Mr. Speaker, today we are considering

funding legislation for the war in Iraq which unfortunately does not

include the timelines for bringing the troops home that I and many of

my colleagues have supported previously. While I strongly believe that

we must provide the troops with the resources that they need to do

their jobs, I cannot support an amendment that would leave them in Iraq

indefinitely.

The intent of the benchmarks included in this amendment seems to be

to send an important signal to the Iraqi government that it must make

progress on the political, economic, and security fronts. I know that

we all want to see that happen, but it is up to those of us in Congress

who are committed to ending this war to ensure that the administration

and the Iraqi government realize that we, and the American people, will

not accept any more blank checks or false promises.

I do intend to support the amendment that will be offered to provide

more than $20 billion for several key domestic items that have been

part of the Democratic Majority's agenda. This amendment includes $1.8

billion for veterans' health care as well as funding for military

health care, children's health care, and Hurricane Katrina recovery

efforts. I am very pleased that this amendment includes the minimum

wage increase that millions of hard-working Americans have been waiting

on for a decade. I also want to commend Chairman Obey and the

Appropriations Committee for including $50 million for Ground Zero

workers and responders who risked their lives and are now suffering

devastating health effects because of their brave service following the

9/11 terrorist attacks. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment

so that we will provide long overdue relief to those Americans who need

it.

I am pleased to note that the rule, which I supported, that provided

for consideration of these amendments ensures that before any further

supplemental appropriations bills to fund the war can be considered, a

vote must occur on legislation to redeploy U.S. troops from Iraq.

I am disappointed that the bill that will be sent to the President

does not set out a clear path to end the war in Iraq. However, I and my

colleagues who agree on this issue will continue to work for what the

American people overwhelmingly voted for in November: a new direction,

both in Iraq and at home.