Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2206, the

U.S. Troops Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq

Accountability Appropriations Act of 2007. The revised Iraq

Accountability Act supports our troops while holding President Bush and

the Iraqi Government accountable.

After vetoing the April supplemental bill that was supported by a

majority of the American people, President Bush is once more asking for

a blank check to continue his escalation of our military involvement in

Iraq. Once again, the President has chosen confrontation over

cooperation by threatening to veto the bill we are considering today.

After a meeting during which lawmakers from his own party told him he

had lost the confidence of the American people, the President issued a

statement claiming to support ``benchmarks'' for progress in Iraq. But,

unlike congressional Republicans, the President will not support

consequences for failure to meet those benchmarks. It should be obvious

to all that benchmarks without consequences are nothing but meaningless

window dressing.

This Congress will not provide the President the blank check that he

has requested. In last November's election, the American people

demanded a new direction in Iraq, and we will continue to fight to

responsibly wind down this war. Our revised bill will fully fund the

troops, honor our commitment to veterans, hold the Iraqi Government

accountable, and continue to press the President to change course and

stop the bloodshed in Iraq. It also provides funding for urgent

domestic needs that are emergencies in their own right and appropriate

to include in this emergency supplemental legislation. These include a

minimum wage/small business tax relief package, $6.8 billion for

Hurricane Katrina recovery, $3.5 billion more

than the President's request, $400 million for the Low Income Heating

Assistance Program, LIHEAP, and $396 million for the State Children's

Health Insurance Program, S-CHIP.

I voted earlier today in favor of Congressman McGovern's bill

providing for the redeployment of United States Armed Forces and

American defense contractors from Iraq. That measure was defeated, but

attracted far more support than many observers had predicted,

indicating a growing momentum inside Congress for redeployment. I

remain confident that as the tragedy in Iraq wears on, even more

Members of Congress will join in demanding withdrawal of our troops

from Iraq and prohibiting the further use of funds to continue

President Bush's war. In the meantime, however, I will join with my

colleagues in the Democratic Caucus to send the President a

supplemental funding bill that demands accountability and guarantees

further congressional consideration of war funding in just a few short

months.

H.R. 2206 fully funds the troops over the next 2 to 3 months,

ensuring that they have everything they need to conduct their mission.

The bill also includes additional funding for the troops not requested

by the President, including increased funding for military health care

and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected, MRAP, vehicles in Iraq. It

includes funds to improve military readiness as well as $1.8 billion to

meet our veterans' health care needs.

The bill would fence off $52.8 billion of the $95.5 billion provided

to the Defense Department until it is released by subsequent

legislation. It requires the President to submit a report to Congress

by July 13 of this year regarding the success of the Iraqi Government

in meeting key security and political benchmarks. Within 7 legislative

days of receipt of the report, Congress would have the opportunity to

evaluate the situation in Iraq and vote on whether or not to continue

to fund the war. Expedited procedures are included in the bill to

guarantee that this vote will take place in both the House and Senate

by the end of July.

I would have preferred not to be taking this vote today, but the

President has brought us to this point with his stubborn refusal to

accept the will of the American people. I will continue to support any

Iraq-related legislation that holds the President's feet to the fire.

The inferno raging in Iraq is one of his own making, and he should be

forced to feel the heat.