Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

I am happy to be here tonight with my colleagues to speak about the

issue that predominates in the minds of the people of this country,

certainly in the minds of my constituents.

We are in a disastrous and unnecessary war in Iraq. I have received

literally thousands of letters, phone calls and e-mails from the

constituents of the Second District of New Hampshire, the people I

represent, the people who sent me to Congress, telling me one thing

loud and clear: They want us out of this miserable war. They want our

troops out of the impossible trap of being caught in multiple sectarian

conflicts.

I have only been in office for 6 months, yet I have received

thousands and thousands of communications from the people I represent.

It is past time to change course.

Now, when we do change course, and it is inevitable that we will

change course, we must do it responsibly and with a view towards

ensuring that our core values and our vital national security interests

are protected. We are not talking about precipitous withdrawals. Today,

when we passed the Responsible Redeployment From Iraq Act, we made sure

that we set a stage for a responsible course for redeployment of our

troops, not a precipitous withdrawal.

Day after day, poll after poll, letter after letter, plea after plea,

the American people, and certainly the people of New Hampshire, are

demanding we bring this war to a responsible end. As we sit here today,

we unfortunately are witness to a stunning lack of leadership, a

failure of leadership, a failure to face the reality from the Bush

administration.

The President's sad and sorry statement today was counterpoint to the

mistakes that have been made in the past. In the absence of leadership

from the White House, Congress has the duty to pick up the ball. We

have the duty to exercise the moral leadership, the courage and the

boldness that the American people know will be necessary to forge a

responsible and comprehensive strategy to protect our security

interests and lead this country back to a place where our military is

strong, where our troops are fighting the right fight against al Qaeda,

and where the American people's trust is restored in their leadership.

So I am glad to be here tonight, and I yield back to you, Ms. Sutton.

Thank you. It's very moving, as we stand here, to think

about the real impact, the effects of this misbegotten war on the

people of this country. The war is a cancer on the body politic that it

is our job to deal with. It's unfortunate.

We were sent to Congress, those of us who are here, largely to serve

as catalysts for change. The legislation we passed today is that

beginning, and I recall standing here where I'm now standing in the

well of the House of Representatives a few weeks ago to welcome to this

chamber men and women who had recently served their country, who were

coming from Walter Reed, who had come from other military hospitals

where, as my friend from New York Mr. Arcuri points out, the costs of

dealing with the traumatic injuries that have been inflicted on more

than 25,000 people in this war have not even begun to be calculated on

the chart next to me. They run into so much money that the mind cannot

grapple with it.

These brave men and women came to the floor. They came on crutches.

They came in wheelchairs. And each one is a story of bravery and of

sadness for me because I saw people whose lives were shattered, people

without one leg, people without two legs, people without two legs and a

arm, people without two legs and an arm, with traumatic brain injuries,

and veterans in addition to the active duty wounded warriors who came

here to meet Members of Congress and talk to us about the difficulties

they were having in their lives, veterans for whom the Veterans

Administration was not responsive, and we have dealt as a new

Democratic majority with those issues as well.

I tried to think of what I could say. There was one soldier who sat

in the front row with a young lady, it was his wife or his fiance, who

wanted to talk to us about what was really happening in Iraq. And he

started by saying, I have three things to tell you. He said, number

one, they're not telling you the real story about what's going on

there. Number two, and he stopped because he'd forgotten number two. He

couldn't get to it.

He had traumatic brain injury. I ask myself, what will it take for

the President of this great country of ours, for those predominantly on

the other side of the aisle who support a surge which has weakened our

security, strengthened al Qaeda, weakened our military, continued the

destruction of our reputation in the world; what will it take for this

President to face the reality of what his policies have created, to

come before the American people with courage and dignity and say, ``We

have made some terrible mistakes, and it's time to correct them. We

will change course, because I know it's the right thing to do. I know

we must do it. We honor the service of all those who have served in

this conflict. But now we will go and we will fight al Qaeda where we

need to in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We will deal and set our strategy

in the Middle East so that we can effectively deal with the threat of

Iran, the threat posed by Syria, the threat posed by Hezbollah in

Lebanon, the threats posed by Hamas and Fattah in the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. We will, once again, reassert our leadership in

the world with the moral courage, with the principles and the values

and the dignity that the American people expect. We will face up to our

past mistakes, but we will lead into the future with a comprehensive

strategy to protect American security''?

I am waiting. The American people are waiting. Congress is waiting.

Enough name calling. We are all in this together. This is not a

Republican or a Democratic issue. The comprehensive strategy that we

have adopted today is an American issue that will move us forward. The

real honor that this President and those who oppose a new direction can

do to those brave men and women who came to this floor shattered is to

acknowledge the past mistakes and move forward to strengthen America

and protect us all.