Mr. Speaker, after my oversight trips to Iraq in July and

August of 2006, I concluded we needed to encourage the Iraqi

government, and specifically Prime Minister Maliki, to take stronger

action to improve the situation in their country, and that the best way

to do this was to set firm timelines for Iraqi security forces to

replace our troops who are doing police work.

I believe a workable timeline will incentivize the Iraqis to make the

hard choices necessary to ensure stability among the three primary

sects--Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds. We need to motivate the Iraqis to set

firm deadlines for provincial elections, reconciliation and amnesty,

and a final drafting of their constitution.

During 2005, Iraqis set timelines to establish and ratify a

constitution and hold national elections. They accomplished each

benchmark successfully. I do not believe they would have achieved this

success if we had not pushed Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds to resolve their

differences and compromise in order to meet the timelines we helped

set.

The United States went into Iraq on a bipartisan basis, with two-

thirds of the House and three-quarters of the Senate voting to

authorize the use of force. I believe we need to draw down the majority

of our troops on a bipartisan basis, and have sought to achieve

bipartisan solutions to improve our operations and reduce the violence.

While H.R. 4156 is by no means a perfect solution, it does propose a

tight, but arguably reasonable, timeline for drawdown of troops in Iraq

similar to one I proposed earlier this year. It should help bridge the

gap between Republicans and Democrats on the most important issue of

our time. The bill would require our commanders to begin a redeployment

of our troops in harms way within a month, and set a target date of

December 15, 2008, to complete the task.

For me, a better bill would have been to give Iraqis and our troops

an additional six months to complete the drawdown, but given this bill

sets a target date, rather than a withdrawal date, it gives needed

flexibility to our military leadership.

I do not believe we have the force structure to maintain the number

of troops in Iraq now, and certainly do not have the capacity to

increase the force.

Our troops have performed extraordinarily well, but it is

unreasonable for us to ask them to return to Iraq for a third or fourth

tour. I also believe it was a significant mistake to extend

their tours from 12 to 15 months and would be unconscionable to

consider extending their tours beyond 15 months. Based on our

military's current manpower, we will need to begin to draw down our

forces by the beginning of 2008, and it would be wise to let the Iraqis

know now this reduction will take place.

While I support this bill, I am disappointed the majority still has

not allowed a single amendment on any Iraq-related bill. As I have said

before, it is pretty arrogant to think we would criticize Iraqis for

not being able to compromise and find common ground when Republicans

and Democrats are unable to compromise and find common ground on the

most important issue facing our Nation.