I support the bill,

Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I

thank the gentleman for this generous

grant of time, and I yield myself such

time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the

bill, but I do have some concerns about

it. The bill appears to be simple. It authorizes

U.S. assistance for Iraqi opposition

to Saddam Hussein. There are

very good intentions behind it. Almost

all of us oppose Saddam Hussein, and

we would like to see him out of power.

We all want to support a viable Iraqi

opposition.

Having said that, the bill does have

some serious implications for United

States efforts to retain the sanctions

on Iraq and maintain strong international

support for our policies toward

Iraq.

My understanding is that U.S. policy

toward Iraq since the Gulf War has

been a policy of containment. We have

pursued that policy now for over 2 administrations.

That policy has been

reasonably successful at a price that

we are willing to pay. We have protected

fundamental American national

interests in the region, stability, the

free flow of oil, the security of friends

and allies. We have specifically rejected

an invasion of Iraq to overthrow

Saddam Hussein. Such an invasion

would take several hundred thousand

troops. There is no guarantee that we

would get Saddam Hussein or that his

successor would be any better.

b 1830

Having rejected an invasion of Iraq,

but still seeking to get rid of Saddam,

we now come to this bill. The policy

message that Congress sends with this

bill is different than the stated policy

of the United States.

This bill states that it should be the

policy of the United States to seek to

remove the regime headed by Saddam

Hussein. What is striking about the bill

is the United States, the most powerful

nation in the world, would depend on

third parties, not even third countries,

to carry out its policy objectives.

Let me state several concerns about

the bill even though I support the bill.

First no one should underestimate the

difficulties of uniting the Iraqi opposition.

It includes some 70 groups and at

least three or four major groups.

We have tried over many years to

unite the Iraqi opposition, and it has

not happened. There is, however, modest

reason for encouragement. The two

main Kurdish groups have a fragile

agreement with each other, but they

don’t want to work with Ahmed

Chalabi.

We have aided some of these opposition

leaders since the early 1970s. We

have worked hard since 1991 to bring

them together. Success has been limited.

Any program for unifying the opposition

and turning it into a viable alternative

through the current Iraqi regime

is a long-term proposition.

Second, I am concerned about creating

false expectations. Iraqi opposition

leaders may misinterpret this bill as an

open-ended U.S. commitment to their

cause.

When the Kurdish leaders were in

town last week, they talked about security

assurances from the United

States. It is apparent from their comments

that they expect very substantial

support from the United States, including

air power.

We have to spell out very carefully

and in writing what the United States

is prepared and not prepared to do. On

at least three occasions, Iraqi opposition

leaders felt that the United States

broke its commitments, and we should

not contribute to false expectations

again.

Third, there is a wide gap here between

means and objectives in this bill.

When we declare that our policy is to

remove Saddam Hussein from power,

we raise the objectives of our policy

very high. Yet we provide modest

means to achieve what has proven to

be a very difficult objective. When you

have a gap between goals and means,

that often leads to trouble in the conduct

of American foreign policy.

Fourth, I wonder whether the bill is

at all workable, whether it is possible

for the administration to implement a

program of military assistance. For example,

can we identify any country

that is prepared to accept military

equipment in the presence of armed

Iraqi opposition groups on its territory?

I am not able to do that as of

now.

Finally, the bill could harm the ability

of the United States to keep U.N.

sanctions in place against Iraq. If it becomes

the public policy of the United

States to remove Saddam Hussein, as

this bill seeks to do, then there will be

less unity in confronting Baghdad,

more criticism of the United States,

and probably more difficulty in getting

support for sanctions and for U.N.

weapons inspections among Arab

States and among Security Council

members.

Under present circumstances, it is

hard to name one Arab country or one

Security Council member that would

support a U.S. program to remove Saddam

Hussein from power.

I understand that some Members

question how well the sanctions are

working, but we should not throw out

one of the key elements of our strategy.

No Member should think that by supporting

this bill, we are strengthening

sanctions against Iraq. We risk the opposite.

To conclude, this is a very serious

piece of legislation the committee has

produced. I will not oppose the bill, because

I, like most of us, feel the opposition

should be supported, and Iraq and

the world would be better off without

Saddam Hussein.

But we should have a clear idea of

what we are doing. We are making a

down payment on support for the opposition.

We should have no illusions

about the bill.

Uniting the opposition will take a

long time. The bill could create false

expectations. There is a wide gap between

means and objectives in this bill.

There is plenty of doubt whether the

bill is workable. The bill does risk the

weakening of sanctions against Iraq.

Let us be very clear about what the

bill does and does not do. The bill

states the sense of Congress. It does

not change U.S. policy. The bill does

not compel the provision of military

assistance to Iraqi opposition groups.

The bill leaves the administration

flexibility in carrying out U.S. policy

toward Iraqi opposition groups. I understand

that the administration does

not oppose the bill.

So despite some of my concerns, I

support the bill. As the legislative

process moves along, I hope improvements

can be made in the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I have

2 minutes remaining under my time as

yielded by the chairman.

Let me just make this observation, if

I may. I think the gentleman from

Texas questioned my statement a moment

ago in which I said that the bill

states the sense of Congress, it does

not change U.S. policy. I believe my

statement is correct for a couple of

reasons. The language in the bill is

only sense of Congress language. It

does not say what the policy is; it says

what the policy should be.

More importantly, perhaps, is that

we in this body cannot set policy without

the approval of the executive

branch. The President is the chief foreign

policymaker, of course, and it is

my understanding that the policy of

the United States Government is and

will remain, after passage of this resolution,

a policy of containment.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance

of my time.