Mr. Speaker, as a proud member of the

Progressive and the Out of Iraq Caucuses, I rise to announce that I

will proudly cast my vote to override the President's veto of H.R.

1591, the ``U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans'' Health and Iraq

Accountability Act.'' By vetoing the bipartisan Iraq Accountability Act

last night, the President vetoed the will of the American people. The

President vetoed a responsible funding bill for the troops that would

have provided more funding for our troops and military readiness than

even the President requested.

By vetoing the Iraq Accountability Act, the President rejected a bill

that reflects the will of the American people to wind down this war. By

vetoing the Iraq Accountability Act, the President turned a deaf ear to

the loud message sent by the American people last November.

I will vote to override the President's veto because the Iraq

Accountability Act offers us the first real chance to end the misguided

invasion, war, and occupation of Iraq. It puts us on the glide path to

the day when our troops come home in honor and triumph and where we can

care for him who has borne the battle, and for his widow and orphan.

This legislation helps to repair the damage to America's international

reputation and prestige. It brings long overdue oversight,

accountability, and transparency to defense and reconstruction

contracting and procurement. Finally, it places the responsibility for

bringing peace and security where it clearly belongs and that is

squarely on the shoulders of the Iraqi government.

Mr. Speaker, in vetoing the legislation, the President claimed the

Iraq Accountability Act, H.R. 1591 would undermine our troops and

threaten the safety of the American people here at home. Coming from an

Administration that has been wrong on every important question relating

to the decision to launch the Iraq War as well the conduct of it, this

claim is laughable. It is nearly as ridiculous as the President's often

stated claim of ``progress'' in Iraq. The facts, of course, are

otherwise. The U.S. death toll in Iraq reached 104 for April--making it

the deadliest month of the year and one of the deadliest of the entire

war. It is therefore little wonder that nearly 70 percent of Americans

disapprove of the way the President is handling the war. But more

important, the President's claim that the Iraq Accountability Act

undermines our troops and threatens the safety of the American people

here at home is simply not true.

Republican Senator Chuck Hagel recently returned from Iraq and paints

a bleak picture: This thing is coming undone quickly, and [Prime

Minister] Maliki's government is weaker by the day. The police are

corrupt top to bottom. The oil problem is a huge problem. They still

can't get anything through the parliament--no hydrocarbon law, no de-

Baathification law, no provincial elections.

Mr. Speaker, many of the Nation's most highly respected generals and

several leading Republicans have endorsed H.R. 1591; all of them oppose

the President's plan to escalate the war in Iraq. Take, for example,

Maj. Gen. John Batiste, U.S. Army (Ret.):

Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton, USA, Ret. supports this legislation because it

``gives General Petraeus great leverage for moving the Iraqi government

down the more disciplined path laid out by the Iraq Study Group.''

According to Major Eaton, the real audience for the timeline language

is Prime Minister al-Maliki and the elected government of Iraq:

Lt. Gen. William E. Odom, U.S. Army (Ret.), President Reagan's

Director of the National Security Agency, supports the bill because

it gives the President a chance to pull back from a disastrous course,

re-orient U.S. strategy to achieve regional stability, and win help

from many other countries--the only way peace will eventually be

achieved.

Mr. Speaker, to date, the war in Iraq has lasted longer than

America's involvement in World War II, the greatest conflict in all of

human history. But there is a difference. The Second World War ended in

complete and total victory for the United States and its allies. But

then again, in that conflict America was led by FDR, a great Commander-

in-Chief, who had a plan to win the war and secure the peace, listened

to his generals, and sent troops in sufficient numbers and sufficiently

trained and equipped to do the job.

As a result of the colossal miscalculation in deciding to invade

Iraq, the loss of public trust resulting from the misrepresentation of

the reasons for launching that invasion, and the breath taking

incompetence in mismanaging the occupation of Iraq, the Armed Forces

and the people of the United States have suffered incalculable damage.

The war in Iraq has claimed the lives of 3,316 brave service men and

women--64 in the first 16 days of this month. More than

24,912 Americans have been wounded, many suffering the most horrific

injuries. American taxpayers have paid nearly $400 billion to sustain

this misadventure.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to hold the Bush Administration and the Iraqi

government accountable. This bill's timetable and benchmarks finally

hold the Iraqis accountable. As retired Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton has

stated, This bill gives General Petraeus great leverage for moving the

Iraqi government down the more disciplined path laid out by the Iraq

Study Group. The real audience for the timeline language is Prime

Minister al-Maliki and the elected government of Iraq.

Even Defense Secretary Robert Gates has noted that the timetable is

helpful--and sends

the message that ``the clock is ticking.'' Gates said ``The strong

feelings expressed in the Congress about the timetable probably have

had a positive impact. . . . in terms of communicating to the Iraqis

that this is not an open-ended commitment.''

Mr. Speaker, in overriding the President's veto, this House will be

doing the business and expressing the will of the American people. In

the latest CBS News/New York Times poll, 64 percent of Americans favor

a timetable that provides for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq

in 2008. In the same poll, 57 percent of Americans believe that

Congress, not the President, should have the last say when it comes to

setting troop levels in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, in overriding the President's veto, Congress is

fulfilling its constitutional responsibilities and exercising the first

check on the President's power in 6 years. As Iraq Study Group Co-

Chairman Lee Hamilton has pointed out, The Founders of our Nation never

envisioned an unfettered president making unilateral decisions about

American lives and military power. They did indeed make the president

the commander in chief, but they gave to Congress the responsibility

for declaring war, for making rules governing our land and naval

forces, for overseeing policy, and of course the ability to fund war or

to cease funding it.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to join me in overriding the

President's veto of Iraq Accountability Act, H.R. 1591. This is the

best way to ensure accountability to our soldiers who have been

sent into battle without proper training or equipment or a clear

mission. It is the best way to keep faith with our veterans who are not

getting the best medical care when they come home. Overriding the

President's veto is essential to restoring our military that is being

stretched to the limits by the Bush policy. Last, it is absolutely

necessary to regain the confidence of the American people who demand a

new direction in Iraq.