Mr. Speaker, first let me compliment my friend from

Wisconsin (Mr. Obey), the chairman of the Appropriations Committee; and

the subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr.

Murtha), for the excellent work that they have done. And we thank our

minority for working with us on this bill.

The purpose of the Members of Congress front and center is to provide

for the common defense of our country. I must tell you how concerned

and worried I am about the readiness and state of readiness of the

United States Army based upon testimony and briefings that we have had

within the Armed Services Committee.

Readiness is based upon equipment and based upon people able to do

their job as defenders in uniform. This is a serious situation in which

we find ourselves. This bill is a major step toward helping our

readiness.

It is our job not just to appropriate money for today's concerns,

whether it be in the Middle East or elsewhere. It is our job to make

sure that those in uniform can protect the interests of America in the

days and years ahead.

In the last 30 years, we have had 12 military conflicts in which our

military associates have been involved. What does the future hold? We

don't know. But as sure as God made little green apples, there will be

threats that we need to deter or challenges that we need to fight in

the days and years ahead. We must have a ready force in all services

and my deep concern for the United States Army causes that to come into

question in our capability.

In this we provide money for the real war in Afghanistan, the

Strategic Reserve Fund, which supports training, not just operations

but repair of equipment, purchase of equipment, and expenses to improve

the readiness of the nondeployed military forces.

I am deeply concerned about the readiness of our forces in the days

and years ahead. This bill will help immeasurably in that first step

toward restoring readiness for our United States Army. And this is no

small thing. A vote against this is a vote against those uncertainties

of the future as well as where we are today involved in conflict.

Military health care is very important, and we look at that in this

bill solidly. Veterans' health care, military housing allowances. We do

so many good things in this bill for our military.

Let us not let the readiness of our United States Army suffer as a

result of not passing this all-important legislation.