Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished Rules Committee

Chair.

Mr. Speaker, the Iraq Accountability Act under this rule is the most

responsible way to chart a new direction to the Bush-Cheney stay-the-

course policy in Iraq, to bring our troops home and to protect our

national security.

The American people are way beyond the politicians at both ends of

Pennsylvania Avenue. Nevertheless, our government is at a crossroads.

On the one hand, some want to continue to endorse the Bush-Cheney war

without end, a war that the administration sought because they were

blinded by the prospects of oil profits. They want to continue a blank-

check, rubber-stamp, diplomatically impotent position.

On the other hand, I urge my colleagues to patriotically stand up for

a greater Nation, be strategically smarter and support our brave men

and women in uniform. That is the responsible course of action.

Ensuring that our troops in the field have all of the resources they

require is the responsible thing to do. Focusing again in a meaningful

way on al Qaeda and the Taliban is the responsible thing to do.

Improving health care for injured soldiers and veterans is the

responsible thing to do. And oversight of the misspending and waste by

the executive branch is the responsible thing to do.

Requiring the Iraqi Government to provide for its own defense is the

right and responsible thing to do, so that we can take our brave men

and women in uniform out of the middle of the Iraqi civil war and bring

our troops home.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I am particularly

concerned that the reckless Bush escalation will continue to undermine

our country's readiness and ability to address other threats to our

national security. Indeed, in recent testimony before our committee,

the Army Chief of Staff testified that America will run a strategic

risk by implementing the escalation and staying on the same course in

Iraq.

The American people are demanding a new direction from the White

House. This includes one of my neighbors in Tampa, Armando B. Arias.

Mr. Arias would meet anyone's definition of ``patriot.'' He loves his

country and has served in two separate wars--World War II and Korea.

When I asked him a few months back when I knocked on his door in West

Tampa what he most wanted his new Congresswoman to work on, he replied

immediately, ``get out of the war and ring our kids home.''

I am proud to be here today to keep that commitment to Armando Arias

and Americans everywhere who are demanding fundamental change.

I urge a ``yes'' vote on this rule and the Iraq Accountability Act.