Mr. Speaker, I claim the time that has been yielded to

me, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I have the greatest respect for the chairman of the

Armed Services Committee, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. Skelton). I

honor him and respect him deeply. But this legislation is deeply and

fatally flawed. It will damage America and American interests for two

reasons:

First, it is a purely political document, hopelessly vague and

meaningless. Let me explain why. The bill turns on two key terms. One,

that the United States transition to a ``limited presence'' in Iraq

within the next 120 days; and, two, that the President provide a

justification of ``the minimum force levels required to protect the

United States' national security interests in Iraq.''

While I am pleased that the authors recognize that we are in Iraq to

protect our national security interests, again, the legislation is

hopelessly vague and therefore meaningless. Neither of these two key

terms, ``limited presence'' and ``minimum force level required to

protect U.S. national security interests'' is defined. Oh, the bill has

a definition section and other terms are defined, but ``limited

presence'' and ``minimum force level required to protect U.S. national

security interests'' aren't defined.

You might ask yourself, why would the authors of the measure leave

two such critically important terms undefined? Well, the answer is

easy: Because this bill is not about policy; this bill is about

politics.

The chairman of the Armed Services Committee knows exactly why these

terms are not defined, and indeed the Democratic leadership knows why

these terms are not defined. They are not defined because they need

ambiguity. Indeed, ambiguity in this legislation is essential to its

passage. They know that they can't agree on what the meanings of these

terms are. You see, if they defined ``limited presence'' as too many

troops, then their most liberal, most antiwar Members would not vote

for the legislation. They couldn't. And, if they defined limited

presence too low, then their Blue Dog Members would not support the

bill. Again, this bill is about beating up on the President and about

scaring nervous Members of Congress.

Again, let's look at the other term, ``minimum force levels required

to protect U.S. national security interests.'' Why not define what that

minimum is? Answer, again, if they define it too high, those who want

out tonight and want our force levels at the lowest conceivable level

couldn't vote for the bill. And if they define it too low, then those

who recognize we face a threat from Iran and other regions' interests

wouldn't vote for the bill. It is deeply flawed for those reasons.

And I would ask proponents of the bill what they would say if the

President, as he could under the language of the bill, were to decide

that ``limited presence'' means 154,000 troops, just 1,000 fewer than

we have now? That would comply with the letter of the bill, but it

wouldn't satisfy proponents of the bill.

And what if the President, as he can under the language of the bill,

were to define the term ``minimum force level required to protect U.S.

national interests'' not as 155,000 troops as we have today, but rather

at 500,000 troops?

You see, they can't agree on those terms. I wonder how many of the

Members realize that the critical terms in this bill aren't defined.

The bill is also flawed for a second reason, and that is that it

reneges on the essential agreement Congress struck just 2 weeks ago. It

is a little bit like Lucy pulling the football out from under Linus

just before he kicks it. Here, don't rely on my opinion; rely instead

on today's Washington Post. You see, today's Washington Post editorial

makes the case for me. The Washington Post, not exactly a conservative

journal, says, ``It seems like just weeks ago, because it was, that

Congress approved funding for the war in Iraq and instructed General

David H. Petraeus to report back on the war's progress in September.''

Ladies and gentlemen, this isn't September.

The Post goes on to write, ``Before Congress begins ordering

withdrawals, it should at least give those generals the months they

asked for to see whether their strategy can offer some hope.'' We owe

it to those generals to give them, as The Washington Post says, the

months they asked for, but, instead, we have given them 27 days.

I urge my colleagues to oppose this bill.

I reserve the balance of my time.

I note the gentleman cited the Washington Post. I wonder

if he has read the editorial today which says that we should be giving

our troops at least until September.

Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to how much time I have remaining?