Mr. Speaker, the way to support the troops is to give them

what they need on the battlefield, and what they need when they return

home from their service to reset--or rest and fix the force for future

missions.

This government must be accountable to our troops and their families,

the only people actually carrying the burden for these wars today . . .

along with our children, for whom we are leaving the cost.

Today's bill provides much needed money for troops in Iraq and

Afghanistan . . . policy that requires accountability from the

Administration . . . and funding to heal the readiness of our troops.

It is not the best bill we could get, but you never have a perfect

bill.

But the predicament we are in now demands we support this bill.

We have so many emergencies on our doorstep now . . . mostly because

the last Congress refused to see the negative impact operations in Iraq

had on our military readiness, leaving us vulnerable as a nation . . .

and leaving important national business undone.

Support for the troops is entirely about giving them what they need

to fight the battles we've committed them to fight . . . and this

legislation does just, with one eye on the future . . . something

previous Congresses failed to do.

I wish the Congress would have put more energy into readiness

oversight over the past 5 years to prevent the current situation . . .

but all we can do today is go forward.

I ask my colleagues to join me in supporting our troops--and this

funding for them.

Today's bill addresses many of these readiness concerns, with

additions above the President's request to support our troops,

including:

$2 billion more to address the current readiness crisis of our

stateside troops, including ensuring that they are better equipped and

trained;

$1.1 billion more for military housing allowances;

$3 billion for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles for

troops in Iraq ($1.2 billion above the President's request);

$1.6 billion for body armor;

$9.7 billion to train and equip Afghan and Iraqi security forces.

It also fully funds the BRAC accounts so communities like the Coastal

Bend of Texas--and others adversely affected by base closure

decisions--can plan appropriately for that eventuality.

So many Americans are coming home alive--yet traumatized in their

minds or bodies--to an extent we have never seen before. The scandalous

treatment of heroes at Walter Reed--and the fact that it took a

newspaper story to change it--is testament to the gigantic challenges

facing military and veterans' health care.

The Supplemental includes funding for new initiatives to enhance

medical services for active duty forces and mobilized personnel, and

their family members (appropriating $2.1 billion more than the

President requested.) These initiatives include:

$900 million for Traumatic Brain Injury care and research and PTSD

treatment and research;

$20 million for facility improvement at Walter Reed.

The bill includes $1.8 billion over the President's request to

address the health care needs of veterans returning from Iraq and

Afghanistan and the backlog in maintaining VA health care facilities,

including:

$30 million for at least one new Level I polytrauma center;

$9.4 million in operations costs for new polytrauma residential

transitional rehab programs;

$10 million for additional transition caseworkers;

$10 million for blind rehab programs;

$100 million for enhancements to mental health services;

$20 million for substance abuse treatment;

$8 million for polytrauma clinic support teams;

$25 million for prosthetics;

$228.9 million in additional funds to treat veterans from both wars.

This bill is an excellent starting point for this new Congress to

begin the long overdue oversight of the defense department. We are far

ahead of the past Congresses in giving our troops the true support they

need--with appropriate funding and acknowledgment of the strain and

burden of Iraq.

While the ideal situation for Congress is for the authorizing

committee to determine policy, that's coming very soon. I am grateful

to Chairman Murtha for the extraordinary lengths we've gone to in this

bill to protect our soldiers by certifying their readiness, protecting

the military readiness of the United States.

While this bill is not perfect, it is an extraordinary first step.

As the Readiness Subcommittee Chair, let me offer the House some

perspective on the current state of our readiness:

In the National Intelligence Estimate declassified on Feb. 2, the

U.S. intelligence services note that--absent a remarkable reversal of

fortunes in Iraq--they find that ``the overall security situation will

continue to deteriorate at rates comparable to the latter part of

2006.'' Further, the NIE determines: ``even if the violence is

diminished . . . Iraqi leaders will be hard pressed to achieve sustained political reconciliation in the time

frame of this estimate''--which is 12-18 months.

The NIE goes on to say that if the U.S. were to leave Iraq, a

greater, wider civil war would erupt, saying: ``the ISF [Iraqi Security

Forces] would be unlikely to survive as a non-sectarian national

institution, and neighboring countries might intervene openly in the

conflict.''

Now, common sense tells me that will be the case whenever we leave .

. . today, manana, this summer, next year . . . or 50 years from now.

Whenever we leave Iraq, the unclassified intelligence estimate guides

us on what we can expect. Our choice is in how long we remain . . . and

how many more brave and patriotic volunteers--who carry the battle for

this Nation--are lost in Iraq.

Today we have a chance to begin that change--in the purest way we can

support the troops . . . men and women, and their families, who are

alone in carrying the burden for the Iraq war.

The readiness of our next deployers--our ability to be prepared for

current and future threats--is diminished due to the war in Iraq. We've

worn out our force and their equipment, and that has huge implications

for our ability to handle the threats to come.

The GAO has looked at this . . . and come away saying the Army itself

``cannot determine the extent to which the existing inventory reflects

what the Army needs'' . . . and GAO notes that: ``until these strategic

and management challenges are addressed, the Army will face uncertain

risks should new conflicts occur.''

GAO also reports that all services ``have drawn heavily from their

prepositioned stocks to support [the ongoing wars]'' . . . and ``these

sustained military operations are taking a toll on the condition and

readiness of military equipment and the Army and Marine Corps face a

number of long-term challenges that will affect the timing and cost of

equipment repair and replacement.''

GAO concludes: ``the Army's decisions today have profound future

implications for the entire department and potentially affect our

ability to respond to a conflict.''

Last year, Congress established a Commission on the National Guard

and Reserves, which has also reported back to us. They tell us point

blank: ``DoD's failure to appropriately consider National Guard needs

and funding requirements has produced a National Guard that is not

fully ready to meet current and emerging missions.''

The Commission says more pointedly: ``The lack of sufficient and

ready equipment is a problem common to active and reserve components.

In particular, the equipment readiness of the Army National Guard is

unacceptable and has reduced the capability of the U.S. to respond to

current and additional major contingencies, foreign and domestic.''

Army Chief of Staff Schoomaker told the Commission: despite the

readiness of troops overseas, ``88 percent of the forces that are back

here in the U.S. are very poorly equipped today in the Army National

Guard.''

The Commission also noted that state governors ``have become

increasingly concerned about whether their National Guard forces would

be available to respond to emergencies here at home.''