Mr. Speaker, I rise in support for the Responsible

Redeployment from Iraq Act.

Mr. Speaker, out of all of this Iraq business, there's one star, and

that star, as every American should know and appreciate, is the young

American in uniform. That is the purpose of this legislation, and I

take this opportunity to compliment those who serve our country

wherever they may be, those in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the

world or here within our United States. I'm proud of them. And they are

our stars.

Mr. Speaker, we have been engaged in Iraq since March of 2003. And in

hearing discussion on the rule, it's obvious that some people wish to

confuse the effort in Afghanistan with the effort in Iraq. They are

separate and distinct.

The war in Afghanistan is something that we needed to do. The Taliban

government gave sanctuary to the al Qaeda terrorists in that country of

Afghanistan, and we did the right thing by going in there.

The war in Iraq is one of choice. There have been discussions and

difficulty and debate over how we got there, but we are there. But

people should know that the insurgency in Iraq and the subsequent

sectarian violence between the Shiite and Sunni is a different and

distinct war from that in Afghanistan.

You know, in history, we learn from the past. Strategic mistakes have

been made, and we're supposed to learn from that. And we have to go to

our revolution in 1776, when the British General Howell did not follow

up his victories against George Washington's troops on Long Island.

Consequently, George Washington's troops were able to encamp at Valley

Forge and later attack successfully Trenton and New Jersey. That was a

strategic mistake that allowed our revolution to be successful.

Lee's invasion of the north, the battles of Antietam and Gettysburg,

were strategic mistakes of the Confederacy.

And, Mr. Speaker, sadly, we have seen not only strategic mistakes in

Iraq, we have seen irretrievable strategic mistakes; no plan for the

aftermath, the initial victory, the number of troops was not as General

Shinseki recommended, far too few; the unguarded caches of weapons and

ammunition, allowing the insurgency to have free access to them; the

dismissal of the Iraqi Army, rather than giving them a pay check and a

shovel, the closing of the Iraqi industries, the deBaathification,

which put thousands of people out of work, including thousands of

school teachers. These irretrievable mistakes made it very difficult

for us to have any sort of positive success in that country.

We hear the call, well, wait until September. There'll be another

report. Well, we have been in Iraq for four Septembers. There is the

old song that those of us with a little gray in our hair remember as

the September song. And one line from that song of yesteryear, ``we

haven't got time for the waiting game.'' That's where we are now. We

don't have time for the waiting game.

The purpose of this is a matter of readiness. It's a matter of

national security. It's a matter that we must face now, or else the

strain and stretch on our ground forces, particularly the Army and, of

course, the Marines, will be beyond repair for many, many years.

It's a matter of strategic importance that we redeploy from Iraq in a

responsible manner, and that's what this bill does. And we are able to

keep our forces strong.

We never know what's going to happen. The last 30 years, we've had 12

military contingencies in which our Armed Forces have been engaged,

four of which have been major in size; none of them predictable. We don't

know what the future holds. But for national security interests, we

need to have a ready force, particularly our ground forces, which are

being strained so very much now.

Further, it is important that we pass the security of Iraq over to

the Iraqi government and to the security forces of that country. We

cannot hold their hand forever. They must step up to the plate and take

over their own security. It's important that that happen.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, initially sets forth a sense of Congress that

the authorization for use of military force against Iraq was enacted

into law in October of 2002, and that the government of Iraq that was

in power at that time has been removed and it's leader tried, convicted

and executed by a freely elected government of Iraq; and further, that

the government of Iraq, the current government of Iraq does not pose a

threat to the United States, and for more than 4 years, the efforts of

our Armed Forces have been valiant in their work and in their combat in

that country.

We need a responsible redeployment. This legislation gives it to us.

It states that the Secretary of Defense shall commence the reduction of

the number of armed forces in that country beginning not later than 120

days after the date of enactment. It also states that such redeployment

shall be complete to a limited presence which is spelled out in the

bill, not later than April 1, 2008.

The question before us, are we, as a country, any safer now than we

were when we went into Iraq in March of 2003? What has it done for the

security of our country?

We see the sectarian violence, on top of the insurgency, the

insurgency being aided by foreign fighters, many of them al Qaeda, and

consequently, we know that the end must be done by the Iraqi security

forces. That's what we are trying to do in this legislation;

responsible redeployment of the American forces, cause the Iraqi troops

and forces to take over their own security, and restore the readiness

to our ground forces here in the United States.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I have, and I offer as part of the Record, Mr. Speaker, a letter I

just received dated July 12 from Lee H. Hamilton from the Woodrow

Wilson International Center of Scholars, who is the national president

thereof. And I will

read just part of it and not take any more time. But it says, ``Dear

Ike, thank you for sharing H.R. 2956 on responsible redeployment from

Iraq. The legislation outlines the right change in mission for U.S.

forces in Iraq, and redeployment within a responsible time frame. It

effectively outlines the functions of the residual force that would

remain in Iraq after redeployment, and makes an important contribution

by focusing on the need for an accounting of U.S. interests in both

Iraq and the wider region.''

I offer this letter at this time.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to my friend and

colleague, the gentleman from South Carolina who is our distinguished

majority whip, Mr. Clyburn.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

I just heard the minority leader say that we are willfully ignoring

the consequences of Iraq. That is what I'm talking about, the willful

consequences of Iraq when I spoke a few moments ago about the stretch

and the strain and the difficulty of gluing our Army and Marines back

together again.

This is serious business. We have a readiness crisis due to our

extended operations in Iraq. Readiness in the Army's combat units has

fallen to a dangerous level. Half of the Army's active brigades are in

combat, and the remaining units are preparing for deployment. Units

preparing for combat do not have all of their assigned personnel or

equipment when preparing for combat. Combat units are experiencing

equipment shortfalls; and let me mention that we have lost over 2,000

trucks and Humvees, over 100 tanks and armored vehicles, and over 100

aircraft. Combat units' readiness is being sustained at the expense of

nondeployed units through the use of emergency war stocks.

I am worried. My heart breaks because no one seems to be listening on

the other side, and no one who is opposed to this legislation mentioned

in this debate anything about the stretch and the strain on our ground

forces of the United States. That concerns me. That is the willful

ignoring of consequences of Iraq. Something must be done.

Lee Hamilton, the co-chairman of the Iraq Study Group, spoke in a

letter to me, which I read a few moments ago, endorsing this

legislation as a responsible bill: We must do something, and it must be

done today. This is serious business.

Let me salute the eloquence of my friend from California, Mr. Hunter.

He asked us to wait until September. We have had four Septembers

already in Iraq. And you know what? It reminds me, and maybe some of

those who have a little gray in their hair, Mr. Speaker, will recall a

song that was popular decades ago, and that line in that song, the

September song, that says, we haven't got time for the waiting game. We

don't have time for the waiting game.

This is the right time, the right measure, the right issue. It is

right for our ground forces. It is right for those in uniform. It is

right for their families. It is right for our country. We have been

engaged in Iraq since March of 2003. We have threats yet unforeseen.

If we continue to strain our ground forces as they are, we will not

be ready for them. Hopefully they never come, but as sure as God made

little green apples, those threats will be there. That's the purpose of

this. The readiness of our forces and the capability of what they need

to do for us in the days ahead, that is our job under the Constitution,

to raise and maintain. That's what we are doing.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I say that we need to pass this

legislation. We need to do so to pass the responsibility back to the

Iraqis, to keep our forces in a higher state of readiness, and to make

sure that the future is all the more safer for those of us here in our

country.