Mr. Speaker, as the hour grows late here this evening, I

and some of my fellow freshmen colleagues have gathered here on the

floor to talk about the issue that is overarching everything we do in

this country today, the war in Iraq.

When we were elected in November, many of us came here on a mandate

for change, a mandate for a change of direction in the way the country

was heading and a mandate for change in direction in Iraq. So, tonight

we are here to talk about the important events of this day, the action

that this House took to pass a very important bill, the Responsible

Redeployment From Iraq Act, and also to talk about the report that was

recently released from the White House on Iraq and the benchmarks that,

sadly, are not being met.

With that, I would like to actually turn this discussion over to some

of my fellow colleagues. We will begin with a statement and some

commentary from the gentleman from New Hampshire, the distinguished

gentleman from New Hampshire, Mr. Paul Hodes.

I thank the gentlewoman for her comments. Your points are

well taken. After 4 1/2 years of this tragic war, more than 3,600

brave American troops killed, more than 26,000 injured, and nearly half

a trillion dollars spent, we continue down the path that the President

insists on taking us.

In his defiance, he has indicated he will continue to ignore reality,

as well as the facts contained in the administration's own analysis of

the war that was released today.

As you point out, in January, the President sent thousands of

additional troops to Iraq and promised to hold the Iraqi government

accountable for meeting those benchmarks for success. Today that report

makes it clear that we need a change in course.

Unity in Iraq, we know here on this floor, must be determined by the

people of Iraq, and our brave troops are caught in the crossfire of a

sectarian civil war without a military mission, and the President has

no plan to bring them home.

Instead of rejecting calls for change and demeaning those who seek

it, the President should listen to the military experts, to Congress

and the American people who in their will and wisdom want to

responsibly redeploy the troops home.

With that, I would like to yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr.

Arcuri).

I thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. Ellison), and

the points raised are worth talking about. He's absolutely right when

we talk about the loss of life, the irretrievable loss of life as being

the real cost, the real measure of our loss.

Not too long ago during this surge, the escalation of this war,

within this past 6 months, I had the very sad experience of I'm sure

that many of you have had of going back to my district to go to

visitation, to calling hours, for a fallen soldier. And on this

occasion, I walked in and I was taken aback because family members,

they thank you. They thank you for coming to pay your respects to this

one who was willing to give it all for his country.

And as I walked in and I walked over to the casket where this brave

soldier lay and there he was, this young man, and I kneeled down and I

looked and I looked long and I looked hard because I wanted to remember

and I wanted to feel all that I could so that when I came back here to

cast the votes that we must cast and to make the decisions that we must

make about the lives that are in our hands, to answer the questions

about what we're willing to ask them to do and what we're willing to

protect them from, I wanted that to be a part of who I am and the

decisions I make.

So I carried that with me, and I carried it with me for the vote

today, but I can't help but also share a very disappointing moment that

happened later that day when I returned home, to hear the news and our

President talking about how much he enjoyed riding his bike and how we

should all ride our bikes because it's a healthy thing to do. Well,

maybe so, but it struck me that this President, to my knowledge,

doesn't go to many of those calling hours, and perhaps it would be

different and perhaps the decision-making would be different because

you're right, my colleague from Minnesota, the lives lost are

irretrievable.

With that, I'd like to yield to the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr.

Hodes), who has joined us again.

It reminds me of a committee hearing yesterday, and we

heard some discussion from one of the witnesses about courage. It was

used in the context, you have to have the courage to go forward.

Sometimes it takes courage to go forward.

I know that Mr. Arcuri and I together looked at each other, and

thought sometimes it takes the courage that you spoke of, Mr. Hodes, to

admit when things aren't going right and changing direction. That is

the kind of direction that we need in this country from our President,

that we need for our troops from our President.

I would just ask the gentlewoman from New Hampshire to

add to that, because I know that you hear a great deal in your role as

a member of the Armed Services Committee. That is a point that is

important for people to know about one of the consequences of this

continuing path that we are going down in Iraq.

I would like to turn to the gentleman from New York,

because I know he has something important to add.

It really is. Today was the day we passed the Responsible

Redeployment From Iraq Act. It is about achieving that victory. We ask

that the President join us in trying to take this into a different

direction, a better direction for the country, for our troops.