Mr. Speaker, no votes in Congress are more wrenching or

difficult than those involving war; whether that vote involves

initiating combat, or in this instance, steps to bring about the end.

The consequences are profound, uncertainty about the right course is

great, and there are strong feelings on all sides.

Every member of Congress is committed to the security of this Nation

and to supporting our troops and their families. There are legitimate

differences about how best to achieve those goals, but the core

commitment to security and to support of our troops should not be

doubted or questioned, regardless of where one stands on this matter.

Before the first vote authorizing force in Iraq in 2002, I asked

fundamental questions of the President: `What will the cost be in human

casualties on all sides? What are the international and potential

regional scenarios that might be developed? What is our long term

strategy for the region?' I also asked about the economic costs to our

Nation and the world, and about the likelihood of religious conflicts

leaving our soldiers caught between warring religious factions with

grievances that are centuries old. I asked what provisions had been

made to care for the wounded and their families when they return? I

called for greater commitment to resolving the Israeli/Palestinian

issues and for reducing our Nation's dependence on petroleum. Finally,

knowing well the history of the region, I asked how long our commitment

was expected to last if hostilities were initiated.

Not one of these questions was answered by President Bush, Secretary

Rumsfeld or any member of the administration. That is why I voted

``no'' on that initial resolution. Sadly, the same questions remain

today and they have still not been answered by the President, which is

why I will vote ``yes'' on the bill before the House today.

For the sake of our Nation's security, for the safety or our troops,

for the sake of our economy at home, for the sake of our international

standing, we must say to the Iraqi leaders and to the world, `We have

removed a dictator from power, we have disarmed a tyrant, elections

have been held, and a constitution is in place. We have shed the blood

of our finest, we have indebted our children, we have tried to help

rebuild infrastructure and put in place the basis of a democratic

republic. Now, it is up to the Iraqi people themselves to find a

political solution that is in everyone's interest and will lead to an

end to the bloodshed.' Our Nation cannot and should not attempt to

impose that solution indefinitely; it must come from the Iraqis

themselves.

Today's bill says just that. It provides the necessary funds to

continue to support our soldiers in the field. It adds much needed

resources to ensure they receive care when they come home. It addresses

needed priorities within our own Nation. And, most importantly, it says

affirmatively, there will be an end to our role in combat in Iraq and

it is time for our Nation, for the Iraqis, and for the world, to begin

to prepare for that time. This cannot go on forever.

Those who talk about staying the course without end, as well as those

who would call for opposing this bill because they want the war to end

tomorrow, must all recognize that in the process of this conflict, our

overall military readiness has been profoundly impaired and our Nation

is now vulnerable should other, more severe, threats emerge elsewhere

in the world. At the same time, our local preparedness of the National

Guard is in tatters. Our Guard lacks key resources, equipment, and

manpower to respond to fires, floods, or other disasters or to join in

serious conflicts elsewhere if called upon to do so. This bill, quite

rightly, seeks to correct these deficits.

The reality before us today is that we cannot immediately stop

funding for our forces or neglect the readiness deficits that now

endanger our Nation. That would be irresponsible and would leave our

soldiers on the ground and our citizens at home and abroad in greater

danger. It would also endanger the lives and hopes of the Iraqi people

themselves and leave them vulnerable to extremists and chaos.

At the same time, however, it would be equally irresponsible to allow

this hemorrhaging of blood and money, this neglect of our own Nation's

needs here at home, to continue unchecked. This legislation changes the

direction for our Nation and says the Iraqi's must change the direction

of their Nation. They must take responsibility for their own security,

share their oil wealth equitably with their own citizens, arid

establish fundamental constitutional reforms. This bill requires that

our President must certify that such things are being done.

Far from `tying the hands' of the President, this legislation gives

him much needed direction. If it becomes law, President Bush must at

long last say that his own people, the American people, in the

constitutional democratic republic that is our Nation, and that he is

sworn to defend, have spoken through their representatives and have

said it is time for change. It will soon be up to the Iraqi's

themselves to determine the fate of their own Nation so that we can, at

long last, may again determine the fate of ours.

If you care about the security of this Nation, vote ``yes'' to

restore our military readiness. If you care about our soldiers, vote

``yes'' to give them the equipment they need while deployed and the

care they need when they return home. If you want to see an end to this

conflict, vote ``yes'' to begin the process that will at last bring

that about.