Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I thank the gentleman

for yielding and commend him for his exceptional leadership in bringing

this important legislation to the floor. I also acknowledge the

leadership of Mr. Murtha and Mr. Skelton for all that they are doing to

make our country safer and to support our troops.

Mr. Speaker, the war in Iraq is the greatest ethical challenge facing

our Nation. This is so because our troops are being sent into battle

without the training, equipment. And the strategic plan for success

because the administration is not honoring our commitment to our

veterans and because the Iraqi war has strained our military, and

therefore weakened our ability to fight the war on terrorism.

By placing an unacceptable strain on our military, this war is

undermining our ability to protect the American people. Instead of

making the American people safer, the war in Iraq has weakened our

ability to protect our Nation from the threat posed by international

terrorism, I repeat.

As Major General Petraeus said, right now we are not prepared. We are

not prepared for the threat this Nation faces here at home. And,

because in this business you cannot be half ready or half prepared, you

are either ready or you are not.

We have put our citizens at greater risk. We have put their lives at

greater risk, their property, our economy, our way of life, and that is

just unacceptable.

Instead of strengthening our hand, the President's policies in Iraq

have weakened our reputation in the world and diminished our ability to

lead the international effort against terrorism, which again is the

real threat.

With U.S. focus on Iraq, the war in Afghanistan has intensified

because of the resurgence of the Taliban and al Qaeda in the absence of

the fullest effort on our part there.

As Major General John Baptiste said, Here is the bottom line.

Americans must come to grips with the fact that our military alone

cannot establish a democracy. We cannot sustain the current operational

tempo without seriously damaging the Army and the Marine Corps. Our

troops have been asked to carry the burden of an ill-conceived mission.

End of quote, Major General John Baptiste.

Our troops have done everything that they have been asked to do and

excellently. We salute them for their courage, their patriotism, and

the sacrifices they and their families are making. Instead of being

honored as the heroes they are when they come home, our wounded

veterans are being forced to cope with a system that is not equipped to

care for them. Preparation was not made.

Americans have been shocked by the revelations of the appalling care

at Walter Reed. As Senator Max Cleland, a great patriot, a decorated

Army veteran, said, Walter Reed is the ugly face of the Iraq war. It is

a face that the American people need to see because this administration

from the beginning never planned to deal with casualties, never planned

for the consequences of this war.

Last fall, the American people voted for a new direction in Iraq.

They made it clear that our troops must be given all they need to do

their jobs but that our troops must be brought home responsibly, safely

and soon.

The President responded to this clear call for winding down the war

in Iraq with a policy of escalation in Iraq that has been tried three

times previously and failed and, additionally, has burdened our already

strained military.

The problems addressed in this bill are problems of the President's

own making. From the start of the war, the President has failed to

recognize and to request in his budget the funds needed by our troops

serving in Iraq, as has been indicated by the distinguished chairman of

the Appropriations Committee, Mr. Obey.

This is the seventh emergency appropriations bill that Congress has

had to pass to make up for the President's failure, seven emergencies.

What is the surprise? Why aren't they understanding the cost of this

war in lives and health, in reputation, in dollars, and the readiness

of our military?

Furthermore, the President's budgets have failed to provide

adequately for the medical needs of our troops wounded in Iraq and for

other veterans. This bill supports our troops, honors our commitments

to our veterans, rebuilds our military, and holds the Iraqi government

accountable. It winds down the war by providing for the responsible

redeployment of our combat forces based on benchmarks endorsed by the

Iraqi government and by President Bush. They are his own benchmarks.

Oddly, though, even though they are the President's own benchmarks,

holding the administration accountable to benchmarks has been

criticized by the administration. They are criticizing their own

benchmarks. Yet both Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and retired

Major General Paul Eaton, formerly in charge of training of Iraqi

security forces, have noted the value of timelines in persuading Iraqis

to make the political compromises needed to end the violence.

Secretary Gates noted, we are all familiar with this, it bears

repeating, ``The strong feelings expressed in Congress about the

timetables probably has had a positive impact . . . in terms of

communicating to the Iraqis that this is not an open-ended

commitment.''

General Eaton said, ``This bill gives General Petraeus great leverage

for moving the Iraqi government down the more disciplined path laid out

by the Iraq Study Group.''

My colleagues, the war in Iraq has lasted longer than World War II

and resulted in the lowest level of American military readiness since

the Vietnam War. It has cost thousands of American lives, tens of

thousands, scores of thousands of Iraqi lives, plus tens of thousands

of our soldiers to suffer grievous injuries, and will cost well over $1

trillion if the war ended today.

The sacrifices borne by our troops and their families demand more

than the blank check the President is asking for, for a war without

end. The sacrifices demand a plan for bringing the war to an end. This

bill contains that plan and provides the President for every dollar he

asked for the troops, and, indeed, thank you, Mr. Murtha, much more.

I urge my colleagues to support it. I urge the President to sign the

bill so that we can focus on winning the war against terrorism, which

is the real threat to the American people. That is our responsibility,

and we fully intend to honor it.