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

Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability Act. Today,

Madam Speaker, we have a chance to take our country in a new direction

to bring coherence and accountability to America's Iraq war policy.

As we enter our fifth year in the Iraq war, Americans have paid a

high price for our involvement. Over 3,200 U.S. troops have died,

approximately 25,000 U.S. troops have been wounded, and President Bush

has squandered more than $350 billion of taxpayer dollars with his

misadventure. Our troops have been fighting and dying in Iraq longer

than American soldiers did in World War II, World War I, the Korean

war, or the Civil War. This important legislation imposes long overdue

accountability on the administration's war policy and will bring an end

to President Bush's commitment to an open-ended war.

Specifically, the benchmarks and timelines contained in this

legislation will hold both the president and the Iraqi Government

accountable in how they conduct the war and the transition to a self-

sufficient, democratic Iraq. This bill has taken into account both the

administration's and experts' advice on how to proceed in Iraq. Many of

the benchmarks are similar to provisions that President Bush has

publicly supported. The bipartisan Iraq Study Group recommended many of

the goals and target dates in H.R. 1591.

Importantly, this bill protects our troops deployed in Iraq and

Afghanistan and the troops and veterans returning home. H.R. 1591

provides sufficient funding to ensure that our troops have the

equipment to protect themselves from harm while they defend many of the

innocent citizens of Iraq. We should all agree that never again will

America send its troops into battle without the best equipment to

accomplish their mission.

For our troops returning home, this legislation reverses years of

neglect and moves us toward a comprehensive effort to address their

needs. There is an extra $1.7 billion for military health care to be

spent on military hospitals and a provision that prevents the closing

of Walter Reed hospital--the first stop for so many of our wounded

troops returning home. The bill also appropriates $1.7 billion

additional funding for veterans' health care, $2.5 billion for

improving the readiness of our stateside troops and $1.4 billion more

for military housing allowances.

Mr. Speaker, when an Iraqi Shiite soldier is ready to defend an Iraqi

Sunni civilian and an Iraqi Sunni soldier is ready to defend an Iraqi

Shiite civilian, then perhaps we will know that the people of Iraq are

ready to live in peace with security. But until such time, our troops

have no business sitting in the crosshairs of a bloody civil war. By

creating benchmarks and timelines for U.S. troop involvement in Iraq,

this bill sends a message to Iraqis that they need to resolve their

conflicts at the negotiation table and not through violence. We can

help, but they must first prove that they are willing and prepared to

help themselves.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1591 and start the process of

bringing our troops home. Our men and women in uniform have done all we

have asked of them. They won the war against Saddam Hussein and fought

valiantly and timelessly to secure the peace in Iraq. Now, it is time

for us to do our job: remove our soldiers from the insanity of the Iraq

civil war and return them home. Only then can we rededicate ourselves

and refocus our efforts to fight against the threat of terrorism.