Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this

legislation, thanking both Congressman Murtha and Congressman Obey for

their work.

It has now been 4 years since this war started, over 3 years since we

heard the phrase ``mission accomplished,'' and almost a year and half

since the Iraqi elections for a permanent government--it is time for

the Iraqi government to police, govern, and run its country. This bill

also provides more support for our veterans and military healthcare.

This legislation will provide funding for our troops, but it will

also force the Iraqis to take control of their own country, and bring

our troops home within the next 18 months--possibly sooner, if the

Iraqis do not meet benchmarks that demonstrate they are making

progress.

Our commitment in Iraq, which grew under the President's surge plan

last month, has strained our military, cost thousands of U.S. and Iraqi

lives, and has created serious readiness problems in the Army and

Marine Corps.

I don't like the idea of setting a timeline, but for 4 years we have

had an open-ended commitment, and after those 4 years, we are still

seeing some of the bloodiest attacks, and highest casualty numbers to

date. We need to set benchmarks to force the Iraqis to take over their

own country, and this bill does that. It is not pulling our troops out

immediately--if Iraqis rise to this responsibility, we will have troops

there for another 18 months, but if they don't, we will begin

redeployment this year.

After 4 years, it is time Congress exercise authority over the way

this war is being run. Congress is not 535 commanders in chief, but we

must provide guidance on what we will ask the American taxpayers to

fund. We have held dozens of hearings this year, and passed a non-

binding resolution opposing the escalation or surge in U.S. troops. Our

vote on this Supplemental will be another step in bringing a resolution

to this conflict and will let the Iraqis know our commitment is not

open-ended.

I applaud the leadership and Appropriations committee on bringing

this bill to the floor, and I urge my colleagues to join me in

supporting it.