Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for

yielding.

Mr. Speaker and Members, I rise in strong support of the bill that is

before us today. First and foremost, I want to point out that every

Member on this floor, every Member knows that the brave men and women

of our military have done a fantastic job, and every Member on this

floor supports the brave men and women serving our country.

Mr. Speaker, too many of those brave men and women have been doing a

fantastic job for way too many tours. Multiple tours. The last time I

was in Iraq, I had lunch with a group of soldiers from California, one

of whom was a firefighter from the North Bay in California, and he

said, I used to have a house in your district, but I don't anymore. My

ex-wife has it now. I said, I am sorry to hear that. He said, well,

this is my fourth tour. I couldn't expect much else.

Our men and women have been put under a tremendous strain for far too

long. Our military equipment has been depleted. Over $100 billion is

needed to bring our military equipment up to standard. Our combat

readiness has been depleted. This bill, this bill is about refocusing

our area; to transition, transition our effort into force protection,

diplomatic protection, counterterrorism, refocus our effort looking

into the future for future problems that we may have. It's long past

time to refocus our efforts; it's long past time to transition.

This bill does represent a change. We heard from the previous speaker

that there wasn't much change. Mr. Speaker and Members, if there wasn't

any change in this bill, we wouldn't be facing the opposition from the

other side that we are facing tonight. This bill represents major

change.

This bill represents a policy change that the American people are

demanding. They demanded it in the November election; they demand it

today. It's long past time for this transition to take place. This war

can't go on forever. We know that on this side of the aisle and we know

it on the other side of the aisle.

A lot of comparisons have been made tonight with Vietnam. I want to

make just one. I served in Vietnam with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. I

didn't do anything exceptional. I showed up; I did my job. But there

came a time in past Congresses that it was known that we were going to

leave Vietnam, and from the time that we knew that our colleagues, our

past colleagues knew that we were going to leave Vietnam, until we

actually left Vietnam, 21,000 Americans died.

They knew, our colleagues in past Congresses knew that we couldn't

sustain that. We weren't going to be in Vietnam forever. They knew we

had to leave. From the time they absolutely knew it on this floor until

we left, 21,000 brave American men died in Vietnam. I was one of the

lucky ones. I was only wounded. I lost a lot of friends. We lost a lot

of fellow Americans.

We cannot make that same mistake. We know that the Iraq war cannot go

on forever. We know that on both sides of the aisle. It's time for a

major policy change. This bill represents that major policy change. I

urge everyone to vote ``aye'' for the underlying bill.