I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I share the previous speaker's sorrow. I'm sorry that the policies

pursued by this administration have not done what he wanted to do,

support our troops. We sent too few, we equipped them too little, and

we have left them too long and trained them for too short a time. Yes,

I'm sorry.

The American public expects us, the Congress of the United States, to

do something, not simply to say yes to failed policies, but to, on

their behalf, speak out and try to take us in a new direction.

Mr. Speaker, there is not a Member of this body on either side of the

aisle who does not pray for our success in Iraq and who does not pray

for the safe return of our brave service men and women. However, after

the loss of more than 3,200 American soldiers and more than 24,000

injured and after the expenditure of more than $400 billion on a war

now entering its fifth year that Secretary Rumsfeld told us would take

just a few months. With open arms and cheering in the streets, this war

would be over and the mission would have been accomplished almost 4

years ago, said the President of the United States, who now asks us to

rubber-stamp, no strings attached. Do it, as Mr. Putnam said, before

supper. That is not what the American public expects of us. They expect

better. They expect a new direction. They expect us to think, not

simply say, amen, Mr. President.

The Defense Department says: ``Some elements of the situation in Iraq

are properly described as a civil war.'' None of us who voted for the

original authorization voted to put our troops in the middle of a civil

war, not one of us.

The Iraq Government has failed to meet political goals. It is our

responsibility to ask them to do so because we want to support our

troops. And if the Iraqis do not meet their responsibilities, our

troops will not be supported. A National Intelligence Estimate

concludes that this war is increasing, this is the National

Intelligence Estimate, increasing the global war on terror. The Army

Chief of Staff has issued strong warnings about the effect of the war

on America's overall military readiness. Mr. Murtha has talked about

that for at least the last 2 years.

My friend, the ranking member of the Appropriations Committee, with

whom I served for a quarter of a century on that committee, he must

share

the concern about military readiness that all of us share and know that

we are eroding our military readiness every day. Thus, the question

before the Members today is this: Will we change direction in Iraq, or

will we continue to stay the course with a failing policy?

Mr. Speaker, I believe the answer is clear. It is long past time that

this Congress assert itself and assist on accountability and a new

direction in Iraq. More blank checks from this Congress would

constitute an abdication of our responsibility and our duty. Four years

of abdication is enough. It is time, my fellow Members, for Congress to

assert its support of our troops by adopting policies that will keep

them safe and enhance their success.

This legislation, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and

Iraq Accountability Act, will protect our troops, requiring deployments

to adhere to existing Defense Department standards, not our standards,

Defense Department standards, standards for training, equipment and

armor, while allowing the President to waive these standards, which are

his own, the administration's standards, if he believes it necessary.

That is the right thing for us to do.

The bill also holds the Iraqi Government accountable, measuring its

performance by the standards President Bush outlined in his January 10

speech, not our standards for Iraq, but the benchmarks that the

President of the United States has set. But if they are only rhetorical

benchmarks with nothing behind them to require that action, then we are

wasting our time in supporting our troops because that will not do it.

The bill provides a responsible strategy for a phased redeployment of

U.S. forces and refocusing our efforts on fighting al Qaeda. That is

who attacked us, not the Sunni or Shia, but al Qaeda.

Some claim that this legislation will micromanage the war. That

assertion is absolutely false and without ground. Our Commander in

Chief, General Petraeus and our military commanders on the ground will

retain all the flexibility they need to succeed. This legislation in no

way undercuts their discretion on the ground. The only strings attached

concerning troop readiness and the Iraq Government's progress have been

endorsed by President Bush. Others assert that inclusion of a timeline

for responsible redeployment is tantamount to capitulation. Mr. Hobson

spoke on this floor just a few minutes ago. He voted to set a time line

in Bosnia. Mr. Lewis sits as the ranking member of this committee; he

voted on June 24, 1997, to set a timeline. Mr. Hastert, Speaker of the

House, set a timeline. Mr. Delay voted for a timeline. Mr. Blunt voted

for a timeline. Mr. Boehner voted for a timeline.

Every one of them voted for a timeline, and what were the

circumstances? We hadn't lost a single troop, not one. We had spent $7

billion, not $379 billion. We had brought genocide to a stop, ethnic

cleansing to a stop, and we were not losing people and we had a stable

environment, yet they voted for a timeline.

Here, Secretary Gates says in testimony at his confirmation hearing:

``We are not winning.'' If that is the case, it is time for us to have

a new strategy, a new direction, a new paradigm, if you will. That is

what this bill does.

Mr. Boehner said just a few weeks ago, in terms of timelines, he

said, ``I think it will be rather clear in the next 60 to 90 days as to

whether this plan, the current escalation, is going to work.'' ``We

need to know,'' Mr. Boehner said, ``as we are moving through these

benchmarks that the Iraqis are doing what they have to do.'' Nothing in

this bill will undermine that 60- or 90-day expectation that the

minority leader, the Republican leader, has articulated. Under this

legislation, if the Iraqis meet their benchmarks for progress, the

redeployment of American forces will not begin until a year from now.

This is not any precipitous withdrawal. And, indeed, if there is total

success, it will be more than a year from now.

Finally, let me point out, as I have said earlier, that timelines

were supported in July of 1997, 220-2. Only two Republicans voted

against setting a timeline. I voted against that timeline. And I said

``at this time.'' Why did I say that? Because we were succeeding. We

were not losing troops. We had stopped genocide. We had stopped ethnic

cleansing. We had a stable government in Serbia. We were winning and

our strategy was succeeding. And under those circumstances, I thought

timelines were not appropriate. But there is not a military general I

have talked to who has said that we are succeeding. Today, this very

day, the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq lies deeply wounded, life at

risk. If a Member of Congress goes to Baghdad, they will not drive you

from the airport to the Green Zone. Why? Because they do not believe it

is safe, almost 50 months after we started this operation.

My friends, it is time for a new direction. I urge my colleagues on

both sides of the aisle support the troops, represent America,

represent your people who want to win but do not want to leave our

troops in the middle of a civil war. Support this well-thought-out

crafted piece of legislation, which in no way undermines the ability of

our troops to manage this war, but says to them, we will expect the

Iraqis to perform and we will give you a time frame in which the world

will know that they must themselves take responsibility.