Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to the legislation

before us today mandating a hard deadline for the Secretary of Defense

to significantly reduce our troop presence in Iraq.

Over the last several months, similar attempts on the part of the

Democratic leadership to require an arbitrary date for troop withdrawal

have gone nowhere, wasting precious time debating legislation that

would be vetoed by the President. While I believe strongly that we must

change course in Iraq and bring our men and women home, it would be a

mistake for Congress to think it could disregard the complexity of this

conflict by simply picking a random date for withdrawal. Forcing such

an important decision without considering the advice of military and

foreign policy leaders, could lead to the loss of many more lives and

open the door for sectarian chaos to spread across the entire Middle

East.

For this reason, I have been a leading supporter of the Iraq Study

Group, also known as the Baker-Hamilton Commission, which in December

2006 outlined a comprehensive approach for bringing a responsible

conclusion to the conflict in Iraq. In fact, in early 2007, I went to

the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives and called on the Bush

Administration to change course in Iraq and implement the Study Group's

recommendations for a new, robust diplomatic offensive in the Middle

East. Since then, Secretary of State Rice has taken several encouraging

steps to open the lines of communication with key nations like Iran and

Syria, and I am hopeful that my efforts, and those of my colleagues,

have prompted the White House to improve its diplomatic efforts in the

region.

This September, Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker will

submit a very important report regarding the conflict in Iraq. While I

am hopeful that this report will show progress, I also feel strongly

that we must begin developing a responsible post surge strategy.

Therefore, on June 5, 2007, I joined over forty other Members of

Congress--Republicans and Democrats--in introducing the Iraq Study

Group Recommendations Implementation Act. The Study Group

recommendations, which would bolster diplomacy, improve political and

economic reconstruction, and handoff the combat mission to the Iraqis,

represent the first truly bipartisan proposal for ending this conflict

and bringing Americans home.

Clearly, there is no easy solution in Iraq. Still, it is extremely

discouraging that the Democratic leadership continues to hold votes on

``symbolic'' withdrawal timelines, while refusing to consider the

bipartisan Iraq Study Group proposal--legislation that as of today has

been cosponsored by 25 Democrats and 33 Republicans in the House.

Mr. Speaker, the bipartisan Baker-Hamilton Commission serves as a

model for how we must work together in a responsible fashion to

stabilize Iraq and get our brave soldiers off the streets. Rather than

wasting time debating arbitrary timelines that disregard the complexity

of the situation, it is critical that we come together now in support

of a responsible exit strategy. I am encouraged that thirteen

additional Members of Congress have signed-on to the Iraq Study Group

Implementation Act since we introduced it over a month ago and I am

hopeful that Members from across the political spectrum will join me in

uniting behind this crucial effort.