Mr. Speaker, there is no issue more important to the

American people and to the Members of this Congress than the war in

Iraq. Over 3,000 American military personnel have been killed in this

war. Over 22,000 have been wounded in combat-related action. Some have

been injured for life. Several thousand more of our troops have

sustained serious injuries or suffered sickness while serving in Iraq;

and tens of thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children dead.

So far, it has cost the United States $387 billion, and next week we

will receive another supplemental request from the President in the

range of $100 billion to $130 billion more.

In blood, in treasure, the costs of the war in Iraq have been high. I

believe, Mr. Speaker, that we must change the dynamic in Iraq. We must

end our occupation, engage the countries in the region to help the

Iraqis negotiate an end to the sectarian violence tearing their country

apart, and let the Iraqi people determine their own destiny.

I firmly believe, Mr. Speaker, there is no military victory to be had

in Iraq. So I am convinced that we must focus our efforts on the

uniformed men and women we have put in harm's way and bring them safely

home. This is why I am introducing today the Safe and Orderly

Withdrawal from Iraq Act.

This is a very straightforward bill, Mr. Speaker. Within 30 days of

enactment, the United States would initiate a safe, orderly, and

responsible withdrawal of all U.S. military forces from Iraq.

The withdrawal would take no more than 6 months and include the

transfer to the Iraqi government of all bases and facilities that have

been operated or occupied by U.S. military personnel. During the

withdrawal period, funding is maintained to ensure that our forces have

the ability to complete or transfer their duties in an orderly manner,

defend themselves as necessary, and be fully supported as they move out

of Iraq. Once the withdrawal is completed, defense funding for the war

would end.

Under this bill, financial support and equipment could continue to be

provided to the Iraqi security forces or to a multilateral force the

Iraqi government might request for help in continuing the training of

their forces and in providing security during the period of withdrawal

and afterwards.

Nothing in this bill affects U.S. funding for economic and social

reconstruction projects. The bill also allows the U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers to complete reconstruction projects currently under way

should the Iraqi government make such a request.

Finally, the bill asserts the authority of the President to arrange

asylum for those Iraqi citizens who might be physically endangered by

the withdrawal of our military presence. As we all know, many Iraqi

civilians have bravely served our Armed Forces as translators, drivers,

administrative staff and in other capacities. Should they be threatened

with violence or retaliation because of their association with our

forces, we should extend to them the protection they require and that

they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, this bill does not walk away from Iraq. It maintains

financial equipment and material support for the Iraqi military and

security forces. It continues economic, social and reconstruction

assistance for Iraq, and its impact would trigger greater diplomatic

engagement in the region which is missing at the present moment.

Mr. Speaker, there are no easy answers for the many questions facing

Iraq's future. There is no perfect legislative answer for the situation

in Iraq. But I do know that our troops do not belong in the crossfire

of a violent Iraqi sectarian war. The American people understand this.

They are far ahead of the politicians in Washington. They want us to do

what is right. They want us to bring our troops home, and they want

that to happen in a safe, orderly and responsible manner.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this war in Iraq is a moral blunder. I

believe that the war in Iraq represents one of the biggest political,

diplomatic and military mistakes in our history. It is time for us to

end this war. I urge my colleagues to support the Safe and Orderly

Withdrawal from Iraq Act.