Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1591 and

commend Chairman Obey, Chairman Murtha, and our Speaker for putting

together a bill that protects our troops, responds to the will of the

American people, and preserves our Nation's interests.

Our men and women in uniform have served with honor and courage, but

we are not doing our part. Our Armed Forces are not battle-ready, nor

is their mission clear and achievable. There is no definition of

victory. The nature of the battle has changed, and our troops now find

themselves policing a bloody civil war. It is well past time to set

clear parameters for this war.

Since the beginning, this war and reconstruction efforts have been

ill-managed. Just yesterday the Iraq IG reported yet again on how

unprepared the administration was for the task of reconstruction. The

Defense Department had no strategy for restoring government

institutions, establishing security, or rebuilding infrastructure, and

the State Department was cut completely out of the work.

There continues to be a lack of coordination and strategy to achieve

our objectives. Putting billions of dollars more into this war without

any parameters and risking the lives of more of our brave men and women

is not only foolish; it is immoral. As the New York Times editorial

noted on Thursday, if the President won't step up to the task of

setting benchmarks and ensuring the safety of our troops, then it falls

to us, this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, this bill does just that. We are stepping up to our

responsibilities. This legislation does not micromanage the war, as

many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle claim. It is a

very carefully considered approach to bringing accountability to the

execution of the war and to the reconstruction efforts. Moreover, it

sets a date certain for the end of this war so we can bring our troops

home.

No amount of American blood or treasure can help Iraq if the Iraqis

don't help themselves. The Maliki government must exhibit the political

will to confront extremists on both sides of the Sunni-Shia divide, to

give all segments of society a stake in Iraq's future, and to put Iraqi

revenues towards the hard task of reconstruction. Congress didn't pull

these benchmarks from the air. They were put forth by the Iraqis and by

President Bush in his January 10 speech.

Mr. Speaker, we are already into the fifth year of this war. The bill

provides the funding the President requested, but it does not do so

unconditionally. This bill sets benchmarks, provides a date certain for

withdrawal.

The days of open-ended commitment and unilateral check-writing

privileges are over. This bill deals with Iraq responsibly, and I urge

my colleagues to support it.