Mr. Speaker, if there was any doubt that the Bush

administration has it Iraq's policy totally wrong, the actions taken

yesterday in both Houses of Congress shattered that notion. In the

Senate, 79 Senators voted in favor of an amendment designating the year

2006 as a period of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty.

The amendment also requires the President to provide Congress with a

quarterly report detailing United States policies and military

operations in Iraq.

And in the House, the Out of Iraq Caucus, led by Ms. Waters,

introduced a discharge petition to force the House to openly debate the

Homeward Bound legislation. Homeward Bound is the bill introduced by

the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie). It is H.J. Res. 55, and it

calls for bringing our troops home no later than October 1, 2006. The

petition must be signed by 218 Members of Congress and then will force

a debate on the floor.

This debate would include 17 hours of open debate, allowing every

Member of Congress a chance to offer an amendment or talk about the war

in Iraq from their very own perspective. Regardless of where my

colleagues stand on the war and regardless of their political

affiliation, I urge them to sign onto this discharge petition because

we are long overdue for a conversation here on the floor about Iraq. It

is a conversation that we need to have because it has been a long time.

Anyone watching at home may remember the last time Congress debated

this matter. It was May 25 when I introduced an amendment to the

defense authorization bill, an amendment asking the President to put

together his plans for bringing our troops home and to provide those

plans to the appropriate committees in the House of Representatives.

Mr. Speaker, 128 Members of this House voted for that amendment, and

if the vote were held today, I am sure we would have many more than 128

votes. Of those 128 votes, 5 were Republican, 122 were Democrat, and

one was our Independent from Vermont.

Unfortunately, we cannot have that vote again because the Republican

leaders in Congress will not allow it. They will not bring important

Iraq legislation like the bipartisan Homeward Bound legislation up for

debate on the House floor. Think about it, the last time we debated

this vitally important issue was nearly 6 months ago, and that was the

first time and only time we have talked about it since the beginning of

the war.

Since Congress will not have this debate, we have had to resort to

taking matters into our own hands. That is why we are working to bring

Homeward Bound to the House floor, and that is why 61 of my colleagues

joined me in sending a letter to the President last week urging him to

make four key policy changes in his position on Iraq.

First, we asked him to engage in greater multilateral cooperation

with our allies. We simply cannot keep 160,000 American soldiers in

Iraq and hope for the situation to just change for the better because

it is our very military presence that is fueling Iraq's growing

insurgency.

Instead, the President should actually eat a little crow, admit his

mistakes and ask our allies, the same ones we offended in the buildup

of the war, to establish a multinational interim security force for

Iraq, possibly run by the United Nations or NATO. The U.N.'s Department

of Peacekeeping Operations would be particularly well suited to

managing this task, as a matter of fact.

Second, the U.S. must pursue diplomatic and nonmilitary initiatives.

If we seriously want democracy to take hold in the Middle East, then we

need to get serious about changing our role from that of Iraq's

military occupier to its reconstruction partner.

Instead of sending troops and military equipment to Iraq, let us send

teachers, scientists, urban planners, and constitutional experts as a

larger diplomatic offensive, one that will allow us to regain our lost

national credibility while, at the same time, creating Iraqi jobs and

bolstering Iraq's economy.

Third, let us prepare for a robust, postconflict reconciliation

process. There is no shortage of national healing that needs to occur

in Iraq after nearly 3 years of death and 3 years of destruction. That

is why we should encourage an international peace commission to oversee

Iraq's postconflict reconciliation. This group would coordinate peace

talks between the various factions in Iraq, providing all Iraqis with a

sense of ownership and hope over their country's future.

Finally, and most important of all, we must bring our troops home.

The human cost of this war has been absolutely staggering. To save

lives, end the war and prevent our Treasury from spiraling even further

into debt, we need to end this war.