Mr. Speaker, as a proud member of the

Progressive and the Out of Iraq Caucuses, I rise to announce that I

will proudly cast my vote in favor of H.R. 2206, the ``U.S. Troop

Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability

Act.'' By vetoing the bipartisan Iraq Accountability Act last week, the

President vetoed the will of the American people. The President vetoed

a responsible funding bill for the troops that would have provided more

funding for our troops and military readiness than even the President

requested.

By vetoing the Iraq Accountability Act, the President rejected a bill

that reflects the will of the American people to wind down this war. By

vetoing the Iraq Accountability Act, the President turned a deaf ear to

the loud message sent by the American people last November.

The President demands a blank check to escalate the war in Iraq

against the will of the Congress and the American people. The

Constitution does not require it, he certainly has not earned it, and I

am not prepared to give it to him. That is why I will proudly vote for

H.R. 2206.

The legislation crafted by the chairman of the Appropriations

Committee in consultation with the leadership and the members of the

Democratic Caucus offers us a real chance to end the misguided

invasion, war, and occupation of Iraq. It puts us on the glide path to

the day when our troops come home in honor and triumph and where we can

``care for him who has borne the battle, and for his widow and

orphan.'' This legislation helps to repair the damage to America's

international reputation and prestige. It brings long overdue

oversight, accountability, and transparency to defense and

reconstruction contracting and procurement. Finally, it places the

responsibility for bringing peace and security where it clearly belongs

and that is squarely on the shoulders of the Iraqi government.

Mr. Speaker, in threatening to veto this legislation, the President

claims it will ``undermine our troops and threaten the safety of the

American people here at home.'' Coming from an administration that has

been wrong on every important question relating to the decision to

launch the Iraq war as well the conduct of it, this claim is laughable.

It is nearly as ridiculous as the President's often stated claim of

``progress'' in Iraq. The facts, of course, are otherwise. The U.S.

death toll in Iraq reached 104 for April--making it the deadliest month

of the year and one of the deadliest of the entire war. It is therefore

little wonder that nearly 70 percent of Americans disapprove of the way

the President is handling the war. But more important, the President's

claim that the Iraq Accountability Act undermines our troops and

threatens the safety of the American people here at home is simply not

true.

Republican Senator Chuck Hagel recently returned from Iraq and paints

a bleak picture: ``This thing is coming undone quickly, and [Prime

Minister] Maliki's government is weaker by the day. The police are

corrupt top to bottom. The oil problem is a huge problem. They still

can't get anything through the parliament--no hydrocarbon law, no de-

Baathification law, no provincial elections.''

Mr. Speaker, many of the Nation's most highly respected generals and

several leading Republicans have endorsed the House Democratic

majority's approach; all of them oppose the President's plan to

escalate the war in Iraq. Take, for example, MG John Batiste, U.S.

Army, (Ret.):

MG Paul Eaton, USA, Ret. supports this legislation because it ``gives

General Petraeus great leverage for moving the Iraqi government down

the more disciplined path laid out by the Iraq Study Group.'' According

to General Eaton, the real audience for the timeline language is Prime

Minister al-Maliki and the elected government of Iraq:

LTG William E. Odom, U.S. Army (Ret.), President Reagan's Director of

the National Security Agency, supports the bill because it ``gives the

president a chance to pull back from a disastrous course, re-orient

U.S. strategy to achieve regional stability, and win help from many

other countries--the only way peace will eventually be achieved.''

Mr. Speaker, to date, the war in Iraq has lasted longer than

America's involvement in World War II, the greatest conflict in all of

human history. But there is a difference. The Second World War ended in

complete and total victory for the United States and its allies. But

then again, in that conflict America was led by FDR, a great Commander-

in-Chief, who had a plan to win the war and secure the peace, listened

to his generals, and sent troops in sufficient numbers and sufficiently

trained and equipped to do the job.

As a result of the colossal miscalculation in deciding to invade

Iraq, the loss of public trust resulting from the misrepresentation of

the reasons for launching that invasion, and the breathtaking

incompetence in mismanaging the occupation of Iraq, the Armed Forces

and the people of the United States have suffered incalculable damage.

The war in Iraq has claimed the lives of 3,381 brave service men and

women, 64 in the first 30 days of this month. More than 24,912

Americans have been wounded, many suffering the most horrific injuries.

American taxpayers have paid nearly $400 billion to sustain this

misadventure.

Mr. Speaker, I support H.R. 2206 because it holds President Bush and

the Iraqi government accountable--by fencing $52.8 billion of the $95.5

billion provided to the Defense Department until released by subsequent

legislation. This bill requires the President to confront the realities

of the Iraq war and take account of the facts on the ground.

First, the bill requires the President to submit a report to Congress

by July 13 regarding the success of the Iraqi Government in meeting

security and political benchmarks. The President must report progress

by the Iraqi Government in meeting key security benchmarks, articulated

by Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki himself in January, including

eliminating militia control of local security, I disarming the

militias, and giving Iraqi Security Forces the authority to pursue all

extremists, including Shiite militias.

The legislation also requires the President to report on whether key

political benchmarks,

announced by President Bush himself in January have actually been

accomplished by the Iraqi Government, relating to such issues as

enacting a bill to equitably share oil revenue among all Iraqis,

reforming current laws governing the de-Baathircation process,

providing for provincial elections, and amending the constitution.

Second, within 7 legislative days after receiving the report in July,

both the House and Senate would vote on whether to release the

remaining defense funds. Thus, the bill guarantees two votes by

Congress in July.

The first guaranteed vote is a vote on an amendment to the measure

releasing the remaining defense funding, which would provide that this

funding could only be used for planning and executing the redeployment

of U.S. troops from Iraq within 180 days of the bill's enactment, with

only limited exceptions to this redeployment for troops for training

and equipping Iraqi troops, targeted counterterrorism operations, and

force protection.

The second guaranteed vote is a vote on the underlying measure

releasing the remaining defense funds. The bill contains expedited

procedures to guarantee that the votes take place in both the House and

Senate by the end of July.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to hold the Bush administration and the Iraqi

Government accountable. This bill's timetable and benchmarks finally

hold the Iraqis accountable. As retired MG Paul Eaton has stated,

``This bill gives General Petraeus great leverage for moving the Iraqi

government down the more disciplined path laid out by the Iraq Study

Group. The real audience for the timeline language is Prime Minister

al-Maliki and the elected government of Iraq.

Even Defense Secretary Robert Gates has noted that the timetable is

helpful--and sends the message that ``the clock is ticking.'' Gates

said ``The strong feelings expressed in the Congress about the

timetable probably have had a positive impact . . . in terms of

communicating to the Iraqis that this is not an open-ended

commitment.''

Mr. Speaker, in passing H.R. 2206, this House will be doing the

business and expressing the will of the American people. In the latest

CBS News/New York Times poll, 64 percent of Americans favor a timetable

that provides for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq in 2008. In

the same poll, 57 percent of Americans believe that Congress, not the

President, should have the last say when it comes to setting troop

levels in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, in passing H.R. 2206, Congress is fulfilling its

constitutional responsibilities and exercising the first check on the

President's power in 6 years. As Iraq Study Group Co-Chairman Lee

Hamilton has pointed out, ``The founders of our nation never envisioned

an unfettered president making unilateral decisions about American

lives and military power. They did indeed make the president the

commander in chief, but they gave to Congress the responsibility for

declaring war, for making rules governing our land and naval forces,

for overseeing policy, and of course the ability to fund war or to

cease funding it.''

Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to join me in voting for H.R. 2206.

This is the best way to ensure accountability to our soldiers who have

been sent into battle without proper training or equipment or a clear

mission. It is the best way to keep faith with our veterans who are not

getting the best medical care when they come home. Passing this

legislation is essential to restoring our military that is being

stretched to the limits by the Bush policy. Last, it is absolutely

necessary to regain the confidence of the American people who demand a

new direction in Iraq.