Mr. Speaker, tomorrow this body will vote on the U.S.

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

After 4 years of failed policies from the Bush administration, and

absolutely no accountability demanded by the previous Republican-led

Congresses, this body has the opportunity to say enough. We say enough

to continuing the open-ended war with no end in sight. We say enough to

giving away hard-earned taxpayer dollars to the Iraqi Government

without any real mechanisms for accountability. We say enough to

ignoring the will of the American people who have overwhelmingly

demanded a new direction and a new course in Iraq.

This week the Iraq war will enter its fifth year. It has already

eclipsed the length of the U.S. participation in the Civil War, World

War I, World War II, and the Korean War. More than 3,200 American

heroes have paid the ultimate sacrifice, while more than 24,000 have

been injured, and tens of thousands of Iraqis have been killed, just as

millions have been fleeing the country.

Despite this immense sacrifice and hardship, the President's war

strategy has not made the Middle East or our Nation safer.

Today the Middle East is less stable than it was in 2003. An Iraq in

chaos and an emboldened Iran has fundamentally changed the balance of

power in the region in a way that undermines the security of our Nation

and the entire region. The war has caused us to lose sight of the

mission in Afghanistan where the Taliban is resurgent and Osama bin

Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, and other key members of al Qaeda, the

terrorist group responsible for killing 3,000 Americans on 9/11, are

still at large and still plotting against us.

Our own National Intelligence Estimate tells us that the war in Iraq

estimate has increased, and the threat of terrorism globally has

increased.

Just 2 weeks ago, I visited Iraq, and I met with the brave servicemen

and -women. I deeply admire these individuals and their families. Out

of pure selflessness and a profound love of our Nation, they have

volunteered to serve. They do so humbly and honorably.

The Bush administration owes them a strategy that is worthy of their

sacrifice. When they failed to provide it, we must hold them

accountable. Our Nation can no longer afford the failed policies put

forward by President Bush.

We must step forward, abandon the rubber-stamp policies of the

previous Congress, and reassert our place as a coequal branch of

government. Tomorrow we will have the opportunity to meet this

obligation and put the administration on notice. The days of writing a

blank check for the mistaken and mismanaged war are over.

When we send our men and women into Iraq without the proper

equipment, training and rest, as the President continues to, we expose

them to greater danger. This legislation we will vote on tomorrow

recognizes this fact by requiring the President to honor his own

standards and the standards the Department of Defense has set for the

troop readiness, training and equipment.

When our own wounded warriors return to the United States, we as a

Nation have an obligation to ensure that they are taken care of. There

is simply no excuse for the deplorable conditions of neglect that our

soldiers have faced at Walter Reed medical center. That is a national

disgrace.

This legislation addresses our veterans health care crisis by adding

$1.7 billion to treat the growing number of veterans, to address the

maintenance backlogs at the VA health care facilities, and to ensure a

significant level of personnel to deliver quality services. This

legislation recognizes that the only solution in Iraq is political and

diplomatic.

As General Petraeus, the top military commander in Iraq, has said:

``There was no military solution to a problem like that in Iraq.''

This legislation will hold the Iraqi Government accountable by

requiring them to meet their own benchmarks for political progress.

We are putting them on notice that they must take the political steps

necessary to achieve stability, including disarming the militia and a

plan that equally shares oil revenues around the country.

We are also sending a strong clear message to the Bush administration

that they must engage in tough diplomacy needed to ensure that Iraq's

neighbors do not continue to undermine the efforts of our troops or

they undermine the hope for stability in Iraq.

Most significantly, this legislation will lead to the responsible end

of our military engagement in Iraq through a phased redeployment of

U.S. combat troops.

Instead of continuing the President's policy of open-ended

commitment, strategically redeploying combat troops from Iraq, while

maintaining a small presence to train Iraqi troops and engage in

counterterrorism operations is the most responsible strategy in Iraq.

We will move our troops from direct engagement. It will require the

Iraqis to protect Iraqis, and it will allow our Nation to be better

prepared for other contingencies affecting the security of our Nation.

Let there be no mistake: this is the President's war, and the

President must be held accountable for its military and diplomatic

failures. With this vote, we are demanding that the President meet his

obligations to our men and our women and to our Nation.

With this vote, we are fulfilling our promise to the American people

that we set a new direction in Iraq.

And, with this vote we are putting forward the leadership needed to

bring the war in Iraq to a responsible conclusion and bring our troops

home.