Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this legislation.

As a veteran of the U.S. Army myself, I strongly support our troops,

our veterans and their families. Our troops have done everything they

have been asked to do and done it exceptionally well. I am tremendously

proud of all the troops from North Carolina and across America who have

done their duty so admirably. They are our heroes, and we salute them.

But as the Representative for Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base, I am

very concerned about the state of readiness of America's armed forces.

I have traveled to Iraq twice, and after I returned last year, I said

the Administration must change this failed policy. Specifically, I said

that we need more focus on the threat of international terrorists. The

National Counterterrorism Center has released a report today entitled:

``Al-Qaida Better Positioned To Strike the West'' that concludes Osama

Bin Laden's network has been reconstructed while America's military is

bogged down in the civil war in Iraq, with no end in sight.

H.R. 2956, written by Chairman Ike Skelton of the Armed Services

Committee, one of the most respected Members of this body and an expert

on military policy, is a good first step for this needed new direction.

It requires the Iraqi leaders to begin to provide for the security of

their own country by redeploying American combat troops from the

sectarian civil war and reconstituting our readiness and transitioning

American forces to the mission of effective counterterrorism anywhere

in the world where radical jihadists threaten America and our

interests. Let me be clear that H.R. 2956 maintains the flexibility of

the Commander in Chief to direct the operations of the armed forces. It

simply calls for a change in policy and public accountability for a

comprehensive U.S. strategy for Iraq.

North Carolina's senior Senator stated it well this week when she

said, ``It is my firm hope and belief that we can start bringing our

troops home in 2008.'' This bill begins to do just that. I urge my

colleagues to join me in voting for it.