Mr. Speaker, I rise today to say that

setting deadlines for withdrawal from Iraq is unacceptable. I am in

agreement with the concept of adding a series of success checkpoints,

and I suggested as much in a letter to the President 2 weeks ago. It

worked before when we set deadlines for a new constitution and

elections, and I think it could work again.

But withdrawal is the Democratic leadership's only solution if the

Iraqis fall short of the benchmarks. That is simply too simplistic. It

is too limiting. It is tying the hands of the President and the

Pentagon.

We should have benchmarks, but the response shouldn't be all or

nothing. These benchmarks should carry a gradation of consequences,

rather than an all-or-nothing withdrawal.

Pulling back to the perimeter is an obvious step between surging and

withdrawal. There are other gradations that our military leaders could

propose to the President.

To begin an immediate withdrawal upon failure of a benchmark is like

writing a lease with an eviction-only remedy for a late payment. It

makes sense to have a section in the default paragraphs calling for a

late payment fee before you begin the eviction.

The leadership in Iraq needs to know that they don't have forever to

make the decisions regarding dividing up the oil fairly and regarding

returning Baathists to positions of public service. They need to know

they don't have forever in coming up with a working model of pluralism.

We are providing their protection. We have the right to tell them to

hurry. We have an obligation to our servicemen and women to tell the

Iraqi factions to hurry.

But we don't need to tie the hands of our field commanders and our

President with an arbitrary withdrawal date, predetermined by some

political purposes and not by what is happening in the Iraq.

The circumstances on the ground in Iraq have changed at least three

times since we went in--from an action against a dangerous regime, to

an action against insurgents, to a civil war between Iraqi Shias and

Iraqi Sunnis.

The circumstances may change a couple of more times before we get

Iraq to reasonable stability, and, who knows, the Iraqis may ultimately

want us to retain a base or two.

This bill overreaches. This bill improperly limits the options open

to our commanders and our troops. This bill makes no provision for any

number of successes in Iraq, which are still quite possible. And I urge

its defeat.