Mr. Speaker, take a moment to travel

through the Nation's hospitals and speak to those in this final injury

ward, see the young women bending over their soldier husbands who now

have lost the use of all of their limbs, 25,000-plus injured and 3,000-

plus dead.

It is not the policies of this Democratic majority that is causing

this absolute disaster. It is the misdirected policies of those in the

administration who are causing harm to our soldiers.

Let me thank our soldiers for their leadership, for their service,

and their patriotism. But as I stand here today and look at my Members,

the Speaker of the House who went into the Mideast, Mr. Giuliani, there

is no white flag on this side of the aisle, and I reject your insult

and insensitivity.

This legislation will not give the administration a blank check. It

will give a new direction to Iraq. It will begin to redeploy soldiers

if the President cannot certify the readiness in July and then in

October of 2007. It provides funding for veterans hospitals, for the

injured with spinal injuries, with brain injury. And, yes, there are

those on this side of the aisle who understand the shedding of blood of

our soldiers.

That is why this legislation will allow us to go and fight the

terrorists, to find Osama bin Laden, and to do the job that we have not

done since the tragedy and the terrorism of 9/11.

This is a sad day in this body. I want us to support the rule and the

underlying bill because there is no white flag. We have the solution,

and that solution is a policy that responds to the needs of the

American people and our soldiers on the battlefield. No more nine

soldiers of the 82nd Airborne. We thank them for their service. We

declare a military success. And we bring our soldiers home.

And maybe it will be good if some of those who did not serve would

understand what it means to serve.

Mr. Speaker, as a proud member of the Progressive and the Out of Iraq

Caucuses, I rise to speak in support of the Conference Report on H.R.

1591, the ``U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq

Accountability Act.'' I support the Conference Report because this

compromise offers us the first real chance to end the misguided

invasion, war, and occupation of Iraq. It puts us on the glide path to

the day when our troops come home in honor and triumph and where we can

``care for him who has borne the battle, and for his widow and

orphan.'' This legislation helps to repair the damage to America's

international reputation and prestige. It brings long overdue

oversight, accountability, and transparency to defense and

reconstruction contracting and procurement. Finally, it places the

responsibility for bringing peace and security where it clearly belongs

and that is squarely on the shoulders of the Iraqi government.

Mr. Speaker, the House and Senate conferees have approved legislation

providing $124.2 billion primarily for the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan. As part of the legislation, conferees approved a sensible

plan to redeploy U.S. forces in Iraq paired with progress made by the

Iraqi government in meeting diplomatic and security benchmarks. These

legislative provisions, which are subject to a Presidential waiver,

will ensure adequate rest between tours of duty of both active duty and

Guard and Reserve forces, while also requiring that their service in

Iraq not be extended beyond a year for any tour of duty.

President Bush would be required to certify that the Iraqi government

is meeting the diplomatic and security benchmarks. If he makes that

certification, deployment shall begin no later than October 1, 2007,

with the goal of completing the redeployment within 180 days. After that period, a

limited number of U.S. forces could remain in Iraq for force

protection, training and equipping Iraqi troops, and targeted

counterterrorism options. The legislation makes it possible for the

U.S. military to focus its resources on Osama bin Laden, whose

organization attacked the nation on 9/11, and destroying his base of

operations in Afghanistan.

Additionally, the U.S. commander in Iraq would provide regular

progress reports to Congress on both the progress of the Iraqi

government to take control of that country as well as the status of the

redeployment efforts.

Finally, the conferees are also to be commended for providing needed

funding to improve health care for returning soldiers and veterans, for

continued Hurricane Katrina recovery for the Gulf Coast, to fill major

gaps in homeland security, and to provide emergency drought relief for

farmers.

Overall, the conference agreement provides more than $100 billion for

the Department of Defense, primarily for continued military operations

in Iraq and Afghanistan. The legislation includes a $1 billion increase

for the National Guard and Reserve equipment and $1.1 billion for

military housing. The legislation also provides $3 billion ($1.2

billion more than the President's request) for the purchase of Mine

Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAP)--vehicles designed to

withstand roadside bombs and more than $5 billion to ensure that

returning troops and veterans receive the health care that they have

earned with their service.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not point out that the tragic

loss of life last week at Virginia Tech still weighs heavily on our

hearts and minds. Neither the mind nor the heart can contemplate a

cause that could lead a human being to resort to such senseless

violence to injure and destroy fellow human beings. The thoughts and

prayers of people of goodwill everywhere go out to the victims and

their families. In the face of such overwhelming grief, I hope they can

take comfort in the certain knowledge that unearned suffering is

redemptive.

The war in Iraq has also caused a lot of unearned suffering in Iraq

and here at home. This is the same war, Mr. Speaker, whose proponents

misrepresented to the nation would last no more than six months and

likely less than six weeks. This same war in Iraq, we were led to

believe by the Administration, would cost less than $50 billion and

would be paid out of the ample revenues from Iraq's oil fields. The war

in Iraq, the American people were promised, should have ended years ago

with Americans troops greeted as liberators by jubilant Iraqis throwing

rose petals at their feet.

The President has threatened to veto the legislation now before us if

it passes. According to the President and the Vice-President, H.R. 1591

``would undermine our troops and threaten the safety of the American

people here at home.'' Coming from an Administration that has been

wrong on every important question relating to the decision to launch

the Iraq War as well the conduct of it, this claim is laughable. Little

wonder that nearly 70 percent of Americans disapprove of the way the

President is handling the war. But more important, the President's

claim is simply not true.

Mr. Speaker, many of the nation's most highly respected generals have

endorsed H.R. 1591; all of them oppose the President's plan to escalate

the war in Iraq. Take, for example, Maj. Gen. John Batiste, U.S. Army,

Ret.

Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton, USA, Ret. Supports this legislation because it

``gives General Petraeus great leverage for moving the Iraqi government

down the more disciplined path laid out by the Iraq Study Group.''

According to Major Eaton, the real audience for the timeline language

is Prime Minister al-Maliki and the elected government of Iraq:

The argument that this bill aides the enemy is simply not mature--

nobody on the earth underestimates the United States' capacity for

unpredictability. It may further create some sense of urgency in the

rest of our government, beginning with the State Department.

Lt. Gen. William E. Odom, U.S. Army (Ret.), President Reagan's

Director of the National Security Agency, supports the bill because it

``gives the president a chance to pull back from a disastrous course,

re-orient U.S. strategy to achieve regional stability, and win help

from many other countries--the only way peace will eventually be

achieved.''

Mr. Speaker, to date, the war in Iraq has lasted longer than

America's involvement in World War II, the greatest conflict in all

of human history. But there is a difference. The Second World War ended

in complete and total victory for the United States and its allies. But

then again, in that conflict America was led by FDR, a great Commander-

in-Chief, who had a plan to win the war and secure the peace, listened

to his generals, and sent troops in sufficient numbers and sufficiently

trained and equipped to do the job.

As a result of the colossal miscalculation in deciding to invade

Iraq, the loss of public trust resulting from the misrepresentation of

the reasons for launching that invasion, and the breath taking

incompetence in mismanaging the occupation of Iraq, the Armed Forces

and the people of the United States have suffered incalculable damage.

The war in Iraq has claimed the lives of 3,316 brave servicemen and

women (64 in the first 16 days of this month). More than 24,912

Americans have been wounded, many suffering the most horrific injuries.

American taxpayers have paid nearly $400 billion to sustain this

misadventure.

The depth, breadth, and scope of the President's misguided,

mismanaged, and misrepresented war in Iraq is utterly without precedent

in American history. It is a tragedy in a league all its own. But it

was not unforeseeable or unavoidable.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health

and Iraq Accountability Act the House passed last month provides real

benchmarks and consequences if the Iraqi Government fails to live up to

its commitments. First, it requires the President to certify and report

to Congress on July 1, 2007 that substantial progress has been made on

security, political and reconstruction benchmarks by the Iraqi

government.

If the President cannot certify that the Iraqi government has made

substantial progress, redeployment of U.S. combat troops must begin,

with a goal of being completed within 180 days (by December 31, 2007).

If the July certification is made, redeployment of U.S. combat troops

must begin by October 1, 2007, with a goal of being completed within

180 days (by March 31, 2008).

The measure changes the mission of U.S. troops in Iraq after

redeployment from combat to training and equipping Iraqi troops,

targeted counterterrorism operations, and force protection.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, the Iraqi Government is not off to a good

start. The Green Zone surrounding Baghdad remains insecure. Two weeks

ago, a suicide bomber managed to penetrate the security perimeter of

the Iraqi Parliament and detonated a bomb that killed at least three

members of the Iraqi parliament and wounded scores of others.

Additionally, the market represented by Senator McCain as an example of

the improved security situation in Iraq was turned into a killing field

within days after Senator McCain's visit. And just last week, we saw

the bloodiest and deadliest day in Baghdad since the so-called

``surge'' began when 198 Iraqi civilians were massacred by insurgents.

Mr. Speaker, radical Shiite Muslim cleric Muqtada al-Sadr has

reasserted his political power by yanking his loyalists from the

Cabinet, a move aimed at showing his supporters he retains his

credentials as an opposition leader and which increases the pressure on

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to loosen his embrace of the U.S.

occupation, which many Iraqis blame for violence in the country.

These developments, Madam Speaker, illustrate the wisdom of requiring

benchmarks the Iraqi Government must meet to justify continued American

blood and treasure in Iraq. Moreover, because those benchmarks are

established pursuant to President Bush's policies, it is passing

strange indeed that he would threaten to veto the bill since it

necessarily means he would be vetoing his own benchmarks for the

performance of the Iraqi government. He would be vetoing his own

readiness standards for U.S. troops. The President demands this

Congress send him an Iraq war bill with ``no strings.'' But the only

``strings'' attached, Madam Speaker, are the benchmarks and standards

imposed by the President himself.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the enormous financial cost, the human

cost to the men and women of the United States Armed Forces has also

been high but they have willingly paid it. Operation Iraqi Freedom has

exacerbated the Veterans Administration health care facility

maintenance backlog; placed an undue strain on the delivery of medical

treatment and rehabilitative services for current and new veterans; and

exacted a heavy toll on the equipment, training and readiness

requirements, and the families of the men and women of the United

States Armed Forces.

The emergency supplemental acknowledges the sacrifices made by, and

the debt of gratitude, we and the Iraqi people owe to Armed Forces of

the United States. But more than that, it makes a substantial down

payment on that debt by providing substantial increases in funding for

our troops. The supplemental includes a total appropriation of $2.8 billion for

Defense Health Care, which is $1.7 billion above the President's

request. The additional funding supports new initiatives to enhance

medical services for active duty forces and mobilized personnel, and

their family members. Included in this new funding is $450 million for

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/Counseling; $450 million for Traumatic

Brain Injury care and research; $730 million to prevent health care fee

increases for our troops; $20 million to address the problems at Walter

Reed; and $14.8 million for burn care.

Unlike the Republican leadership of the 109th Congress and the Bush

Administration, the new Democratic majority is committed to America's

veterans. What's more, we back up that commitment by investing in their

well-being. For example, the supplemental includes $1.7 billion above

the President's request for initiatives to address the health care

needs of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and the backlog in maintaining

VA health care facilities, including $550 million to address the

backlog in maintaining VA health care facilities so as to prevent the

VA from experiencing a situation similar to that found at Walter Reed

Medical Center.

We provide an additional $250 million for medical administration to

ensure there are sufficient personnel to support the growing number of

Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and to maintain a high level of services

for all veterans; $229 million for treating the growing number of Iraq

and Afghanistan veterans; $100 million for contract mental health care,

which will allow the VA to contract with private mental health care

providers to ensure that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are seen in the

most timely and least disruptive fashion, including members of the

Guard and Reserve; and $62 million to speed up the processing of claims

of veterans returning from Iraq and Aghanistan.

Madam Speaker, when American troops are sent into harm's way, America

has an obligation to do all it can to minimize the risk of harm to the

troops. That is why it was so important that we included additional

funding above the President's request to support our troops. We provide

$2.5 billion more to address the current readiness crisis of our

stateside troops, including ensuring that they are better equipped and

trained. We include $1.4 billion more for military housing allowances

and $311 million more for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP)

vehicles for troops in Iraq. And there is included in the supplemental

$222 million more for infrared countermeasures for Air Force aircraft

to address the growing threat against U.S. air operations in Iraq and

Afghanistan

Equally important, Mr. Speaker, the supplemental contains language

directing the President to adhere to current military guidelines for

unit readiness, deployments, and time between deployments.

The supplemental requires the Defense Department to abide by its

current Unit Readiness policy, requiring the chief of the military

department concerned to determine that a unit is ``fully mission

capable'' before it is deployed to Iraq. The President may waive this

provision by submitting a report to Congress detailing why the unit's

deployment is in the interests of national security despite the

assessment that the unit is not fully mission capable.

The Defense Department is also required to abide by its current

policy and avoid extending the deployment of units in Iraq in excess of

365 days for the Army and 210 days for the Marines. The provision may

be waived by the President only by submitting a report to Congress

detailing the particular reason or reasons why the unit's extended

deployment is in the interests of national security.

Mr. Speaker, to reduce the incidence of combat fatigue and enhance

readiness, it is important that our troops have sufficient ``time out

of the combat zone and training between deployments. That is why we

require the Defense Department to abide by its current policy and avoid

sending units back into Iraq before troops get the required time away

from the war theater. The President may waive this provision by

submitting a report to Congress detailing why the unit's early

redeployment to Iraq is in the interests of national security.

Mr. Speaker, the American people spoke loudly and clearly last

November when they tossed out the Rubber-Stamp Republican Congress.

They voted for a New Direction in Iraq and for change in America. They

voted to disentangle American troops from the carnage, chaos, and civil

war in Iraq. They voted for accountability and oversight, which we

Democrats have begun to deliver on; already the new majority has held

more than 100 congressional hearings related to the Iraq War,

investigating everything from the rampant waste, fraud, and abuse of

Iraq reconstruction funding to troop readiness to the Iraq Study Group

Report to the shameful mistreatment of wounded soldiers recuperating at

Walter Reed Medical Center.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the President should sign this measure, in order

to get these needed resources to our troops and to our veterans and to

hold the Iraqis accountable. By signing this legislation the President

can help deliver the message to the Iraqi people that they must take

responsibility for their own future. By signing this measure the

President can show some leadership in the transitioning of the mission

of U.S. troops from combat to training Iraqi troops and

counterterrorism. Last, this legislation will help restore and

strengthen our military, with a new Strategic Reserve Readiness Fund

among other measures.

Last November the American people signaled clearly their loss of

confidence in the President's leadership and their desire for a new

direction in Iraq. In less than 120 days, the new Democratic majority

has begun to deliver. And we will not rest, Madam Speaker, until we are

clearly on a glide path to the day when our troops come home.

And even then our work will not be done. We must still be about the

business of repairing the damage to America's international reputation

and prestige. But this Democratic majority, led by the Progressive

Caucus and the Out of Iraq Caucus, has ushered in a new era of

oversight, accountability, and transparency to defense and

reconstruction contracting and procurement.

I urge all members to join me in supporting the Conference Report to

H.R. 1591. This is the best way to ensure accountability to our

soldiers who have been sent into battle without proper training or

equipment or a clear mission. It is the best way to keep faith with our

veterans who are not getting the best medical care when they come home.

Passing this supplemental appropriations bill is essential to restoring

our military that is being stretched to the limits by the Bush policy.

Last, it is absolutely necessary to regain the confidence of the

American people who demand a new direction in Iraq.