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

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

which sends the message to the Iraqis that we will not commit open-

endedly our blood and tax dollars if they are not willing to step up

and take control of their own country.

We have lost more than 3,200 of our best men and women over the last

4 years and 4 days we have been in Iraq, and more than 24,000 others

have come home wounded. We are spending about $200,000 a minute in

Iraq. The Iraqi people need to know that we will not continue to do all

the work if they are unable or unwilling to put aside their religious

differences and come together to build a civil society.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that this legislation has been mischaracterized

as a timeline on our troops. The true intention of this measure, as I

see it, is to put a timeline on the Iraqi people to meet the benchmarks

that have already been established by the President. The bill we will

vote on today will not withhold a single dollar from our men and women

on the ground in Iraq, and it will not tie our commanders' hands but

simply holds the Iraqis accountable for taking command of their own

country.

As chairman of the U.S. delegation to the NATO Parliamentary

Assembly, I have talked at length with our allies who are helping us

fight the war on terror in Afghanistan, where we are in a very critical

year, with the Taliban planning a new series of attacks on U.S. and

NATO troops there. I fear we are threatening our work on that very

important effort if we continue to focus most of our resources to a

deteriorating sectarian conflict that General Petraeus has said cannot

be won with military might alone if there is not timely political and

diplomatic progress.

I served 4 years in the United States Navy and 26 years in the

Tennessee Army National Guard. During that time, it was my duty to

carry out the orders handed me by the civilian leadership. Now that you

and our colleagues and I are part of that civilian leadership, it is

our responsibility to help shape military policy and hold the civilian

leadership at the Pentagon and elsewhere accountable for the way they

have managed--or mismanaged--operations in Iraq.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, I am not willing to keep asking our

military families and the American taxpayers to commit their lives and

tax dollars forever. The only alternative to this bill is an open-ended

bleeding of our blood and tax dollars with no end in sight and no

pressure on the Iraqi government to make the changes necessary.