Mr. Speaker, today's vote is very difficult for me.

I support the immediate withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.

The U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability

Act is a significant improvement over the President's failed Iraq

policies. For years, Bush has sent our troops into harm’s way without

the proper equipment. Today's legislation aims to hold the

Administration accountable for its own readiness standards--and for the

benchmarks President Bush himself proposed for Iraqi government

performance. This bill also goes farther toward providing an actual end

date for this war than any other legislation that has reached the House

floor.

I applaud Speaker Pelosi, Jack Murtha, and Dave Obey for this

significant achievement. I wish I could support my Speaker today and

vote with the overwhelming majority of my Democratic colleagues. But, I

can't vote ``yes.''

I ran for Congress because of my strong opposition to our

government's unyielding commitment to the Vietnam War. I didn't think

it made sense for American men and women to die for the half-truths of

the Johnson and Nixon Administrations. Today, I don't think it makes

any more sense for lives to be lost for the outright lies of the Bush

regime.

I voted against the original resolution authorizing the President to

take military action against Iraq. At the time, I said I didn't trust

this president and his advisors.

During the war's four long years, nothing has happened to convince me

otherwise. On the contrary, the Bush Administration has repeatedly

misled the American people about Iraq. They lied to Congress about

Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, about the cost and length of the

war, and about meeting arbitrary benchmarks.

Their goalposts keep moving. The amount of money they requested for

this supplemental alone is nearly twice the amount they initially

projected the war would cost in its entirety.

Throughout my career in Congress, I've voted against defense spending

and against war. Building new weapons systems and waging war doesn't

solve problems. If the last four years are any indication, it actually

makes them worse.

The longer we stay in Iraq, the higher the cost of this senseless

war. Unless we withdraw immediately, the Shiite-Sunni civil war will

continue taking the lives of additional American troops and Iraqi

civilians. Education, health care, and other domestic needs will go

under-funded in America while additional billions are spent in Iraq.

And our international allies will further doubt our actions and

intentions around the world.

Despite my utmost respect for my colleagues who crafted this bill, I

can't in good conscience vote to continue this war. Nor, however, can I

vote ``no'' and join those who think today's legislation goes too far

toward withdrawal.

That's why I'm making the difficult decision to vote ``present.'' My

vote should be interpreted as opposing the war's continuation while

permitting this Congress--under Speaker Pelosi's leadership--to deliver

a strong message to President Bush that his blank check to wage war has

been canceled.

I urge my colleagues to vote their consciences and help end the war

in Iraq.