Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1591, the U.S.

Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act.

I voted against this war 5 years ago and believe we should never have

gone into Iraq.

But as a veteran, I stand by our troops and have always committed to

providing for them regardless of politics.

And H.R. 1591 supports our troops before, during, and after service.

It mandates proper training and equipment, it requires that our troops

get the rest they need between deployments to stay sharp, and provides

for our wounded as they return from battle.

This bill also sets deadlines for the Iraqi government so that we can

start shifting responsibility to the Iraqi people and bring our troops

home by 2008 at the very latest.

Mr. Speaker, we have 160,000 American troops on the ground in Iraq

right now, many of which lack proper equipment and training.

We also have 32,000 wounded soldiers from the Iraq conflict who need

medical attention and assistance to get back on their feet.

Unfortunately, we have a veteran healthcare system that is failing.

Report after report indicates under funding, neglect, improper conduct,

and almost no accountability.

If the tragedies at Walter Reed Army Medical Center have taught us

anything, it is that wartime spending shouldn't just stop with tanks

and guns.

It needs to extend to taking care of our wounded heroes and their

families after they return from the battlefield.

Mr. Speaker, I recently visited our returning veterans at Walter Reed

Medical Center. And what I saw there just broke my heart.

Some of our wounded told me their doctors weren't giving them the

attention they needed and that they even had to prove to the medical

staff that they were injured!

One man in particular really touched my heart. I met a wounded

soldier from my home State of California who told me about his father

who had dropped everything, closed his business, and flew to Washington

so that he could take care of his son full time.

This young man's family not only had to risk their son for this war,

they're now sacrificing their livelihood to help him recuperate.

And yet sadly, he's one of the lucky ones.

What about the majority of military families who simply can't afford

to quit their jobs, move cross-country and take care of their husbands,

wives, and children?

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, the American people shouldn't have to put

up with these hardships.

They shouldn't have to worry that their family members in uniform are

getting the best care possible.

How poorly does it reflect on us as a Nation when we don't adequately

take care of our veterans when they come back home?

Veterans healthcare is one of the most neglected and underfunded

programs in this country.

This isn't just embarrassing, it is unconscionable.

We have a duty to minimize the risk to our troops and their families

by making sure they have the very best training, the finest equipment,

and stay deployed only as long as absolutely necessary.

Furthermore, we have a moral obligation to take care of each and

every soldier who has been injured in the line of duty in defense of

our great Nation.

H.R. 1591 addresses these responsibilities and that's why I will vote

in favor of this bill today.

The American people have already paid too high a price for this war.

3,233 soldiers have died in Iraq, including 10 men from my own

district.

We owe it to these heroes to set a deadline for withdrawal and let

our soldiers move on with their lives.

We owe it to our families who are praying for the safety of their

loved ones to take care of our troops every step of the way.

That's why I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1591.