Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished chairwoman of the

Rules Committee and fellow New Yorker for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, for months I have said that our country needs a plan to

ensure the timely redeployment of our troops out of Iraq. The previous

Congress failed in their duty to provide oversight and refused to ask

the tough questions regarding the management of this poorly planned and

ill-conceived war. To say, as some of my Republican colleagues have,

that passage of this legislation would somehow embolden our enemies or

send the wrong message to our allies is just a blatant distortion of

the truth.

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

Act lays out for the first time a responsible and realistic strategy

for completing our mission in Iraq and bringing our brave troops home

as soon as possible. This is a responsible and deliberate plan to

change the direction in Iraq without jeopardizing the safety and well-

being of our soldiers. The legislation sets a responsible timeline for

the phased redeployment of U.S. troops in Iraq with a date certain by

August 2008 at the latest.

The war in Iraq increasingly strains our military, creating a crisis

in the U.S. troop readiness and decreasing our ability to respond to

new threats. With more than 3,200 troops dead, more than 24,000 troops

wounded, and more than $400 billion of taxpayer dollars spent, we have

paid too high a price.

We have a choice: We can continue the administration's open-ended

commitment to a civil war in Iraq, or we can finish the job and begin a

responsible redeployment of U.S. forces.

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

Act goes beyond a new direction for Iraq. It begins a new direction for

our country, one in which veterans are taken care of, families provided

for, and brave men and women in harm's way have the resources they need

to get the job done.

The legislation provides $1 billion to fight the global war on terror

by putting the focus back where it should have been all along,

Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden. The legislation would also provide

$2.5 billion in additional funding to ensure our troops are properly

equipped.

I would recommend a ``yes'' vote.

The legislation would also provide $2.5 billion in additional funding

to ensure that our troops are properly equipped and trained; $2.8

billion for Defense Health Care; and $1.7 Billion for veterans' health

care--including millions to address the maintenance backlog at VA

health care facilities like Walter Reed--ensuring our veterans and

troops get the care they need and deserve.

I am proud to associate myself with this legislation because it will

change our direction in Iraq, and provides the new direction for our

country that the American people demanded last November.

My constituents did not send me to Washington to serve as a rubber

stamp for the Administration. I was sent to Washington to stand up

against the mismanagement of this war and misplaced priorities of the

Administration.

True victory will be achieved when we bring all of our brave troops

home--alive and uninjured. I would ask that if my children were serving

in Iraq, and we as a nation should ask nothing less for our brave

troops.