Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this bill

because I strongly support a responsible redeployment of our troops

from Iraq.

It should not have been necessary for us to consider this bill today.

Back in March, I voted for, and Congress passed, legislation that would

have begun a draw-down of combat troops in favor of a disengagement

strategy in Iraq. Regrettably, however, the president vetoed that

legislation and then moved in exactly the opposite direction by

escalating the number of troops committed to Iraq.

So, while a war can't be effectively led by committee, by failing to

exercise responsible leadership, the president continues to make it

necessary for Congress to assert itself. And thus the House is acting

again today--and whatever the outcome, we will act again and again

until we find the necessary support to change course in Iraq.

The war in Iraq has cost this Nation the blood of its soldiers, the

treasure of its citizens, and the good will of our allies around the

world. The average number of attacks, Iraqi civilian deaths, and

coalition deaths are all at their highest levels since the invasion.

Over 3,600 American soldiers have died in Iraq, and we are spending

over $10 billion every month to continue this failed policy.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, I must point out that

the time is rapidly approaching when we will not be able to sustain the

numbers of troops now deployed in Iraq without calling back our

National Guard and Reserve for second or third tours or extending the

tours of current active duty troops beyond the already extended 15

months.

And our increasing military and financial commitment to Iraq limits

our options for addressing other critical national security concerns

even as a new intelligence report indicates that al Qaeda is

operationally stronger than a year ago. The most disturbing news is

that al Qaeda has regrouped to an extent not seen since 2001.

Proponents of the President's escalation--the so-called ``surge''--

say we haven't given it a chance to succeed. But it has been under way

since January, with the Iraqi government fully aware of the steps

toward reconciliation it needs to take to enable U.S. forces to stay--

and still, those steps aren't being taken. Today's interim report from

the Pentagon tries to make a bad situation look better, listing

``satisfactory'' progress on a number of benchmarks required by the

Congress several months ago. But in reality, as the report states,

``the security situation in Iraq remains complex and extremely

challenging,'' the ``economic picture is uneven'' and political

reconciliation is lagging.

I had hoped that by holding the president and the Iraqi government

accountable for achieving these benchmarks, we would gain the leverage

necessary to pressure the Iraqi government to forge the political

solution we all know is required. But it appears that the Iraqi

government is either unable or unwilling to bring its feuding factions

together to achieve these goals.

The Pentagon's report blames those of us pushing for redeployment for

the lack of progress toward political reconciliation, saying it has

been hampered by ``increasing concern among Iraqi political leaders

that the United States may not have a long term-commitment to Iraq.''

But if the Iraqis won't make progress when we're there--and then

threaten that they can't make progress if we leave--under what

conditions will we see progress? The president has asked Congress to

wait to act for the next progress report due in September. But what are

we waiting for? He has dressed up his new approaches in many different

ways since this war started over four years ago, and yet little has

changed.

What we need--and what many Democrats and Republicans alike are

calling for--is a responsible redeployment from Iraq. That is what the

bipartisan Iraq Study Group ultimately called for, and that is the main

reason I introduced legislation to implement its recommendations. I

continue to hold out hope that we can forge a bipartisan consensus in

favor of adopting the ISG as a foundation for a phased withdrawal

strategy. I believe in this approach because responsible redeployment

would allow Iraqis to take control of their own security by reducing

U.S. combat forces while limiting the U.S. military to missions such as

counter-terrorism, protecting U.S. Embassy personnel, and training

Iraqi security forces. This bill will also allow necessary flexibility

for our military forces to continue strikes against al Qaeda in Iraq.

This legislation calls for the beginning of redeployment and a troop

draw-down within the next four months. It takes a different approach

from H.R. 2237, the bill introduced by Representative Jim McGovern (D-

MA) that I opposed two months ago, in that it would not prohibit

funding for our troops already in Iraq, and it requires the president

to submit a comprehensive strategy providing specific plans for

diplomatic initiatives and justifying the number of U.S. troops who

would remain and explaining their missions.

I do question whether we can extricate all combat troops by April

2008, as it calls for--it could take as long as six months to move over

one hundred thousand soldiers and their gear and to do this safely.

This is one military exercise that we have to take seriously and spend

time and resources to plan--because it could mean life or death for our

men and women in uniform. But I believe we should set a target date now

and begin this planning. This bill would force a change in strategy and

mandate the start of a phased withdrawal and redeployment, and that is

why I will vote for it.