Mr. Speaker, I yield

myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support

of this resolution. Mr. Speaker, among

the many Members who deserve commendation

for the bill before us, I

would like to single out for recognition

my friend, the gentleman from New

York (Mr. ENGEL) who first introduced

this bill in the 107th Congress; my good

friend, the gentlewoman from Florida

(Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for her superb

chairmanship of the Subcommittee on

the Middle East and Central Asia who

joined the gentleman from New York

(Mr. ENGEL), in initiating this bill in

the 108th Congress; and my friend, the

gentleman from New York (Mr. ACKERMAN),

the ranking member of the Subcommittee

on the Middle East and Central

Asia, who has been a tireless fighter

for tough-minded U.S. policies towards

State sponsors of terrorism.

Mr. Speaker, for years, our government

has favored Syria over other

State sponsors of terrorism. We allow

more trade with Syria than with the

others, and we maintain normal diplomatic

ties with Syria. This legislation,

the Syria Accountability and Lebanese

Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003,

will end this special treatment, this inequity.

It will make our Syria policy

more like our policies toward other

State sponsors of terrorism. With this

legislation, Syria’s support for terrorism,

as well as Syria’s illegal occupation

of Lebanon, will become the

central focus of our bilateral relations,

rather than just an afterthought.

Mr. Speaker, Syrian-sponsored terrorism

was responsible for the worst

pre-September 11 terrorist incident in

American history: the cold-blooded

murder of 241 of our Marines by a suicide

bomber in Lebanon a few years

ago. Now, Syrian behavior is resulting

in more American military being

killed, this time in Iraq.

Recently, as my colleagues know, I

visited Syria and met with President

Bashar al-Asad. I warned him that the

Syria Accountability Act would soon

be on its way to passage unless Syria

changed its ways. My words to him

were both a prediction and a pledge.

Asad understood me perfectly. The Secretary

of State, Colin Powell, delivered

a very similar message to him one

week after my visit.

Yet, Syria’s unacceptable and menacing

behavior has not changed. Palestinian

terrorists still populate Damascus.

Hezbollah still occupies the south

of Lebanon, its military arsenal regularly

replenished, both by arms from

Syria and Iran. Lebanon continues to

remain under Syria’s thumb. There are

some 17,000 Syrian occupation troops in

Lebanon, and countless additional

thousands of Syrian intelligence officers

controlling Lebanon. Anti-U.S. incitement

continues in the Syrian

media. Dissident Syrian parliamentarians

and academicians, who want only

freedom, languish in prison. Terrorists

and Jahadists are allowed to cross the

Syrian border into Iraq for the purpose

of killing our own fighting men and

women.

Mr. Speaker, I wish that this legislation

had not been necessary, but the

Syrian regime has made it so. Despite

warning after warning, it has refused

to heed the dictates of common sense.

Now, Syria will pay the consequences.

The door to good relations with the

United States has been wide open to

Syria. Secretary of State Powell, myself,

and others beckoned Syria to

enter, but the Syrian regime has contemptuously

slammed the door shut.

Mr. Speaker, even now, as this legislation

makes clear, our Nation would

welcome good relations with Syria just

as soon as the Syrian regime conforms

to the minimal norms of civilized

international conduct. Until then, I

urge my colleagues to support H.R.

1828.