Madam Speaker, our country faces great challenges: energy

independence, global warming, economic competitiveness, health care,

and widening income inequality. But when I visit with people in Maine,

the first issue they bring up is Iraq.

We cannot address our other pressing issues unless we solve our most

urgent problem: Iraq. We cannot make many needed investments in our

future until we put our involvement in Iraq in the past. The war in

Iraq is straining our military and compromising our ability to address

vital priorities like global terrorism and nuclear proliferation. It is

diverting attention from dealing with Iran, North Korea, and

Afghanistan. Since the President will not, Congress must lead to force

Iraqis to take responsibility for their own security by directing an

orderly redeployment of troops and promoting a political solution in

Iraq with a focus on transition to Iraqi control.

Recent experience shows that the U.S. must impose deadlines with

consequences so that Iraqi leaders will be compelled to take

responsibility. An unending U.S. military presence in Iraq creates a

climate of dependency that undermines the goal of having the Iraqi

Government control internal security.

There is a growing consensus that only a political solution, not a

military one, will address the sectarian conflict in Iraq. Yet

President Bush has rejected the wisdom of military commanders, the Iraq

Study Group, and the voters by choosing to send more troops into the

crossfire of a sectarian civil war. If the President won't provide an

exit strategy, Congress must take the lead in ending the war.

To achieve this goal, I have cosponsored H.R. 645, a bill introduced

by Representatives David Price and Brad Miller. The bill would, by

December 31, 2007, terminate the authorization for military operations

in Iraq that passed, over my objection, in 2002.

The original mission Congress authorized, eliminating weapons of mass

destruction and ousting Saddam Hussein, is no longer operative. If the

President wants U.S. troops in Iraq beyond the end of this year, he

should justify his plans and seek new approval from Congress. I am

confident that the new Congress will not give the President a blank

check, as the congressional majority wrongly did in 2002.

H.R. 645 also requires the President to submit a plan and timetable

for phasing out troop deployments by December 31, 2007. It declares

that U.S. policy is to withdraw forces in order to transfer

responsibility to Iraqis; prohibits funding for permanent U.S. bases;

authorizes employment, democracy, and governance programs; and creates

a special envoy for Iraq regional security.

America's servicemen and -women in Iraq have served with skill,

determination, and courage. We owe them and their families our

gratitude and our unwavering support. Our legislation does not cut off

funds for armor and protective equipment still needed by our troops in

the war zone.

No exit strategy will succeed unless it has broad public support. I

support H.R. 645 as a responsible approach to ending the war by

focusing on U.S. policy and on the now outdated congressional

authorization for the use of force. Citizens deserve to know where

their elected officials stand on the war and not just on the

escalation. I have let my constituents in Maine know where I stand and

how I believe Congress should take a long overdue leadership role in

ending this war.