adhere to current military guidelines for unit readiness, time

between deployments, and meeting benchmarks and ending our involvement

in Iraq's civil war.

Although the bill may not be the best I might have hoped for, I have

concluded that it is the best that can be achieved at this time, this

moment in history. I support the rule and the bill because I believe it

represents a change of course and a new direction in our policy on

Iraq. This bill will place us on the road that will reunite our troops

with their families and bring them home with honor and success. I urge

all members to support the rule and the bill.