Mr. Speaker, voting ``no'' today will not bring home the

troops during the next four months. The President is determined that

the troops remain during this period. The danger is that cutting the

funds could leave our troops in Iraq without the necessary equipment,

including equipment vital for their safety. It is so difficult to watch

the deaths of so many brave American soldiers. Until we can force the

President to bring them home, we must give them the equipment they need

to keep them safe.

So de-funding this supplemental will not shorten the war but could

endanger the safety of our men and women in uniform. This is the issue

confronting those of us, like myself, who actively opposed going to war

in the first place 4 years ago, and who have voted time and again since

then to press the White House and the Iraqi government to achieve a

number of key benchmarks so our troops can come home. The Iraqi

government has to finally step up and make some difficult political

decisions and end the sectarian violence that is tearing their country

apart.

The benchmarks contained in this bill are important, but they would

be much more effective if they were backed up by a realistic timetable

for the redeployment of our troops if the benchmarks are not met. The

House and Senate approved just such a bill last month, but the

President vetoed it and there were not enough votes in either the House

or the Senate to override the President. Everyone should understand

that it was not for lack of Democratic votes that we were unable to

force the President to change direction on Iraq. The problem is that it

takes a two-thirds vote of the House and Senate to override a

Presidential veto and only a handful of Republicans were willing to

vote with us.

This bill contains funds to provide our troops with body armor,

vehicles designed to withstand improvised explosive devices,

countermeasures to roadside bombs and mines, and medical care to treat

their injuries. Again, voting no on the bill today won't force the

President to withdraw our troops from Iraq; it just means our troops in

Iraq and Afghanistan won't get the resources they need to protect

themselves. Voting no would also cut off funding needed to sustain our

military and political efforts in Afghanistan. This is an area that

many of us feel deserves more attention and resources, not less.

It is critical that today's vote is not the end of this debate. The

funds provided for Iraq in this bill run only through September. In the

weeks ahead, there will be other opportunities for Congress to change

the direction of this war, to hold the Iraqi government and President

Bush accountable, and bring our troops home. The legislation we need to

debate and pass is one that essentially deauthorizes our current

military involvement in Iraq and provide a responsible timeline for the

orderly redeployment of our forces. I regret that this is not the bill

before us today, but we will have this debate in September. At that

time, I hope that more of our Republican colleagues will join us in

voting to change the President's policy on Iraq.