I thank the gentleman for yielding and appreciate his

leadership in bringing this important legislation, the Orderly and

Responsible Iraq Redeployment Appropriations Act.

Mr. Speaker, on Monday, America honored our veterans, something that

we do every day in our hearts but which we openly celebrated on that

day. I am very proud that this year we could celebrate also the biggest

increase in veterans benefits in the 77-year history of the Veterans

Administration thanks to the New Direction Congress.

Yesterday, the President of the United States signed the Defense

appropriations bill with the biggest increase in defense spending, made

necessary because we must rebuild the capacity of our troops, which

capacity has been weakened by the war in Iraq. And today, we bring

before the Congress new direction legislation regarding the orderly and

responsible redeployment of our troops out of Iraq.

This legislation is necessary because whatever you may have thought

about the war or the conduct of the war or the origin of the war,

whatever you may think about the performance of the Iraqi Government

there, and I have my views on that subject, the fact is we can no

longer militarily sustain the deployment in Iraq. Staying there in the

manner that we are there is no longer an option.

Our troops have performed their duties magnificently, excellently,

patriotically, and courageously. We owe them the deepest gratitude for

their courage, their patriotism, and the sacrifices that they and their

families are willing to make. But even as they tried

to create and had their military successes, God bless them for that,

the secure framework was established to enable the Iraqi Government to

make the political change necessary to end the civil war. Well, the

sacrifice of our troops was simply not met by the actions of the Iraqi

Government.

How much longer should we expect our young people to risk their

lives, their limbs, their families, for an Iraqi Government that is not

willing to step up to the plate?

This legislation today offers something fundamentally different from

what President Bush is proposing, a 10-year war, a war without end,

costing trillions of dollars at the expense of our military readiness.

In fact, it offers something different than this House has done before.

Indeed, it provides the tools to our troops so that they can get their

jobs done with the greatest respect for that job. But it also presents

a strategy that will bring them home responsibly, honorably, safely,

and soon.

The legislation is different because it ties the funding to a

strategy for redeployment. It is different because the funding provided

is for the short term so that we can measure the administration's plan,

if there is such a plan, to redeploy the troops on the schedule

established in this bill.

We do have a military crisis not seen since Vietnam. Equipment is

wearing out and needs to be replaced. Our troops, wherever they are,

are only being trained for counterinsurgency in Iraq instead of a wider

training for a full range of missions that they may be called on to

perform. The deployment schedule of the Bush administration is wearing

down our forces, plain and simple.

The distinguished chairman of the Armed Services Committee has made

this readiness issue the cornerstone of his opposition to this war in

Iraq. The distinguished chairman of the appropriations subcommittee on

Defense has told us over and over again that this deployment in Iraq

cannot be sustained without weakening our national security, without

diminishing the capacity of our armed services to meet challenges to

our national security wherever they may occur. As such, this readiness

crisis poses a grave threat to America's national security.

Yet under the President's plan, and this was expressed by

representatives of the administration on more than one occasion, the

President's plan would bring 30,000 troops, the number of troops that

were sent in for the surge, that 30,000 troops would be redeployed back

to the U.S. by July of 2008. So let's understand this. This means that

by July of 2008, we will have the same number of troops in Iraq as we

had in November of 2006 when the American people called for a new

direction in Iraq. Again, we cannot afford the President's commitment

in Iraq. It traps us. It traps us, and we cannot, while we are in that

trap, address our readiness crisis.

This redeployment, in addition to undermining our military capacity

to protect the American people, is also unsustainable financially.

According to a recent report by the Joint Economic Committee, this war

could end up costing American taxpayers $3 trillion. We will pay any

price, as President Kennedy said, to protect the American people, but

without us going into the shortcomings of this war and the President's

execution of it, $3 trillion, think of the opportunity cost of that

money in our readiness, in the strength of our country, in our

reputation in the world.

The legislation before us is important. Again, the title of it is the

Orderly and Responsible Iraq Redeployment Appropriations Act. It would

begin redeployment within 30 days of enactment and have a goal of

completing the redeployment by December 15, 2008. The legislation

requires a transition in the mission of U.S. forces from being in

combat to diplomatic and force protection, to targeted counterterrorism

and limited support for the Iraqi security forces. It would prohibit

the deployment of U.S. troops to Iraq who are not fully trained and

fully equipped. Thank you, Mr. Murtha, for your leadership on that

subject and on this one as well and so many others. It requires that

all U.S. Government agencies and personnel abide by the Army Field

Manual's prohibition against torture.

The legislation that Mr. Obey has brought to the floor, and I salute

your leadership over and over again on this subject and so many others,

Mr. Chairman, the House must choose between the President's plan for a

10-year war without end, no end in sight, the longer we're there, the

harder it is to come out, the longer we're there, the more severely it

hurts our military readiness; or a Democratic plan for responsible,

honorable, safe redeployment out of Iraq and soon.

Our troops have already paid too high a price for this war: 3,850

U.S. troops killed, 28,000 injured, thousands of them permanently. That

is, of course, the biggest price to pay. But the price that we are

paying in our reputation in the world for us not to be able to take our

rightful place as a leader in the world to make the world safer, to

make the region, the Middle East, more stable, and so many other

challenges that the world faces, whether it's the eradication of

disease, the alleviation of poverty, the curbing of global warming,

keeping peace, ending the fury of despair that contributes to the

violence in the world. The countries of the world are crying out for

American leadership, and at the same time they disrespect us for what

is happening in Iraq.

We must act now to provide a new direction because it is clear that

the President has turned a blind eye to all of this. And in addition to

what I said earlier, our troops paying the biggest price, our

reputation in the world, the several-trillion-dollar price tag to the

taxpayer, and the cost to our readiness, despite the fact that the

President has turned a blind eye to the facts of Iraq and a tin ear to

the wishes of the American people to take a new direction in Iraq and

bring our troops home, we must act today. I hope that our colleagues

will all support this legislation because in doing so and if it is

enacted into law and if this policy is pursued, we can resume our

rightful place in the world. We can refocus our attention, as Mr. Obey

said earlier, on the real war on terrorism, and we can make the

American people safer by rebuilding and restoring the readiness and the

capacity of our military to protect the American people wherever our

interests are threatened.

All of us stand here and take an oath of office by pledging to

protect and defend the Constitution. In that preamble, to provide for

the common defense is one of our first responsibilities. Unless we do

that, protect the American people, nothing else is possible.

So let us support this legislation which helps us honor our oath of

office to defend the American people and to respect the sacrifice, the

courage, the patriotism of our troops to make us the home of the brave

and the land of the free.

I urge a ``yes'' vote on this important legislation.