Mr. Speaker, I am grateful we are considering this

legislation to extend the date for termination of the Office of the

Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, SIGIR. This office

provides a hugely important function as a watchdog for fraud, waste,

and abuse of funds intended for Iraq reconstruction programs.

The American taxpayer deserves vigorous and continuous oversight of

how funds are being spent in Iraq. It is also important to the Iraqi

people, for whom the American Government provided a generous package of

development and reconstruction funds that have not always been spent

wisely.

I have made 15 trips to Iraq and have seen firsthand the essential

work done by this office. Congress clearly made a mistake in passing

the fiscal year 2007 Defense Authorization Act allowing the SIGIR

office to close prematurely.

This legislation will correct that mistake and also wisely require

SIGIR to prepare a final forensic audit on all funds appropriated to

the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund, IRRF.

As chairman of the Government Reform Subcommittee on National

Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, and working

under the leadership of Committee Chairman Tom Davis, I have held

several oversight hearings on contracting in Iraq.

We've investigated the failure to establish realistic requirements

and to define contract terms and conditions, limited competition and

insufficient agency oversight. Reports provided to us by SIGIR were

invaluable.

We all recognize that the security situation in Iraq makes

reconstruction especially difficult and dangerous. But the Government

has a responsibility to the taxpayer to do all that it can to ensure

that dollars are spent wisely and well.

We have a special responsibility to our soldiers and marines in Iraq.

One of the most important reasons Congress appropriated money for Iraq

reconstruction was to support our troops by showing the Iraqi people we

wanted to help them build a new Iraq, and reduce the risk that an

insurgency would develop and grow. We know the insurgency exists and

sectarian violence has flared, but the importance of the projects

funded through the IRFF has not diminished in the slightest.

Finally, I believe a strong watchdog office like SIGIR will help us

to learn lessons about the realities of contracting in a post-conflict

environment.

I am grateful my colleagues in the Senate, Susan Collins and Joseph

Lieberman, offered this legislation. I also thank Mr. Skelton who

offered this legislation in the House and recognized the need to

continue SIGIR's mission.