Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the

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

concede that the legislation we are voting on today is by no means

perfect, but I do believe it is a step in the right direction and

deserves the support of those Americans who want to bring this

misguided and mismanaged war to a responsible and timely conclusion.

In an ideal world, we would bring our troops home today, but that

doesn't match the reality of our struggle in Iraq. We have an even

smaller chance of accomplishing that goal in the Senate. The bill

before us represents the best opportunity to affect the conduct of this

war.

The benchmarks established within the supplemental are the same as

those proposed by the President in January, the Iraq Study Group, and

endorsed by Iraqi leaders. They include real consequences for the Iraqi

government and a definite timeline for a phased and deliberate

redeployment of American combat forces from Iraq by no later than

August 2008. The bill provides what is currently missing in the

President's policies--a plan to redeploy our troops from a situation

that cannot be improved by their continued presence.

It's unmistakable that our presence in Iraq has weakened our Armed

Forces and jeopardized our standing in the world. It has also diverted

valuable resources away from fighting al Qaeda in Afghanistan, tracking

down Osama bin Laden, and preventing another terrorist attack against

America. The supplemental not only provides a new direction in Iraq,

but also redirects resources to fight the real global war on terrorism.

To all of those who argue that passage of this legislation would mean

conceding defeat to the terrorists, I would say both that they are

wrong, and that the alternative they endorse is unacceptable. For what

they propose is simply ``stay the course,'' more of the same--more

deaths, more life altering injuries, more destruction, more squandered

opportunity, more debt, and more diminished standing in the world. This

legislation is about sending a message to the President that he cannot

pursue the same failed strategy of the past 4 years and receive a blank

check from this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I am opposed to this war. I believe the decision to

invade Iraq is the single most devastating and misguided foreign policy

decision our Nation has ever made. I will vote for the supplemental

because I believe it is the best course available to us at this time to

bring our involvement in this misguided tragedy to an end.