Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 261 provides for the

consideration of the emergency supplemental, the U.S. Troops Readiness,

Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act. The rule provides 4 hours

of general debate in the House equally divided and controlled by the

chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on

Appropriations.

The rule waives all points of order against consideration of the bill

except for clauses 9 and 10 of rule XXI. The rule provides that the

amendment printed in the Rules Committee report shall be considered as

adopted. The rule waives all points of order against the bill as

amended and provides that the bill, as amended, shall be considered as

read. Finally, the rule provides one motion to recommit with or without

instructions.

Mr. Speaker, with a deep appreciation for how critical this bill is,

the Rules Committee reported out a rule that allows for 4 hours of what

will be a full debate. It allows for the consideration of clear and

concise legislation that everyone in the Congress is familiar with. It

is a responsible rule, and I urge all of my colleagues to support it.

But we are here today to debate much more than procedure, Mr.

Speaker. We meet today on the fourth day of the fifth year of the war

in Iraq, a conflict that has gone on longer than the Korean War, even

longer than the Second World War, that war being fought against the

greatest threat to world security.

The scenarios painted by politicians here about the war in Iraq don't

affect the men and women fighting it or living it. They actually know

what the world for them really is. And what is that reality? This is a

war being fought by soldiers who often do not have the equipment they

need or the care they are owed. And it is not improving security for

the Iraqi people. It is depleting our military and endangering the

security of this Nation; and that is to this day based on a flawed

strategy that desperately needs to be changed.

Under such circumstances, for this Congress to support an open-ended

commitment to this conflict, passing yet another blank check as past

Congresses have done, would be a dereliction of duty. By contrast,

passing a bill that has a chance of changing a stagnant situation in

Iraq is not micromanaging; it is living up to what we owe our soldiers

and the Iraqi people, to give them a fighting chance for success.

The supplemental makes America's continued involvement in Iraq

conditional on the situation there improving. America's soldiers will

no longer be asked to fight in an open-ended war whose goal line keeps

moving. The bill would require Iraqi leaders to make the political

compromises necessary to produce a working government, or risk losing

the American military support. It will require the President's own

security benchmarks to be met if American soldiers are to continue

sacrificing their safety for that goal. And it will be the first step

toward ending the war.

Ending this flawed conflict is crucial not just for Iraq, but also

for the future of our own military and, hence, to our own national

security.

This Congress was aghast when it learned of the conditions of Walter

Reed. But every day, the men and women of our military are suffering

beyond reason. Let me briefly share one story with you that I recently

heard, the story of a young lieutenant awaiting his second deployment

to Iraq.

His first tour saw him bravely patrolling dangerous streets north of

Baghdad. He returned last December, expecting a year on base during

which to rest and train a new platoon. Instead, with the escalation in

place, he will be heading back months sooner. The soldiers under his

command are not getting the time they need to train properly for their

mission. The vehicles and equipment they use to train for war are

failing and often break. They are physically weary, many still

suffering from the lingering effects of leg and back injuries. Others

are in counseling for post-traumatic stress disorder. Most of the

soldiers who were married before the war are now divorced. Their lives

outside the conflict are coming apart.

This lieutenant and his soldiers personify sacrifice. They never

complain. When those in the military are given a mission, he told me,

they find a way to complete it. That creed is why our Armed Forces are

so strong.

But what this officer did tell me is that our Armed Forces cannot go

on like this. He said that we are in danger of destroying our system of

national defense. We see soldiers being sent back tour after tour, some

too injured to wear the body armor. Our services are desperately trying

to find a way to meet new troop requirements, sending back the wounded.

Mr. Speaker, this war is a dramatic misuse of our military. In the

name of our national security, it is undermining the only true

guarantor of national security that we have, our Armed Forces. And for

years this Congress has let it happen, but not anymore.

Today the House will finally recognize that our military is at the

breaking point, not because of any inherent weakness, but because it is

being asked to complete a flawed mission. And so that mission itself

must change.

Let me add as well that while our soldiers may stoically bear the

burdens of short leaves and shoddy equipment, that in no way means that

we in Congress should allow it to happen.

This bill respects our men and women in uniform enough to put their

needs at the forefront of national priorities. From now on, if they are

asked to go into battle without being fully armored, fully rested, and

fully trained, then the President himself will have to stand before

them, look them in the eye, and explain why he thinks our national

safety is worth that level of sacrifice.

The legislation will also provide desperately needed funds for

veterans' health care. Our country is seeing more wounded soldiers

returning from abroad than at any point in 40 years, and yet our health

care system has failed thousands of them. It is unconscionable, and it

is long past time that that state of affairs is radically changed.

And, finally, this bill both increases funding for the ongoing

conflict in Afghanistan and for a variety of other critically important

national security objectives. Taken together, it represents the

beginning of what will be a responsible and ethical shift in our

national security priorities away from a war in Iraq that we can't end

and back towards where it ought to be.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is the first real chance that Democrats

have had since 2003 to change the course of the war in Iraq, and we

intend to do it. We will do it not because we are conceding anything to

those who would do our Nation harm, not because we lack the will to

fight for security, and not because, as some would have you believe, we

are giving up. With this first step, we will change the course of this

war because the future of the people of America depends on it, because

a basic level of respect for our soldiers demands it, and because the

long-term security of our Nation requires it.

This is an important and historic bill, and I am proud to support it.

I urge all of my colleagues to do the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.