Thank you very much, Ms. Slaughter, and

thank you very much for your leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I have appended to this podium the faces of 90 people

who never should have lost their lives in this war.

Mr. Speaker, when I voted against using troops in Iraq more than 4

years ago, I believed then, and still believe today, that this was not

a war of necessity, but rather for the Bush administration a war of

choice and convenience. As we have learned since that vote, the concern

that I and others had was, indeed, justified.

Today's vote is not a vote on supporting our troops. After all, there

is no choice when it comes to supporting our military. We all stand by

them, Republicans and Democrats alike, especially when they are in

harm's way.

But should we send our troops into battle without proper body armor?

For over 4 years the Bush administration has said ``yes.'' Democrats

have said ``no.''

Should we force our troops into second and third and fourth tours of

duties with shortened times in between those tours? The Bush

administration continues to say ``yes.'' Democrats say ``no.''

Should we welcome home our troops with inhumane conditions at our VA

hospitals around this Nation, not just at Walter Reed, and a

shortchanged veterans health care system? The Bush administration says

``yes.'' Democrats say ``no.''

Should we stay the course of rhetorical arguments filled with fear

and deception, like I have heard here today? Or should we finally start

holding this administration and the Iraqi Government accountable? For

over 4 years the Bush administration has said ``stay the course.''

Democrats and the American people demand accountability and a plan to

bring our men and women home.

Choices arise only when we start asking ourselves the real questions

about how we can best support and protect our troops. On these issues,

there are very clear choices between the Bush administration's ``stay

the course'' stubbornness and the Democratic plan for accountability.

This bill is not the end-all-be-all when it comes to getting us out

of Iraq. It is not the long-term solution which

so many of us crave. But it is the first step, a very necessary step,

on the road to holding the administration and the Iraqi Government

accountable and bringing our troops home.

Many Democrats did not vote for this war, but make no mistake about

it, one way or another we will end it. Incidentally, whatever happened

to exit strategy? Most importantly, we will do so in a manner that

enhances our security here at home and contributes to the restoration

of order and stability in the Middle East region and throughout the

world.

This is an excellent rule, Madam Chairman, and the bill that has been

fashioned by the Speaker and the leadership of this House is a correct

start to adhere to the wishes of the American people.