Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, about two centuries ago, almost, this country was facing

a war that devastated it for generations. The first day, the first

battle was going to be at Bull Run, not far from here in Washington,

and I am sure that some Members of Congress and many other citizens of

Washington packed up lunches, got in their horse and buggy, and went

out to watch the fight. Suddenly, they found the Union forces

were being routed, bloodied, and were told to run for their lives.

Today, our brave Union forces are again in the field, are suffering

great casualties, and what is happening today when we finally get

around to talking about Iraq 4 years after it happened? We are going to

have a picnic. So later today everybody will stop and go to the White

House and discuss the picnic. There is something so surreal and Alice

in Wonderland about all the things that have been going on around here,

but let me tell you of a different time.

In 1991, leading up to the first Gulf War, this Congress had a real

debate about that conflict, one that was said to be one of the best of

the 20th century, because in 1991 the House was a real deliberative

body. We had three resolutions to consider; actually, the minority

resolution, there were two Democrats and one minority leader

resolution, was the one that passed in a Democrat Congress, and every

Member who wanted it had 5 minutes to speak their mind. We debated for

20 hours on that, and it was a wonderful time because we all took part

in something we cared so deeply about.

Contrast that with what this Republican leadership is giving us now,

a day not about policy or progress but about politics and posturing. It

is a day designed to provide the majority with a chance to make cheap

political attacks against Democrats in anticipation of upcoming mid-

term elections at a time when Americans and Iraqis are giving their

lives in one of the most brutal wars of our time.

Yesterday, an internal Republican memo was circulated outlining the

party's plan of attack for today. It instructs Republicans to paint a

picture of ``A Democrat Party without a coherent national security

policy that sheepishly dismissed the challenges America faces in a

post-9/11 world.'' We are going to hear a lot of that empty propaganda

today, I am absolutely sure. But how will that divisive rhetoric help

our soldiers abroad, Mr. Speaker? What can it possibly have to do with

the war we are fighting?

If this memo didn't show us the real motivations behind today, last

night's meeting of the Rules Committee certainly did. My fellow

Democrats and I had a simple request at the meeting. We asked for the

rule to be an open one. An open rule would have given any Member on any

side of the House who wanted to speak a chance to do so. And what is

more, an open rule would have permitted Members from both sides of the

aisle to present amendments to the resolution so that we could do more

than just talk, so that we could try to improve the flawed policies

being pursued in Iraq.

But the committee gave us a closed rule. Not one person here from

either party will be able to amend this resolution. Now, why would the

Republicans do this? Could it be because they are not interested in

addressing the serious questions in a forthright way? There are

certainly problems to be addressed. Let me give you one example.

Yesterday, I joined a group of Democrats repeating our call for the

creation of a Truman Commission to oversee the Iraqi reconstruction.

Rampant construction and incompetent Iraq contracting have prolonged

our mission there and cost lives, with 75 percent of oil and gas and 50

percent of electricity projects remaining unfinished.

The GAO reports that $7 billion in funds have simply been lost. The

Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Stuart Bowen, is

investigating 72 cases of alleged fraud. Have Republicans dealt with

these problems? They have not. They recently elected to block $1.9

billion in new reconstruction funds from being examined. They won't let

Mr. Bowen and his team look at that, because he was doing the job too

well. So they took the jurisdiction pretty much away from him.

I suppose it shouldn't come as a surprise that today, instead of

proposing serious solutions to the problems we are facing, we are being

offered a ``yes or no'' vote on a resolution drowning in patriotic

rhetoric and offering us an open-ended fight against an open-ended

enemy.

Debate is about choice, but there is no choice here today. What we

have is less like our democracy and more like a Soviet election.

Americans expect real debate in their Congress. They do not expect

their representatives to passively acquiesce to the assertions of a

meaningless resolution based on White House talking points. And they

expect their elected officials to have a meaningful discussion on the

future course of the greatest challenge to our Nation in a generation.

My friends on both sides of the aisle, we can stop this sham in its

tracks by voting ``no'' on this rule. I implore every Member from both

parties to realize what is at stake here. If you support the rule, you

are saying you don't believe our troops and their families deserve a

serious debate on the war. You are saying you don't think the massive

troubles of the Iraqi people deserve more than a cursory glance. And

you are saying you don't think this Congress should be anything more

than the President's rubber stamp. What you are saying is that this war

is just a political tool to be used at elections.

My fellow Democrats and I have said a lot about the death of

democracy in this House. Over the course of the 109th Congress, of 144

different rules presented by this Republican Party, only one rule that

was not an appropriations measure has been made open for debate and

amendable by this leadership. One. And if there was ever a rule that

should be open, if there was ever a day in which democracy should

breathe freely in these halls, even if just for one day, it is this

rule and it should be this day.

Your vote on this rule isn't about how you voted on the war, it is

about respecting the troops. It is about respecting democracy. How can

we ask the fine young men and women of our Armed Forces to die so that

Iraqis can have democracy and debate when we are systematically

undermining those same principles here? It is unconscionable.

Whether you are a Democrat or Republican, I implore every Member,

everyone to take a stand for the values of democracy and the values of

this Nation and vote please against this rule. Defeating this rule will

show our troops that we have enough respect for them in this House to

have a real debate on their lives and future and of the future of the

Nation that we love.