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

It will bring our troops home, take care of our veterans, and begin to

address critical needs here at home.

I applaud the leadership of the House--our Democratic leadership

team--for bringing this important and far reaching bill before us

today.

I, like many of my colleagues, would have preferred to have a bill

before us that would get our troops out of Iraq tomorrow, or even in 3

months. I most certainly would like not to have to send the 100 members

of the V.I. National Guard out to Iraq next month. But that is not

doable, it is not realistic.

What is realistic is setting some benchmarks--actually the

president's benchmarks as goals and legally holding him to them, while

planning for the complete re-deployment by summer of next year!

More than that though, it provides what the soldiers and their

families have been crying for, for the past 5 years. Equipment,

training, protective gear and armor and all that adds up to troop

readiness. It is negligent to send our men and women into the middle of

a civil war where they become targets without the proper preparation

and equipment.

H.R. 1591 sets guidelines for length of deployment, and it does

something that I think will go a long way to reducing the violence

against our troops, and that is it establishes that there will be no

permanent bases in Iraq. It further restores our values and principles

in combat by prohibiting torture.

More funding is also channeled to Afghanistan where the war needs to

be brought back on track and we need to make up lost ground in the real

war on terrorism.

But this bill goes further. For all these 5 long years we have also

complained that funds needed here at home were not only being spent but

wasted in Iraq--there is still over 9 billion that is unaccounted for

and we are losing.

Well what we do in H.R. 1591 is begin to take better care of our

soldiers when they return home. The stories about conditions at Walter

Reed, and of persons in need of mental health care being turned away

are not only heartbreaking, they border on criminal.

And we also begin to take care of some long overdue issues here at

home:

Agriculture disaster assistance, State Children's Health insurance

payments for rural schools, better homeland security preparedness,

improving oversight and accountability and finally doing what we ought

to have done 2 years ago for the victims we left behind in Katrina,

Rita and Wilma.

And we help some countries with whom we have close ties and who need

our help--Jordan, Afghanistan, Liberia and several other African

nations.

This bill sends funding to our defense needs on the two major fronts

at which our troops need us, takes care of critical needs at home, and

begins to rebuild our reputation for leadership and our moral authority

in the world.

I support it, the people of the Virgin Islands support it, and I urge

my colleagues to support and pass H.R. 1591.