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

with some reservations. While I appreciate the care with which Speaker

Pelosi, Chairman Obey and the Democratic leadership have approached

this supplemental appropriations bill, we are left, as we often are,

with a flawed product. But I do believe, in regard to Iraq, that it is

the best we are able to do right now.

The legislation for the first time establishes performance benchmarks

for the Iraqi military and government, and firmly states that it is

time to bring the troops home sooner rather than later. I did not vote

to authorize the Iraq war, and I do not support President Bush's troop

surge, but if this bill does not pass we will be forced to pass a

funding bill that does not have these benchmarks, and that would be

nothing more than the status quo, which is a blank check for President

Bush. I say again, I do not support everything in this legislation, but

it is the best alternative available to us at the present time.

I am particularly troubled by the non-military and non-veteran

spending in this bill. While I

support more funding for some of the important needs addressed here,

particularly domestic spending priorities that have been severely

neglected by the Bush administration over the last 6 years, they would

be better considered elsewhere. The bill does address serious

deficiencies in our veterans' health care system, and I whole-heartedly

support this funding. We have a great deal more work to do to ensure

that the brave men and women who defend this country are fully

supported upon their return home, but this is a good start.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation, like the war itself, presents us with

tough choices. I will support the bill, and by doing so send a signal

that it is time for the Iraqis to also make tough political decisions

and take control of their own destiny. My thoughts and prayers are with

our troops and their families, and I will continue to work for their

speedy return.