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

In considering what to say about H.R. 1591, I looked back at what I

said in the Congressional Record about House Resolution 861, an Iraq

resolution from the 109th Congress in June of last year. I lamented the

fact that 2,500 soldiers had died, 18,000 had been wounded, and 320

billion dollars had been spent or appropriated. I said that enough was

enough and that it was time to begin redeploying troops to the

periphery of the conflict and bring some of them home.

Sadly, in the last nine months, we have lost over 700 more troops and

seen more than 5,000 additional soldiers wounded. We have little to

show for our efforts, as Iraq is still in chaos and there is no peace

in sight. I am afraid that if we do not take a different approach that

this pattern will continue--progress in Iraq will not be made and

increasing numbers of American soldiers will suffer. H.R. 1591 is a

new, reasonable approach.

Like most Americans, I want Iraq to succeed as a stable democracy.

But Iraqis have to want this too and actually work towards this goal in

a meaningful way. H.R. 1591 encourages the Iraqi government to do this

by offering our continued assistance, if it meets certain political and

military benchmarks. These markers were laid out by President Bush in

January. A further incentive for Iraq to take more responsibility for

its own security is the knowledge that, under H.R. 1591, we will not be

there forever. There will now be a date certain, August 2008, after

which the Iraqi government could not longer rely on our soldiers for

its security.

This is not just the right course for Iraq, it is the right course

for America. After 4 long years, thousands dead and wounded, and

hundreds of billions spent, it is time that this war comes to an end.

Ending the war in Iraq will stop the losses and devastating injuries

inflicted on our troops. It will also allow us to redirect the billions

that would otherwise be spent on Iraq to meet needed priorities here at

home, such as providing health insurance to low-income children. I ask

my colleagues to keep in mind this tremendous opportunity cost should

we not stop the war.

While the legislation before us today will bring the war in Iraq to

close over a reasonable period of time, it also supports our troops in

the field. H.R. 1591 appropriates almost $100 billion for ongoing

military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. I strongly support our

troops who have done everything asked of them with dignity, courage,

and skill. It is with their safety and security in mind that I will

vote in favor of this bill.

Beyond Iraq, H.R. 1591 contains over $20 billion to meet other

emergency priorities. These include resources for veterans' health

care, recovery from the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita,

relief for farmers and ranchers from years of drought, and money to

states for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

Enacting H.R. 1591 is thus important to address these emergencies,

support our troops in the field, and end our involvement in the war in

Iraq. I strongly encourage all Members of the House to support its

passage.