Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Massachusetts for

yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, today's debate is long overdue. For the past 3 years,

the United States has had a military presence in Iraq. In fact, when

the authorization for war in Iraq was authorized,

I was not a member of this body. Yet this is the first extensive public

debate Congress will have had on the most important issue of the day.

Even now, however, the rule put forth by the House leadership asks

Members a simplistic question: Do you accept or renounce the

President's vague appeal to stay the course and be patient? Such a

narrow focus does a disservice to our role as representatives of the

people.

The American people want to hear practical, well-thought-out ideas

from their elected representatives. Today we could have had that

honest, engaged and realistic debate.

I had hoped to discuss the reality of Iraq right now and how we may

best help a political solution to emerge. This isn't a debate we should

be afraid of. We can have this debate and can have it respectfully. But

the House Republican leadership has decided to pass on this

opportunity.

What should we be debating? I believe there are several things upon

which all Members can agree, Republican and Democratic alike.

The first is that the United States has no desire to control Iraq's

oil supply. The second is that we will not build permanent bases in

Iraq. Taken together, these statements say clearly to the Iraqi people

that the United States presence in Iraq is not permanent. And it says

clearly to the administration that our strategy in Iraq must reflect

the fact that we will not be there forever.

But, Mr. Speaker, the focus of this House must move beyond these

specific details and rapidly toward our broader policies on Iraq. We

all want a free, stable and prosperous Iraq, and we have an important

diplomatic role to play. But ultimately, it is up to the Iraqis to

achieve those goals through the political process.

The United States should continue to offer support for Iraqi security

forces; and regardless of our troop deployment, the United States must

maintain its responsibility to assist in rebuilding the country's

economy and infrastructure.

But beginning to draw down troops stationed in Iraq can be done while

keeping all of these goals in mind. I respect several redeployment

proposals put forth by Members of this body for those reasons.

The President's exhortations to ``stay the course'' remain

disconnected from the reality on the ground and from a sincere

engagement on the policy details.

In contrast, the proposals put forth by several Members of the House

were developed after much thought. The Members struggled to mold the

chaos in Iraq into a workable solution that upholds the best interests

of the Iraqi people and that of the American people.

These proposals and ideas deserve to come to the floor. They deserve

to be debated, and they deserve a vote. Unfortunately, under the rule

reported out, this will not happen. Instead, we will have a gripping

session that yields no results. Congress is part of this government. In

fulfillment of its responsibilities, this House should reject this rule

and bring real policy to the floor.