Mr. Speaker, just a few weeks ago I visited our servicemen

and women in Iraq. My visit confirmed my belief that we must support

our troops and redeploy them. That is why I will vote for the U.S.

Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act.

When I met with the troops in Iraq, they told me that they lacked the

basic equipment needed to do their job, like body armor, light bulbs

for vehicles, and scissors for bandages and gauzes. In some cases, they

told me that the equipment they use is unreliable due to excess use.

Our troops are also concerned with the lengths of their tours in Iraq;

they told me that they are not only demanding, but exhausting. Our

troops are being overextended. For many of them, it is not their first

tour, but their second or third. Many of them have missed the birth of

their children or the death of their parents.

It is time for a new direction in Iraq. The U.S. Troop Readiness,

Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act does that--it gives the

American people the first step in a new direction to what our troops

properly deserve. A new direction, with benchmarks for success in Iraq,

with benchmarks that ensure our troops have the equipment and training

they need, and a benchmark that guarantees a fully funded deployment

out of Iraq. This bill makes it clear, and sends the message that the

majority of Americans want--an end to the war.

In the last 4 years, we have spent close to $400 billion on the war

in Iraq. The war on Iraq has claimed the lives of nearly 3,200 and more

than 24,000 servicemen and women have been injured or permanently

disabled. More than half of those will not be able to lead a normal

life because of the severity of their injuries, impacting not only them

but also their families. In the 32nd Congressional District of

California which I represent, we have lost 13 sons to combat. Despite

all this, the Administration has failed to outline concrete steps to

end the war and has left our servicemen and women without adequate

equipment and our veterans without proper care.

The U.S. Troops Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability

Act will provide our troops with the equipment they need, require

Iraqis to take control of their own country, help fight the real war on

terror in Afghanistan, and establish a strategy for the redeployment of

U.S. troops no later than March 1, 2008. This bill provides $1.7

billion more for military health care, including Walter Reed, and

includes $1.7 billion more for our veterans, so those who served before

and those recently serving have access to adequate care. It includes

$2.5 billion to improve troop readiness and helps servicemen and women

afford housing. This bill also represents help for those at home,

including uninsured children and farmers whose emergent needs were

ignored under the Republican leadership.

I don't support this war. I voted against authorization of force in

2002 and have repeatedly called for the redeployment of troops out of

Iraq. The Bush Administration's failed policies in Iraq and Afghanistan

have gone unchecked--until now. I'm voting for this bill because it

will--for the first time--set a date for the war to end--a date when

U.S. combat troops must be out of Iraq. The bill isn't perfect, but it

draws a clear line between those who want to stay indefinitely in Iraq,

and those like me who, along with the majority of Americans, want to

end it. Passage of this bill is the beginning of the end for our

soldiers not being prepared and not knowing when they will come home.

Let us not forget that these last 4 years so many of our sons and

daughters and their families have given the greatest sacrifice. I

remain supportive of our troops and know that they will continue to do

a great job and we in Congress must do ours this week. I support the

U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act

because I know it is the first real step to the redeployment and safe

return home of all of our servicemen and women.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the U.S. Troop Readiness,

Veterans' Health, and Accountability Act H.R. 1591. Four years ago, I

voted against the resolution giving the President the authority to go

to war with Iraq because I had serious doubts about the need to rush

into military action. U.N. inspectors were still doing their work

examining Iraq's nuclear weapons program and had not found weapons of

mass destruction. Our allies who supported President George Bush, Sr.

for Desert Storm were not supporting us! All diplomatic efforts had not

been exhausted and there seemed to be no clear goals or strategy. There

was no exit strategy to bring back our troops. There was no evidence

that taking action in Iraq was urgent when the fight in Afghanistan was

still underway. A proposed budget for the war was never presented to

Congress.

Now we are entering our 5th year of this conflict and my concerns

have been proven correct. Most important, there were no weapons of mass

destruction. The Taliban is resurging in Afghanistan because we diluted

our efforts.

We still have no goals or strategy in Iraq and our reputation around

the world has been seriously undermined. Thousands of young Americans

have been killed, disabled or wounded. we will have spent half a

trillion dollars on this war and there is no end in sight.

It's time to heed the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Iraq

Study Group and take a new direction in Iraq. The legislation before us

sets definite benchmarks and timelines that put the Iraqi government on

reasonable notice that they must assume responsibility for their own

destiny.

This Supplemental Appropriations Bill lets the American people know

when our troops will begin coming home.

Many of my colleagues oppose setting a deadline because they believe

the insurgents will just outwait us. But unless we are prepared to be

in Iraq forever, this fear will always be a concern. History has shown

that insurgents and terrorists are very, very patient.

The religious and secretarian hatred in the Middle East has been

present for centuries and our presence in Iraq for a few more years is

not going to change that. Our presence in Iraq will just get thousands

more of our servicemen and women, caught in the middle of their civil

war, killed and wounded.

My Republican colleagues had no qualms about mandating to President

Clinton when our forces had to come out of Kosovo. It seems to me that

this is not any different.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation that will bring an

orderly, responsible end to the war in Iraq.