Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of ``H.R. 2956, The

Responsible Redeployment from Iraq Act,'' and had I been on the floor

today, I would have voted ``yes.''

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend due to the fact that I was

given the high honor of receiving the NAACP Spingarn Award. However,

this is an extremely important piece of legislation. One of our

greatest responsibilities is the protection of our soldiers. The

Democrats are determined to end this war and bring our young men and

women back home. H.R. 2956 will now provide such a policy that will

allow us to meet our national security interests in Iraq and the

broader Middle East region by maintaining a minimal force. The

Administration has provided a failed policy and it is time for a new

direction. We understand that this transition must be well thought out

and handled responsibly; with a view toward an enduring national

security interest in the region.

This legislation, acknowledges that our military has accomplished the

mission they were given in the original 2002 authorization to use force

and that Iraq must now take leadership for its own future. For years

Democrats have advocated for the responsible redeployment of American

forces from Iraq. The relocation and redistribution of our soldiers is

long overdue and enough American lives have been sacrificed for a

failed policy. Democrats have argued that the Iraqis must take primary

accountability for their country and their security. American presence

in Iraq must be re-focused away from playing referee in a civil war. We

must focus and limit our efforts to military missions such as counter-

terrorism, training Iraqi security forces and protecting American

personnel at the embassy.

The bill requires American forces to begin redeploying within 120

days and to complete the transition to a limited presence by April 1,

2008. The bill also requires a comprehensive strategy by January 1,

2008 for U.S. policy in Iraq, including a discussion of American

national security interests in Iraq and the broader region, the

specific missions remaining forces would undertake, and minimum force

levels required to accomplish them. Finally, it requires the President

to submit updates on the use of and need for any forces remaining in

Iraq every 90 days starting on July 1, 2008. The President has been

given ample time to bring our soldiers home. It is now time for us to

act on their behalf.

I am committed to the homecoming of our brave men and women who have

so valiantly completed their mission. So, I am honored to support this

legislation.