Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this bill.

If the President of the United States were a rational decision maker,

a bill of this kind would not be necessary in the first place.

Unfortunately, the President continues to cling to the illusion that

the situation in Iraq will improve if only we're willing to sacrifice

still more American lives. But we cannot solve Iraq's civil war any

more than we could solve Vietnam's civil war 40 years ago.

By unleashing forces he does not understand and cannot control, the

President has put our military forces in an impossible situation. Our

troops cannot referee Iraq's sectarian conflict. The longer our forces

remain in Iraq, the more they become identified with a government that

is seen as increasingly repressive, and incapable--or unwilling--to

take the steps necessary to resolve Iraq's internal conflict

politically and peacefully. It is for all these reasons that it is past

time for Congress to take steps in forcing the President to change

course and withdraw our combat troops.

This course correction is far slower and more difficult than I would

like. I share the frustration of many of my colleagues that the

President is not moving quickly enough or boldly enough to end our

military involvement in Iraq. I for one do not expect the President to

provide the Congress with accurate assessments of the readiness of our

forces or of the Pentagon's ability to meet some key needs of the

troops.

Existing DoD readiness assessments already show that our forces are

overworked and overstretched. My friend from Pennsylvania, Mr. Murtha,

has included provisions in this bill that seek to limit the President's

ability to deploy our ground forces to Iraq that are not truly ready

and therefore less effective and more at risk. I believe zealous

oversight of these provisions will be required if this bill becomes

law. The President has shown he is willing to say or do anything to try

to get his way when it comes to Iraq policy. He must not be allowed to

politicize readiness assessments the way he has politicized

intelligence assessments.

One bogus criticism of this measure is that setting a date certain

for withdrawal is bad policy or micromanagement by the Congress. My

colleagues on the other side of the aisle have been trotting this

argument out frequently of late. Their position is undercut by the fact

that they voted to impose time lines and benchmarks on President

Clinton during our effort in the Balkans a decade ago.

By the way, I am pleased that this measure contains significantly

increased funding for two critical areas of veterans health care:

traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. We are only

beginning to come to grips with the true costs of this conflict for our

veterans, and we must take aggressive measures to ensure that they

receive the follow up care they need to have the best possible chance

of leading full, productive lives.

Mr. Speaker, we should be under no illusions regarding this bill. It

is only the first concrete step in our effort to redirect our nation's

policy in Iraq. Some weeks ago, we passed a non-binding resolution that

pointed us in a

new direction with respect to the occupation and war in Iraq. That was

the right thing to do, even though it was non-binding on the President.

Similarly, this supplemental appropriation is beneficial, although the

actual withdrawal of troops will require, I believe, additional

forceful action by Congress to fulfill the provisions of this bill.

It is important to move forward with this measure now and force this

President to make America's combat occupation of Iraq history rather

than a limitless, open-ended future.