I thank my friend and colleague from the Rules Committee.

Mr. Speaker, I, like so many Americans, have tried to be patient with

this administration in extricating us from the difficulties we are in

in Iraq. Like so many other Americans, I want to believe that our

country is doing the right thing and we are taking the correct steps

and doing everything that needs to be done to bring our troops home.

But it is very difficult when we see and experience what we have

experienced.

You know, first they told us that there were weapons of mass

destruction. None were found. Yet the American people continued to be

patient.

Then they told us we were in Iraq to remove a tyrant. We removed

Saddam Hussein; our soldiers fought valiantly and well. Yet we are

still there at the present time despite the fact that Saddam Hussein

has been removed from power and has been executed.

Then they told us we were there to fight terrorism, and we have been

fighting terrorism, and we continue to fight terrorism, and yet our

troops remain there.

Now they tell us we are there to make our families safer. Well, I for

one don't feel that my family is any safer today than they were when we

went into Iraq. In fact, I think that my family is far less safe.

This administration tells us that we are there to fight terrorism,

that we are there to fight al Qaeda, and yet we hear that al Qaeda is

now stronger than it has been since before 9/11. So, again, I ask the

question: Why are we in Iraq? Why are we sacrificing American lives?

Twenty-six thousand have been injured; 3,600 Americans have been

killed. Nearly a half trillion dollars has been spent, and yet still we

are in Iraq and still we are no safer than we were before 9/11.

People ask me: What are we doing? How are we making our country

safer? What are you doing to bring the troops home? And it is very

difficult to answer because it is sort of like trying to hit a moving

target. Every time that a benchmark is set, every time a question is

asked, this administration moves the target. They tell us we are in

Iraq on a surge that will tell us in 60 to 90 days where we will be.

Then today we hear from this administration we only now can begin the

surge because only now are we fully up to speed. Yet we see our Armed

Forces at the weakest point they have been in many years.

Our National Guard is not where it should be, here State side;

rather, our National Guard is overseas. They are not in a position to

help should we need them here. Should we have another disaster like

Hurricane Katrina, our National Guard is not here. Rather, they are

serving overseas. These are the things that this administration has

failed the American people on.

The violence in Iraq continues. The Iraq government has failed to

meet the key benchmarks endorsed by the President in January, and

political reconciliation is nonexistent.

And yet we as a Nation have not engaged the neighbors of Iraq. We

have not gone forward and tried to bring a settlement to this. We have

not engaged Iran. We have not engaged Syria. We have just continued to

send troops to Iraq. Something has to be done.

Today we took the first step to do that. I was proud to be one of the

representatives who voted for the Responsible Redeployment from Iraq

Act, as were 223 of my other colleagues here. It is an important step

that we have taken. It is an important step for this Congress.

You know, I can't help but think, I have two teenaged children. What

are we going to tell our children about why we were in Iraq? When our

grandchildren read the history books and say to us, ``Members of

Congress, what did you do to stop this war,'' what are we going to tell

them? Well, today we took one step in telling them that we began the

process. We are beginning the process to bring this war to an end and

to bring our troops home. It is necessary. It is important. It is our

responsibility as Members of Congress.

Just a point that I'd like to make on something that you

said earlier, if you could comment on that.

We talk about money costs, but think of the amount of money that this

Congress has had to appropriate for veterans benefits as a result of

the staggering injuries, the staggering effects that this war has had

on our veterans and on our military personnel, and I just think that

that's something that I don't think that this administration thought

about when they planned out Iraq. They didn't think about the number of

wounded because, while our medical teams get better and better, we save

many more lives, but obviously many, many more people receive injuries

that they will suffer from the rest of their lives. And it's our duty

and our responsibility as a Nation to take care

of those individuals, and the emotional costs to their family and

obviously financial cost to this country of taking care of them is

great.

And I just wanted to add that because that's something else that I

don't think anyone thought about before we went into Iraq.

Let me say thank you, again, to my friend from Ohio for

organizing this.

Let me just say, I hear throughout this debate, victory, victory,

victory. The other side constantly talks about victory. But to my way

of thinking, victory is long past.

What victory means at this time would be bringing as many of our

troops home alive and safe as we possibly can. That's what victory

means. That's what we should be trying to achieve, and that's what

today was all about. I think that really is the most important thing

that I think we achieved today.