Class action lawsuit reform, we passed with 50 Democrat votes. Their leader, out of step with her own Members, voted no.

REAL ID Act, 42 Democrats voted yes. Their leader voted no.

Permanent repeal of the death tax. What happened? Forty-two Democrats voted yes. Their leader voted no.

Continuity of government, bipartisan support for this, included 122 Democrats voting for it. They thought it was the right thing to do. Their leader voted no.

The agenda on the left is all about no. No action, no results, no ideas. And we on the right, we the Republican majority, are acting. We are moving forward. We are trying to do what is right for all Americans, not just say no.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. We have a newspaper here in Washington, D.C. It is called The Hill. Today there was an article, Progressives to Unveil Their Core Principles. The article talks about how some of the liberal Members in the House felt sidelined, and I am quoting, ''felt sidelined as more centrist Democrats have chosen to side with Republican leadership on several issues.''

I would suggest to the gentleman that the reason so many Members of this body do talk with us, side with us, work with us, vote with us to pass this legislation, is because it is what America wants to see happen. It is what their expectation is and the legislation they want to see.

Mr. MCHENRY. That is a wonderful way you put that. We are trying to take a consensus agenda on what the American people need and want and the direction this country wants to continue heading. And that is more local control, individual ownership and responsibility, keeping more of what they earn to help their families, help their communities, help raise their children and improve small businesses around this country.

I certainly appreciate the gentlewoman from Tennessee taking the time to be here tonight to discuss our agenda, not a Republican agenda but an agenda for America, to do the right thing for all American people. That is what we are trying to do. My constituents back home in western North Carolina certainly have those same ideals in mind. I am sure yours do as well there in Tennessee. I thank the gentlewoman for hosting this hour.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I thank the gentleman so much for being here this evening. I think one of the things that we have seen is that so many Members of this House have supported tax relief for every taxpayer. They know that this majority has supported tax relief for every single taxpayer, not for just a few. And, true, we have targeted that relief to those at the lower end of the earning scale and that is an important thing to do.

In the past few years, we have also reduced income tax rates across the board. We have eliminated that death tax. We hope that the Senate works with us, making this a permanent elimination.

We are allowing businesses, we talked about small businesses and jobs creation, allowing businesses to deduct more for their equipment, for their depreciation, for their leasing, so that they can up those capital expenditures. We are seeing capital investment increase and jobs growth take place.

For States like my State, Tennessee, and others that do not have a State income tax, we have passed a bill restoring the Federal sales tax deduction. In my State in Tennessee, that is putting hundreds of millions of dollars back into our State economy. It is a great thing. It is a great thing for Main Street. We know that it is the right thing to do, to be sure those dollars stay at home. The last thing we need to do is to take more out of somebody's paycheck, more out of their pocketbook, and turn around and send it here to Washington, D.C. to try to decide how we are going to send it back. Leave it at home.

The tax relief for individuals and for small businesses has paid off. We started with a recession in 2001 and now we are entering the 25th month of steady jobs growth. Twenty-five months. Since May 2003, this economy, not the government, not Washington, D.C., but this wonderful free enterprise system in this great Nation has created nearly 5 million new jobs. The reason we see this jobs growth is not because government is creating jobs, it is because this leadership in this Congress, in this administration, understands create the right environment and get out of the way. Let the free enterprise system do what they do best, which is create jobs. Over the past couple of years, 25 months, an average of 146,000 jobs a month. We have got historically low unemployment and we have got steady growth.

We have led on tax relief. We have led on the effort to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse in government and on the effort to cut Federal spending. We passed a budget, despite outcry from the left, that allowed a .8 percent, nearly a full percent cut in budget authority in non-defense, non-homeland security spending.

An issue I know my constituents care deeply about is the growing problem of illegal immigration. We have taken a strong stance on this issue and have made a terrific start with passage of the REAL ID Act. We are funding more border agents. Our list goes on and on, 100 ways, in 100 days.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be here to visit with my colleagues tonight. We look forward to continuing the conversation and to continuing to work on a positive, progressive, proactive agenda for America.

ANNOUNCING FORMATION OF OUT OF IRAQ CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FITZPATRICK). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I am here this evening to talk about something new and wonderful that has happened in the Congress of the United States of America. I am here to talk about a new caucus that is named Out of Iraq Caucus. I am here to talk about the men and women of this House who have decided they can be silent no longer. I am here to talk about men and women who represent various points of view relative to support for the President from the time that he first announced he was going into Iraq to now. I am here to talk about why we have formed this caucus, what we plan to do, but more than that this evening, we are going to focus on our soldiers and those who are in Iraq serving this country, those who are there in harm's way, those who have been killed in Iraq, those who are up at Walter Reed Hospital suffering from serious injuries, having lost limbs, having lost their eyesight, those who do not know what the future holds for them.

□ 2015

We are going to focus on that this evening because it is extremely important for the families of these soldiers to know and understand that we support these soldiers. We know that many of them went there because they were called to duty. They were recruited to go to Iraq because their President asked them to do so, and they wanted to serve this country despite the fact they did not understand all of the reasons why. Many of them went to serve because they thought that Saddam Hussein was responsible for 9/11. But, of course, we know now that Saddam Hussein was not responsible for 9/11, and many of the soldiers know that now.

So this caucus has been formed. We have 61 members, and they are still adding on. We met this morning at 10 a.m., and we will continue to meet as we develop our mission statement, as we help to define who we are.

Basically, we have come together to say we want out of Iraq. We want out, and this caucus is not putting a time certain. This caucus has not concocted demands about how we want to get out. We simply want our young people out of Iraq. So we will provide support to other Members of Congress, other caucuses who want to get out of Iraq. We will provide support to the citizens of this Nation, the organized national groups who want to get out of Iraq.

We will organize not only coming to the floor as we are this evening to talk about various aspects of this war. We will also organize workshops and seminars. We will travel, some of us, to different regions in this country, responding to citizens who are asking for Members of Congress to come and explain this public policy to them. We will be available to meet with the families of servicemembers who have been killed,

who have been injured. We have families who are asking to meet with somebody, anybody. We have people who are asking to meet with Donald Rumsfeld, who cannot get any response, who are not being talked to. We are going to meet with them. We are going to talk with them. We are going to share with them what we know.

But more than that, we are going to be an ear to family members who need to talk with someone about why their son or daughter died in Iraq. We are going to spend the time and give them some attention because we think that the least that we can do is sit and talk and listen to family members.

Some of them will say that they are very proud that their child or their son or their relative served in this war, and we will commend them for the pride that they feel and the fact that their relative, their child, their brother, their father served. Some will say that ''I once support the war but I no longer support it.'' We will listen to them, and we will hear what they have to say. And we will explain to them how we feel at this time about getting out of Iraq.

And so this is a caucus that will have the ability to extend itself not only to the organized groups and organizations but again to the family members.

I would like to point out something about this war. We have heard many of the statistics and much of the data over and over again. But we have to remind folks we have been there now since March 19, 2003. We have 1,722 soldiers who have died in this war, and the numbers mount each day. The number of soldiers injured: 13,074. We have many Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle who are going up to Walter Reed Hospital to see the soldiers there who are injured, and the stories that we hear coming back from those visits break one's heart. These are stories of young men and women who had hopes and dreams. Many of them went to war because they had no jobs. They did not know what the future held for them, and they thought, Perhaps if I go and serve my country and get an income, perhaps I can do good. I can not only serve my country, but perhaps I can get ahead. Perhaps I can learn a trade. Perhaps I can learn something. Perhaps I can exploit some of my talents and show what I can do. But when I come home, I want to go back to school. I want to go to college. I want to get married. I want to have children. I want to contribute to my community.

Well, unfortunately, these 1,722 will never be able to realize their hopes and their dreams. They have died. But the question still remains for many of us, Why are we in Iraq? What is the real story? We know now there are no weapons of mass destruction. Why are these young people dying?

I want to relate an interview that I watched on television this past Sunday. This past Sunday, as many folks in America do, I watched some of the great television shows, and I was watching George Stephanopoulos as he interviewed the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. And he interviewed her. They talked about, of course, the work that she is doing in the Middle East, working with the issue of Israel, the Palestinians.

But then he segued to the war in Iraq. And he said to Condoleezza Rice, ''As you know, there has been a lot of talk back here in the United States about these Downing Street memos, the minutes of a meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair in the spring of 2002 where they discuss their meetings with the United States.'' And then he said, ''I want to show you what one mother, Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a U.S. soldier, had to say about that memo this week.'' And then they showed Cindy Sheehan, mother. She said this: ''The so-called Downing Street memo dated the 23rd of July, 2002, only confirms what I already suspected. The leadership of this country rushed us into an illegal invasion of another sovereign country on prefabricated and cherry-picked intelligence.''

And then George Stephanopoulos said to the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, ''How do you respond to this, to what Mrs. Sheehan said? How do you respond to that?'' Condoleezza Rice started out with her explanation. She started out by saying, ''Well, I can only say what the President has said many, many times. The United States of America and its coalition decided that it was finally time to deal with the threat of Saddam Hussein.'' And she went on with the typical kind of discussion and explanation in line with the message that is given by this administration. Along the way, she said, ''When you consider what the Iraqi people had gone through in the Saddam Hussein regime's reign, what about the responsibility to the Iraqi people?''

I was struck by this conversation because not one time did the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, acknowledge Cindy Sheehan, who had been on the screen with the question that was raised by George Stephanopoulos. Not once on Father's Day did she say, we are sorry your son died, we feel your pain, we understand how you must feel. Not once did she recognize her. Not once did she recognize the death of her son. Not once did she show any sympathy. But oftentimes we hear from this administration how much they care about the soldiers.

Well, the Out of Iraq Caucus is going to show not only do we want them out of Iraq but we care about them. We will never fail to acknowledge a mother who is in deep pain about the loss of her son. Not ever will we be on national TV and not take a moment to say we too care about our soldiers. No. This conversation basically focused on our responsibility to the Iraqi people.

My first responsibility is to Americans and to those American soldiers. My first responsibility is to their safety. My first responsibility is to their well-being. My first responsibility is to acknowledge them and their families and their parents. And my responsibility, as a public policymaker, is to tell the truth. We all know now there were no weapons of mass destruction. We cannot tell these young people why they are really there. We cannot tell them that there is an exit strategy. We cannot tell them why many of their friends that they met in this war died in vehicles that had no armor. We cannot tell them why they died up in Fallujah. We cannot tell them why they died in Operation Lightning. We cannot tell them what they are doing in Operation Spear.

We hear all of these fancy, concocted names for the operations, but what we do not hear is the definition of why they are doing what they are doing. Are they simply being organized into these special operations to try to send a signal to the American people that they are really in charge? What are they to do when they go into these battles and into these special operations? Are they to shoot whatever moves?

We know that, yes, thousands of Iraqis have died because we have young people in these special operations, Operation Lightning, Operation Spear, operation this, operation that, who were told to shoot anything that moves. Many of them cannot live with the psychological damage that is fostered upon them because they are shooting and they are killing and they do not have all of the answers.

So today we focus on our soldiers, and we say to Cindy Sheehan we are sorry about the loss of her son and we thank her for caring enough to ask the questions, to be involved. We are trying to get public policymakers to do the right thing. So tonight, as we further announce the Out of Iraq Caucus and the Members who have signed up to do the work of providing the platform of creating the voice for those who want to speak out, we focus tonight on our soldiers in Iraq. Our prayers go out to them. We want them to be returned home. We want them to realize their dreams and their hopes and their aspirations.

I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY), who has been on this floor night after night talking about these issues, the gentlewoman from California that basically said we want out of Iraq; administration, tell us how you are going to do it.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California for starting tonight's dialogue.

It is true. I have been on the House floor, I think, 79 times, maybe 80 in the last year for 5 minutes after the end of our workday, of our congressional day. And my message has been we need to figure out how to bring our troops home. Never in that message have I said it is the troops' fault that we are there and that they are to be criticized. We are not going to pick on the warriors. We are not going to blame them

because their leadership, their administration, sent them there to do a job that was not necessary.

The death of over 1,700 of our troops does not say to me that to honor those deaths we need to send more troops, we need to have more death.

□ 2030

I do not think that honors those who have died. I think that, in fact, it is a shame that we would even think of sending another young person, male, female, another older person, our National Guard, our Reservists, into an area that we did not need to be in in the first place. There is no excuse for the United States to have started a war in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, our Constitution states that Members of Congress must be chosen by the people of the United States and that Congress must represent the people of the United States. That means that we as Members, Members of Congress, need to act and listen to the people when they speak. Well, I have been speaking for 80 days, every time we are in session, for 5 minutes, but now the American people are speaking. They have spoken.

The latest Gallup poll released last week indicates that the American people are ready for our military in Iraq to start coming home. They are saying, bring our troops home. They say this, and some actually supported the war at the beginning, but now, like the three of us up here, they want to honor our troops, they want to honor the families of our troops, they want to bring them home safe and whole.

When I say whole, I know what I am talking about. Two years ago, I had major, major back surgery at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. And when I was able to walk, I walked the halls and visited the troops that had come home then. It was August 2 years ago, so they were just beginning to come home from Iraq. I want to tell my colleagues, we are not talking about people that are hardly wounded at all, we are talking about young people who have virtually been destroyed physically. Their minds are there, though. They know what happened. But we are doing such a disservice to them if we send more young people, more troops in an area where they too are going to get injured or killed.

Nearly 60 percent of Americans believe that the United States should bring home some or all of our troops from Iraq, and the Gallup poll tells us that only 36 percent of Americans support maintaining our current troop level in Iraq. Only 36 percent. This is the lowest level of support for the war since it began in March 2003, and nobody is saying we do not support our troops. They know these statistics are all about bringing them home because we do support them, and we know that when they come home they will be safe. It is absolute in these numbers that Americans are not criticizing the troops, the warriors; they are criticizing the war, how we got into it, how badly it has been managed, and why there is absolutely no plan on how to bring our troops home.

The American people have stated loud and clear, and their numbers are increasing also; the more they see what is happening to their neighbor, a friend of their son or their daughter, they are realizing that, oh, my, it can happen to any single one of these young people that we send overseas for a war that was not necessary in the first place. The only way to end this death and destruction that occurs every single day is to start the process of bringing our troops home. Clearly, the American people are way ahead of Congress on this issue.

Unfortunately, the President of the United States is way behind on the issue of Iraq. We have asked the President to come up with a plan for ending the war. He has not. He has no plan for victory, except to leave our troops in harm's way as targets for a furious insurgency who look at our sons and daughters as occupiers. What, then, should Members of Congress do?

Well, I have been working hard on this, as the gentlewoman from California told us. For one thing, I came up with a plan in January when I introduced legislation that is H. Con. Res. 35, calling for the President to begin bringing our troops home. Thirty-five Members of Congress support this legislation. And then we continued this effort on May 25 by introducing an amendment to the defense authorization bill calling on the President to do this simple thing: Create a plan for Iraq and bring his plan to the appropriate House committee. Mr. Speaker, 128 Members of Congress, including five Republicans and one Independent, voted in favor of this sensible amendment.

It is clear that the United States must develop a plan to bring our troops home. That is the only fair thing to do for the people of this country but, most importantly, for the troops. They deserve to know when they get to come home, and their families deserve it equally.

I have loved being up here with my colleagues. I am proud to be a member of the Out of Iraq Task Force in the House of Representatives. It is not that we want to run away from anything; we certainly believe that when the United States pulls our troops home, that we do have a responsibility and we must be working with the Iraqis to help them with their failing economic and physical infrastructure. We know that we can help them with that, but we know we cannot do it while we are in the midst of destroying their cities at the same time we are trying to put them back together. First, we bring our troops home, then we work with the Iraqi government and we help them put their country back together.

We are also proud of the Iraqi citizens who went to the polls and voted, but we are also very clear that what they were voting for was the fact that they wanted their country back in control by the Iraqis, not by the United States military. As soon as we do this, we can start working with them, and we can work with the international world, get them all involved, so we can be doing the right thing for Iraq and the Iraqi people who are also being destroyed by this war.

So I thank the gentlewoman for letting me be a part of this. My colleagues will hear more from us. We have a lot of ideas, but our major idea is two words, ''troops home,'' in honor of those young men and young women and the Reservists and the National Guard who are doing something that they were told they must do; and they are serving their country the best that they can, but they are getting very poor guidance from the leaders of this country.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY), not only for being here this evening, but for all of the work, all of the hours, all of the time that she has put into this effort.

I now yield time to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE), who too has been a leader in opposing this war. She warned us early on that we should not just give permission to the President of the United States to go to war without understanding what the reasons were and without having that debate. So, unfortunately, our debate is taking place a little bit late, but it is taking place.

I would like to thank the gentlewoman from northern California, the Oakland area, (Ms. LEE), for all of her work and for being here this evening.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) for her leadership and for really seeing the wisdom and knowing that this is a defining moment to bring us all together in our Out of Iraq Caucus.

The gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) has recognized the fact that there were those who voted for the war and those who voted against the war, but we know what is going on with our young men and women now, and so the gentlewoman decided to bring us all together to try to help us figure out how to get out of this mess. I think the country owes the gentlewoman a debt of gratitude.

Also, to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY), I just want to say to her, sometimes she is the lone voice in the wilderness. Sooner or later, though, if you call it the way it is and stick with your principles and stick with what you believe is right, people will hear you; the country will hear and the world will hear, and I think that is what we are seeing now. So I just want to thank her for her leadership as well.

Mr. Speaker, so often we get caught up in the rhetoric of our positions and what we believe, and oftentimes forget about the human face and the toll of

such a war, such an illegal and immoral war.

The gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) so eloquently talked about the callousness and the insensitivity of this administration toward those who have died and who are risking their lives, when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice did not acknowledge the sacrifices and the pain that a courageous mother, Cindy Sheehan, must be feeling.

As the daughter of a veteran of two wars, I feel this, and I understand this, and I think that our administration, whether they have children in Iraq or not, I think that they should stand up for these young men and women and feel their pain and try to help figure out how to first say, I am sorry; and secondly, say, let us begin to figure out how we develop a plan and begin to bring our young men and women out of harm's way.

Mr. Speaker, that is how we really support our troops. Empty rhetoric does not work when young men and women are dying.

So let me just say, I visited the troops, I guess it was probably a couple of years ago at Walter Reed Hospital. This is the untold story of this war. There are thousands of our kids who will be disabled for life, thousands of our young men and women who lost their limbs, who cannot see, their faces have been blown off. It has been a financial difficulty; they have come back to the lack of financial and economic security. Some of them are losing their houses, they have lost their jobs, their credit cards. And we serve on the Committee on Financial Services and we know how the credit card companies are messing with them in terms of their debt and the bankruptcy issues.

They come back and, upon their return, they see that they have very little in terms of veterans benefits. They have long lines they have to wait in. The mental health services are almost nonexistent. We know what post-traumatic stress syndrome is. Our young men and women need mental health services like they have never needed it before. Yet, we cannot get legislation nor funding to provide this kind of care for our kids, and I think that is a shame and a disgrace.

Mr. Speaker, I went to a funeral of a young man who was killed in my district in the war, and it was unbelievable. This young man was a proud soldier, and I was so proud of him, because he was determined that he was going to go and serve our country and wave the flag and make sure that democracy prevailed in Iraq, and he honorably died, and it was very sad. But his family told me that while they may not have agreed with what he wanted to do in terms of going into the military, that they supported him going; they loved him and they missed him, but they wanted to get more involved in trying to help us figure out a way to ensure that no more kids are killed like this. I hear this over and over and over again. I think all of us here hear that over and over again.

But yes, we went and we bombed the heck out of Iraq, so we have I think a duty and a responsibility to help rebuild and reconstruct the country. But as the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) said, we need to first begin to develop a plan to get our young men and women and bring them home, get them out of harm's way, because they are the targets of the insurgency. I do not believe there is going to be any stability as long as the Iraqi people believe and see that their country is occupied by U.S. forces. So we are putting them and keeping them in harm's way.

So we need to bring them home, and we need to figure out a plan to do that as soon as possible.

Also, let me just say that in the Committee on International Relations, a committee upon which I serve, we had authorized or reauthorized the State Department Reauthorization Act a couple of weeks ago. So I tried to offer an amendment for withdrawal, and I think there were 12 or 13 votes for that. But then I decided that since the President and since Secretary Rice continued to say that we do not want to permanently occupy Iraq, we do not want permanent bases, I said, well, let me do an amendment to the State Department authorization bill and all it would say is we just do not intend to have permanent bases in Iraq. Well, I think, on a bipartisan vote, it got about 15 votes there.

Mr. Speaker, I share that because we hear the administration saying, no permanent presence, no permanent bases; yet we see just the opposite in terms of funding and appropriations and beginning to create this scenario to build permanent bases. So we have to ask the question: What is really going on?

□ 2045

We know that the administration misled the American people and the world that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. We knew that then. Now, I think the Downing Street memo and the other facts are coming out so that the public will understand what we said then, we knew that there was no connection between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda and 9/11 and Iraq.

We knew that then, but now, thank God for the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) and the hearings that we are holding. We are beginning to educate the American people so that they know what we knew. And I think people are listening, people are beginning to say was this worth it? Was this worth it? Was this worth over 1,700 of our young people being killed, countless number of Iraqi civilians being killed, $300 billion-plus, and I think Defense Appropriations just had another $45 billion in it, that was not with my vote, but to that, some voted for the other day, and so where does this end? Where does this end?

And so I just wanted to say tonight in closing that we need to insist that the administration announce that they will develop a plan for bringing our young men and women home, announce a plan for stabilizing and to help bringing in the international community to stabilize Iraq, and this means the international community in a real way.

And we need to make sure that the administration says to the American people that there will be no permanent bases in Iraq. Because, if we do that, we are going to be up to trillions of dollars in terms of this war. And I hate to see that happen, because here we have people who are homeless, we have young kids who need a decent education, and we need affordable housing, we need a universal health care system.

And we need to take care of some domestic needs. With the war going on like this and with billions and billions of dollars being spent, especially if we intend to have permanent bases, we will never meet our domestic needs and the responsibility that we owe to our American citizens.

So I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) for her leadership and for making sure that all of us come to this floor and call it like it is and tell the truth, and begin to beat that drum and begin to wake up America so that we can save our kids from being bombed and from the suicide attacks and from the violence that they are dealing with in such an honorable way.

These kids are courageous, they deserve our support, and they deserve our support in a real way. And that means our support by insisting that they come home so they can be with their families and get the type of care that they need.

Ms. WATERS. I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE). We appreciate so very much the work that she has been doing and her wisdom and early warnings about this war.

Next, I would like to call on the Congressman from New York (Mr. RANGEL), who is a veteran who knows a lot about war because he served.

He is a gentleman who has been unsettled about this war for months. And he has taken many opportunities to ask what we are doing. When are we going to have a discussion? When are we going to speak out? When are we going to have hearings? What is going on with this?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank him for raising those questions. I wanted to thank him for being a part of what we are attempting to do with the Out of Iraq Caucus. And I welcome him this evening to this discussion.

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I just want people to know that the whole country is not run by distinguished women from California. But I certainly do appreciate the leadership that you have taken. God knows how much better off our country would have been if

we had recognized the brain power that we have with minority women in this country. But we have that to work on.

I do not know where to start, because there are certain people that believe that we are not supporting the troops when we are anxious that they return home well to their families.

But I can say that I visited those that have been wounded. I have the 369th. They call themselves the Hell Fighters. They are a National Guard outfit. They have been to the Persian Gulf. They have been to Iraq. I am always there when they leave. I am always there when they come home. And I want the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) to know that they appreciate what we are doing for them.

What people do not understand when they talk about the patriotism of our fighting men and women, they are so right, unlike those of us who have a responsibility to participate, whether we are going to have peace or war for our great Nation, any veteran will tell you, when that flag goes up, you are in the military, you salute it. You do not challenge the military. You do not challenge the President. You do what you have been trained to do, and that is to destroy the enemy.

And so no matter how patriotic our men and women are, and they are that, bringing them home to their loved ones means we are patriotic too.

I remember when I first enlisted in the Army. I was 18 years old. I had not finished high school. Spinning my wheels. Did not know which way to go. Saw the uniform, saw the check, could send the check home to mom; my brother had before me. Seemed like a pretty good deal.

Now, no way did I know that in August of 1950 I would be sent to Korea, which I am embarrassed to admit I had no idea where it was, to engage in a police action, which did not sound too bad to me, being a policeman. I went there in August of 1950 and guess what? The Second Infantry Division that left Fort Washington to go there is still there today.

Getting into wars in countries is a heck of a lot easier than getting out of them. And so in that war, we did not even declare war. You know, it was a police action. It was the United Nations. It was Truman telling us to go. The majority of our outfit, they were either killed or captured.

And since I had an opportunity to be exposed about education, I felt for those who God blessed to allow to live, that we had a special obligation not to allow that to happen to other people's kids. Here we have a situation where people who have served their country and joined the Reserve have been called up two and three times. Families have been broken. I remember when I introduced my draft bill the first time, I got a call from Senator HOLLINGS from South Carolina.

He says, you are worried about minorities and poor folks. You better start thinking of my Reservists. Families are being broken. People have already served and being called two and three times. Wives are complaining, the employers have not called them since their favorite employee was twice called up to serve the country. Tuition has not been paid. Marriages have been broken.

And then you take a look at the other side, the Charlie Rangels all over the country, different colors, different backgrounds, different languages, some not even citizens, but spinning their wheels and hoping for a better way of life, getting an education like I got with the GI bill. Where do they come from?

Well, just ask the Pentagon. They do not come from communities that chief executive officers live in. They do not come from kids with families of those in the White House or in the Pentagon. As a matter of fact, I have talked with some of the private marketers that are hired by the Pentagon, and as someone says, they rob banks because that is where the money is. They fish because that is where the fish are. They recruit where the hopeless are in terms of unemployment.

I asked the question, Do most of them come from areas of high unemployment? Yes, that is where they recruit. It makes sense. Now we have not got the retention. People are not being retained. People are not volunteering. You would think that if the President of the United States believes that, and that fighting terrorism in Iraq is in our national defense, what a speech a President could gave to all of America. I could hear it now.

If we do not bring freedom and liberty to every country that seeks it, if we do not have regime change where we do not like people, if we do not bomb and invade and superimpose our government, then our country would be jeopardized. So what are you asking, Mr. President? We are asking all of you not to allow the poor to just carry on this fight. This is a fight for freedom and liberty; you should be so proud to enlist.

So you make a plea to the poor, to the middle class and to the wealthy, to the men and women of this country that love it. Volunteer. Instead, what do they say when they do not meet their quotas? Well, the $10,000 for 3 years did not work, so we doubled it to $20,000. Now it is $30,000. So do not worry, Mr. President, it is going to be $40,000, and we will get those kids one way or the other.

And now we have got parents saying, do not do that to my kid. He loves us. If I were offered $40,000 at 18 years old off the street of Harlem, I would ask how many years can I take? I mean, that is a lot of money even with inflation being what it is today.

It seems to me that we should not need a draft if Americans thought we were doing the right thing. Makes sense to me. You would leave your job in the Congress if you are young enough. If there is something I can do, I will do it because this country has been extremely good to me.

But I know one thing, that for all of the people that are talking about that they are supporting the war, I ask one question: Would you put your kids in harm's way to indicate your support for this war? It seems like it is so easy, when I was a kid for someone to pick a fight, and then when it is time to go to fight, they said I will hold your coat. That is what America is doing today.

Do not tell me that these young people want to fight, I suppose those people being drafted do, that would be an insult to all of the heroes and sheroes that have been drafted, or at least the men that have been drafted that defended this country. But the truth of the matter is that if we have a draft, if we had a draft, we would not be in Iraq today.

If we had a draft, we would not be rattling swords in North Korea. If we had a draft, we would not be threatening Syria and Iran. We would go to the international community with the strength of the United States of America and persuade those countries that terrorism is not just an American problem, it is an international problem, and with mutual respect, sit down and talk with them to see how we can bring peace to the Middle East.

This is going to be one of a series of nights that we know how awkward it is to be against the President when the Nation is at war. But that is true of so many things that happen that we are not proud of. It is so easy not to stand up. It is so easy to say, I hope they know what they are doing in Washington. It is so easy to hope that everything is going to work out okay.

But we have had a lot of problems in this country because people are waiting for someone else to do something. And I think as our numbers grow that we will soon make it comfortable for people just to ask the question: Why did we go in the first place? Was there a plan which projected for the 21st century to go to knock off Saddam Hussein before 9/11? Did everyone that was in the Cabinet that has written books, Clark did, Woodward who wrote the book on this, did O'Neill, who was Secretary of the Treasury when they said that after 9/11, the President was committed to go after Saddam Hussein, even though there was no evidence that they should go that way?

You hear more about the papers from England, the intelligence reports that we have got to show that even the British intelligence indicated that was the route that we were going. We find now all of the reasons that were given were not true. And as you hear us over and over, and listen to the priests and the nuns and the ministers and the imams and the rabbis recognize that all we are talking about is not defending our country, we have got a new standard now.

□ 2100

You do not go to war just when you are attacked. You do not go to war just

when you have imminent danger of being attacked. Now, subjectively, we can go to war to avoid the attack being imminent. That subjective standard will no longer be just ours. It will belong to North Korea, South Korea. It will belong to India and Pakistan, and the moral value of the greatest democracy that has ever been created would be shattered just because no one stood up.

Well, we have seen what happened in history and we want to make it very comfortable for you not to get involved politically but to listen to the facts. And at the end of the day, when Condoleeza Rice and the President are asked, and maybe some Democrats, if you knew then what you know now, would you have committed this great country to war? Because all you got out of it is a pretty crummy election even by Florida standards, and the fact that we have no clue as to where we are going to get additional troops to stay there until they get their act together or to train them.

So I thank the three gentlewomen from California and especially, well, not especially, because all of the gentlewomen are giants in this. And one day, and I hope one day soon, the people who held us in suspicion because we are standing up, and we have to thank God that we have constituents that allow us to do it, that the least that we can say that we have done is to create an atmosphere where good people can stand up when they know in their hearts that they are doing the right thing.

Ms. WATERS. I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) and ask him to remain for a colloquy if he has a few moments with all of us here. I thank the Members for focusing our discussion tonight on our soldiers and helping to remind people that these are real human beings, as I said before, with hopes and aspirations. And when they die, not only are those hopes and aspirations gone, but the family members are left devastated and destroyed by these deaths, and we have got to do more to slow our support for them.

It is not their fault if they are there. They answered the call for many reasons, some of which the gentleman described so wonderfully well in his presentation. Some people looking for just a job, for income. Some folks looking to serve their country, to answer the call for whatever reason. And what we have got to be sure about is that we do not allow these sacrifices to be taken lightly.

For example, we hear some Members saying, who wish to support the war, to continue to support the war, saying all they show on television are the bombings, the suicide bombings. All they show are the deaths and the destruction. They do not show the good stuff.

Well, I get very upset when I hear that, because what they are literally saying to me is that somehow the loss of lives of our soldiers should take second place or third place to some news about perhaps cleaning up a street somewhere. I cannot say news about new electricity or clean water or schools or any of that, but they simply say over and over again, all they show are these suicide bombings; they do not show the good stuff.

Well, I do not like hearing that because, again, they are relegating the loss of lives to some secondary status. And tonight we draw attention to the importance of the soldiers, how we are proud of them and their families. And I mentioned earlier that in this interview on Sunday with Mr. Stephanopoulos and Condoleeza Rice, even though he drew her attention to Cindy Sheehan, the mother who had a comment who had been here in the Congress trying to raise the discussion, he drew her attention to her and something she had said and Condoleeza Rice never acknowledged her, never said she was sorry about the death of her son, never gave any attention to the fact that this woman in pain was attempting to create this discussion.

So tonight there is a mother who has not been answered, who has been trying to get some response from Donald Rumsfeld. Now, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) has put together a letter to Rumsfeld saying, please talk to her. Not only has she been knocking down the door, making the telephone calls, she is talking about other mothers and other families. Please talk to her. Please respond to her.

I signed on to that letter today. We are going to encourage all the members of the Out of Iraq Congressional Caucus to sign on to that letter. But I would like to ask all Members here tonight, do you think that we should not only join as the Out of Iraq Caucus in asking Donald Rumsfeld to respond to Ms. Sheehan and perhaps other mothers and families, should we not have an organized way by which they really are talked to, that they have an opportunity to even come to Washington?

If we can offer $40,000 to their children to come to Iraq, can we not help them to come to Washington and be recognized and talk with them, not just in ceremony, not just one day perhaps out of the year; but when they say they need some answers that they want to know, should not we encourage Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleeza Rice and this administration to be more sensitive, more sensitive?

Ms. WOOLSEY. Well, I do not want to be a cynic but is not Donald Rumsfeld the same individual who was stamping his names on letters to families when he was sending his condolences to them when their family member had died in Iraq? He needs a lot of training on how to be compassionate.

I think it is a very good idea that we send that letter, but I do not think we should be surprised that that is the reaction that Cindy Sheehan has gotten from Condoleeza Rice and from Donald Rumsfeld.

There seems to be something missing in the picture, and that is compassion and really understanding what this means to those who are fighting the war and the families of those who have lost their loved ones and who are getting loved ones back who are totally, totally wounded, both physically and mentally. So yes, we should do that.

Mr. RANGEL. Let me try that. Suppose they did call and the mother would say, Would you remind me as to why my beloved child lost his or her life? Would they say because Saddam Hussein was a mean, evil man when we have so many mean and evil people in this world? Would they say that we wanted to show them what democracy really is and they had an election? Would they say that we want to bring order to this part of the world? Would they say that, and we are prepared to do this further, the President's inaugural address and speeches he has given?

How would they answer about the weapons of mass destruction if the bereaved asked?

Suppose they asked, Was this connected with the attack of 9/11? What would they say? Suppose they said, well, Whatever happened to Osama bin Laden? Was he not the villain, or did 15 of the 19 terrorists come from Saudi Arabia? Suppose they asked, What were you doing tip-toeing through the gardens at the ranch with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia?

Suppose they asked, Why did the Saudis get special treatment in leaving the country to go to Saudi Arabia? I do not know. Maybe, just maybe, we should not ask a mother to get those kind of answers. And just maybe, we should not have to lose a child to challenge those type of answers.

Ms. WATERS. Those are certainly tough questions and, of course, just as Condoleeza Rice gave the framed message that she always gives when she is speaking publicly, Saddam Hussein was a terrible man, Saddam Hussein was a threat to the United States. Now, the Middle East will be better off without Saddam Hussein. Those are the kind of answers I suspect that she would give. But I think when Condoleeza Rice is on national television in an interview where millions of people are watching, and you have a mother who is shown on television raising a question and you do not even take the time to acknowledge that mother, to say, Ms. Sheehan, I am sorry about the loss of your son.

Ms. LEE. I have noticed this administration is so detached, totally detached from the impact and the ramifications of what they have done in terms of their policy, their warmaking policies. Remember, Secretary Rice was one of the chief architects of this war. Perhaps it is very difficult for her to realize that being one of the chief architects of this war, that Cindy Sheehan lost someone that her policies were responsible for.

So I think not only should we encourage Secretary Rumsfeld to meet

with them, we should insist on that. The Defense Department, the Pentagon, and the White House, they owe these families an audience. They owe them an audience.

And the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) asked the questions that would be very difficult, I think, for this administration to respond to if, in fact, Cindy Sheehan asked those questions. But I believe they have paid the supreme price and they deserve the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State and all of those who crafted this war, they deserve to meet with them to hear from them, and these parents need that audience and that is the minimal thing that we should insist on.

Mr. RANGEL. I tell you as a lawyer and someone that would advise somebody, I would not ask them to ask to see Secretary Rumsfeld.

Members have to remember this is the same person that told the whole country that he did not know whether we were winning or losing the war. Is that something to tell someone?

He said that it is a slog, whatever the heck that is. And he said something that he was so right in, that he really did not know whether we were creating more terrorists than we were killing. And we can answer him, and the world can, because we lack the sensitive sophistication to understand that a life is a life, whether it is an American, whether it is an Iraqi, in the tens of thousands and sometimes the hundreds of thousands.

I talked with Colin Powell about this and I asked him, How do you train a young patriotic soldier to go to a foreign country to kill terrorists that you do not know what they look like, what uniform they wear, what language they speak, and you can only react when you are being fired upon? Can you imagine how many terrorists we create when these cowardly people go to a school, go to a hospital, go to a mosque and fire at our troops? And those who have served would know, you have no option except to destroy where that fire is coming from. And if you destroy innocent people, we no longer call that human life. You know what we call it? Collateral damage.

Ms. WATERS. Well, Cindy Sheehan has already made the inquiry. She had made calls. She has written the letter and now she has asked the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) to help her. He started to circulate a letter, which I signed, and I would like to encourage others, because we are not encouraging her to start this. She has already been doing it. And she is simply put out with the fact that she can get no response, no returned telephone calls, anything. And I think that we should give her some support.

In addition to that, I do think perhaps one of the things we should look at further is support for all the families who have questions, because what I am hearing is families are not being told how their children died. They get the message that it has happened, but when they start to ask for details and particulars they are not getting it. And as they put together these budgets, these budgets ask for whatever they think it is they need. And I think it is time to include in the budgets some assistance to the families, that they can at least be respected enough to be given the information, for somebody to sit down and talk with them and answer the questions, tell the truth. They may not get the truth. They may not get the questions answered in the way they want to, but I think we are going to have to try to work at forcing that to happen.

□ 2115

I am awfully sorry that our time has expired. I see two more Members just entered the room. The gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. TOWNS) just entered the room and I know that they wanted to be part of this.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to rise tonight with my distinguished colleagues in the newly formed Get Out of Iraq Caucus. We stand together in this hallowed place to advocate for the majority of Americans who believe that President Bush must get our men and women home from Iraq. It was the great politician and diplomat Adlai Stevenson who said: "Patriotism is not a short and frenzied outburst of emotion but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime." I want to thank each and every American who believes strongly in this cause for making that dedication and speaking out about what you believe to be wrong for our great Nation.

I want start off by reading a very telling quote: "War should be the politics of last resort. And when we go to war, we should have a purpose that our people understand and support." This quote was made by none other than former Secretary of State Colin Powell, a senior member of the Bush Cabinet leading up to the war in Iraq. The truth is that this war was not a last resort, and it most certainly does not have the full support of the American people. The truth is that this Administration has continuously changed the truth about their motives for going to war. First they said it was about weapons of mass destruction, then when we found out the truth that there weren't any in Iraq, they said the war was now about Saddam, and today they tell us it's about establishing democracy in Iraq. The real truth is that this Administration has no real plan, they had no plan before going to war, they have no plan to get out of this war and most dangerous they have no plan to win this war. The truth is that our men and women of the Armed Forces are the ones caught in the middle, the ones who have to fight and risk their lives in a war that has not end in sight.

Earlier this week I offered an amendment to the Defense Appropriations bill which would have increased funding for training the Iraqi National Army by $500 million. This Amendment would have doubled the amount of money appropriated for training the Iraqi National Army within the Iraq Freedom Fund. However, Mr. Inslee's amendment to lift the $500 million cap on funds for training the Iraqi National Army was accepted into this Appropriation. Therefore, I will work with Chairman YOUNG and Ranking Member MURTHA to insure that additional funds are appropriated for training the Iraqi National Army. The Jackson-Lee and Inslee amendments reinforce the point that the best way to get U.S. troops out of Iraq is to train the Iraqi troops to take care of their own nation. Clearly, more money is needed to not only train these inexperienced troops to defeat the insurgency, but also to pay troops to enlist in this new army despite the obvious danger they face. At this time of increased danger for our troops, this Amendment reiterates the fact that we need to be transferring more responsibility upon the Iraqis to take care of their nation and develop a plan to remove our U.S. troops.

To this date at least 1,783 members of the U.S. military have died, 152 from the State of Texas alone, since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003. Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, at least 1,585 U.S. military members have died. There have been at least 1,909 coalition deaths in Iraq, which means that more than 93 percent of the coalition deaths have come from the U.S. Armed Forces. This President told us that there would be an international coalition going in to fight the Iraq War, the truth is that it is our troops and our troops alone who are on those front lines suffering mass casualties and the burden of this war.

Just last month I wrote to President Bush respectfully requesting him to rescind and repeal the Defense Department rule that bars public viewing of the flag-draped coffins of fallen soldiers upon their arrival back to the United States in the spirit of patriotism, honor, and respect for the service that they have given. This overly restrictive rule contravenes the First, Ninth, and Tenth Amendments to the United States Constitution as well as the principles of due process and equal protection as it relates to the decedents, their families, and each American who wishes to honor one who has fought for his or her Nation. In addition, this rule violates the Freedom of Information Act by arbitrarily narrowing the scope of material that may be accessed under the law. While the stated objective of this policy is to protect the privacy of the decedents' families, its effect reaches unjustifiably broad and in a manner repugnant to the foundations of the democracy in which we live. The American public has been allowed to view and honor fallen soldiers of wars dating as recently as the Persian Gulf War in 1990–1991 under prior Administrations of both political parties. The current policy is clearly deceitful to the American people, who deserve to know the full truth about the War in Iraq.

When our American troops are the ones fighting abroad, it is our military families who must also suffer. They wait every day and night hoping to hear from the loved ones, praying that they are not put in harm's way, that they may come home soon. Too many families have not been so lucky, finding out the news of a loved one's death is not only emotionally traumatizing it can have long term effects for the family that may never be repaired. Such is the case with the family of Army Spc. Robert Oliver Unruh a 25-year-old soldier who was killed by enemy fire near Baghdad on September 25th of last year. Unruh was a combat engineer, who had been in Iraq less than a month when he was shot during an attack on his unit. Several days after learning of his death, his mother had gone to

the hospital complaining of chest pains, Hamilton said. She was feeling better the next day but saw her son's body Saturday morning and collapsed that night in her kitchen. The poor woman literally died of a broken heart, her beloved son killed in action, the emotion of it all was just too much for her to take. There is also the story of the Danner family in Branson, Missouri who had to spend this last Father's Day sending their father off to War in Iraq. Col. Steve Danner will be heading to Fort Riley, Kan., on Monday to begin training before he begins a two-year tour in Iraq with the Army National Guard 35th Support Command. At 52, Danner isn't hesitating to fulfill his duty, but said it's going to be tough to leave his family. ''I'm as ready as I'm going to be,'' Danner said. ''My main regret is my youngest daughter is going to be a senior at Branson and I'll miss her softball games and probably her graduation next year. We have to recognize it's a reality. I've done this a lot of years. It's my turn again.'' Danner's wife, Katie, said she was ''shocked'' when she learned her husband would be headed to Iraq. ''I knew there was always a possibility, but you would have thought, at his age, that the war wouldn't be at a point where they would need his talents,'' she said. The Danners have four children, Aryn Danner Richmond, 29, of Phoenix, Andrew, 20, Alex, 19, and Audrey, 17. Katie Danner said they understand why their father needs to leave, but ''I don't think they really know what it will be like for Dad to be gone.'' It's a true shame that loyal soldiers like Col. Steve Danner have to be called up at the age of 52 because of this war and the current recruiting shortage. It's stories like that that make my heart ache and that strengthen my resolve to defend the rights and welfare of our American soldiers and their families.

We must all stand as champions for our men and women fighting abroad. These soldiers who bravely reported for duty, they are our sons and our daughters, they are our fathers and mothers, they are our husbands and wives, they are our fellow Americans and they deserve better than the predicament that this Administration has placed them in. Many of these soldiers are now themselves standing up and demanding answers about this war. One such brave individual is Sgt. Camilo Mejia, whose case I know that many tremendous anti-war organizations have championed. Camilo spent six months in combat in Iraq, and then returned for a 2-week furlough to the U.S. There he reflected on what he had seen, including the abuse of prisoners and the killing of civilians. He concluded that the war was illegal and immoral, and decided that he would not return. In March 2004 he turned himself in to the U.S. military and filed an application for conscientious objector status, for this he was sentenced to one year in prison for refusing to return to fight in Iraq. He has eloquently stated: ''Behind these bars I sit a free man because I listened to a higher power, the voice of my conscience.'' He was finally released from prison on February 15th of this year. I applaud this young man for making a conscious decision not to fight in a war he does not believe in, it's a disgrace that this young man who truly is a conscientious objector was treated like a criminal.

Time and time again this Administration has said that there are no plans for a draft, that we have an all-volunteer Army, but all of us know the real truth that there is in effect a back door draft taking place. Individuals who have been out of the Armed Forces for years and many who were told that they had fulfilled their commitment are now being taken away from their families and put in this war. Under the Pentagon's ''stop-loss'' program, the Army can extend enlistments during war or national emergencies, about 7,000 active-duty soldiers have had their contracts extended under the policy, and it could affect up to 40,000 reserve soldiers depending on how long the war in Iraq lasts. The Army has defended the policy, saying the fine print on every military contract mentions the possibility that time of service may change under existing laws and regulations. Its just cowardly to hide behind fine print when it comes to peoples lives being at stake in this war, every day their tours are unjustly extended is another day they risk their lives. However, many of these individuals are now fighting back against this injustice, rightfully asking why they, who have already proudly served their Nation, must now be recalled for a war that has already claimed too many American lives. Fewer than two-thirds of the former soldiers being reactivated for duty in Iraq and elsewhere have reported on time, prompting the Army to threaten some with punishment for desertion. The former soldiers, part of what is known as the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), are being recalled to fill shortages in skills needed for the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The military families know the helplessness that many of their loved ones serving in Iraq feel because they are being given no voice in this war they are being told to fight. An article in the Christian Science Monitor article written in July 2003, almost two years ago when this war was still in its infancy, had a number of very telling quotes from U.S. soldiers in Iraq. One soldier said: ''Most soldiers would empty their bank accounts just for a plane ticket home.'' Another soldier, an officer from the Army's 3rd Infantry Division said: ''Make no mistake, the level of morale for most soldiers that I've seen has hit rock bottom.'' The open-ended deployments in Iraq and the constantly shifting time tables prompted one soldier to remark: ''The way we have been treated and the continuous lies told to our families back home has devastated us all.'' In yet another Army unit, an officer described the mentality of troops: ''They vent to anyone who will listen. They write letters, they cry, they yell. Many sometimes walk around looking visibly tired and depressed. . . . We feel like pawns in a game that we have no voice [in].'' These quotes were taken almost two years ago, I can only imagine how these soldiers and others like them feel seeing that this war is still going on and with no real end in sight. These quotes individually are sad, but collectively they represent a pattern and unfortunately once again it is our men and women in the Armed Forces who are paying the price.

Even members of this Administration who orchestrated this war have their failures in this war. L. Paul Bremer, has said ''horrid'' looting was occurring when he arrived to head the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad on May 6, 2003. ''We paid a big price for not stopping it because it established an atmosphere of lawlessness,'' Bremer said. ''We never had enough troops on the ground.'' Prior to those comments he had also stated last September that: ''The single most important change . . . would have been having more troops in Iraq at the beginning and throughout.'' He said he ''raised this issue a number of times with our government'' but admitted that he ''should have been even more insistent.'' Even Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, the architect in many ways for this war admitted U.S. intelligence was wrong in its conclusions that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. ''Why the intelligence proved wrong [on weapons of mass destruction], I'm not in a position to say,'' Rumsfeld said. ''I simply don't know.'' When asked about any connection between Saddam and al Qaeda, Rumsfeld said, ''To my knowledge, I have not seen any strong, hard evidence that links the two.'' With leadership such as this, how are our troops supposed to have any confidence in this Administration and their handling of this war??

This Administration is creating new veterans everyday by sending our soldiers to Iraq, meanwhile it has done nothing to help—the courageous veterans we already have here in our Nation. There are over 26,550,000 veterans in the United States. In the 18th Congressional district of Texas alone there are more than 38,000 veterans and they make up almost ten percent of this district's civilian population over the age of 18.

As soldiers return home from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, perhaps the most disturbing trend is their inability to find jobs because of their veteran status. Take the story of Staff Sgt. Steven Cummings from Milan, Michigan. Cummings' wife took out two mortgages and the couple accumulated $15,000 in debt during his 14 months overseas, because his salary was less than he was making as a civilian electrical controls engineer. Looking back, those almost seem like the good times. In the year since he's been home, Cummings has been laid off from two jobs. While other reasons were given for the layoffs, Cummings thinks both were related to his duty in the Michigan National Guard and the time off it requires. Like some other veterans who have returned from Afghanistan and Iraq, he is struggling to find work. ''I don't know what I'm going to do now. I'm in the exact position I was when I came back from Iraq,'' said Cummings, a father of two. ''I'm 50 years old and I have a mortgage payment due. I'm tired of it.'' Cummings, a member of the 156th Signal Battalion who did telecommunications work in the Iraqi cities of Baghdad and Mosul, said he is surprised to find himself in this predicament. Cummings said he thought he was returning to Gentile Packaging Machinery Co., where he worked for 11 years in Bridgewater, Mich., but he was told he was laid off the first day he was back to work, he said. Cummings said he considered suing the owner, but freshly home from war, it just seemed overwhelming to do so because he felt ''devastated, betrayed, worthless.'' A few months later through a veterans program he was able to get work at Superior Controls Inc., in Plymouth, Mich. But, he said he was laid off from that job on May 20. He said he was told the company was downsizing, but he believes it was because he complained about a company policy that said it could not promise to hire returning veterans from war. Some are changed by war, and find the civilian jobs they had before are no longer as meaningful. This has also been the case with Cpl. Vicki Angell, 32, who was assigned to the 324th Military Police Battalion out of Chambersburg, Pa. She gave up her job as a customer service supervisor at

an equipment company to serve in Iraq, and it took her a year to find a job she was happy with as an editor at The Sheridan Press in Hanover, Pa. ''You send out a lot of resumes. You try to do everything you can do, but it's really hard to account for the time you are in Iraq, and really to try to make that, the things you were doing in Iraq relevant to what an employer is looking for today,'' Angell said. Sgt. Benjamin Lewis, 36, who also lost a stepson to the War in Iraq, was a civilian chef who worked at a restaurant in Ann Arbor, Mich., that burned down while he was deployed in Iraq with the Michigan National Guard, said some employers directly told him they could not hire him because he could be deployed again and needed weekends and time off in the summer for drilling. Others, he said, asked if he struggled mentally because of his time at war. He got so desperate he considered returning to Iraq with a new unit. It is because of cases such as these and many others throughout our nation that I am a proud cosponsor of H.R. 1352, the Veterans Employment and Respect Act offered by my colleagues Representatives ALLYSON SCHWARTZ and JOE SCHWARZ. This vital legislation already has 161 Congressional cosponsors and would give companies up to $2,400 in tax credits for each veteran from the Afghanistan and Iraq wars that they hire. Unfortunately, we may be able to give companies incentive to hire recent war veterans but it seems we can not get this Administration to put the same effort in looking after our veterans in the first place.

As soldiers return home from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan the need for medical care, living assistance, and disability benefits are steadily increasing. This puts a strain on an already-overburdened Veterans Administration, which has not been adequately funded by the Bush Administration to meet these challenges. The fact is that more than 30,000 veterans are waiting six months or more for an appointment at VA hospitals, and there are more than 348,000 veterans on the waiting list for disability claim decisions. This President has long ignored pressing domestic concerns for a war that did not need to be fought and for which so many good American men and women have given their lives.

It was our second President John Adams who aptly said: ''Great is the guilt of an unnecessary war.'' Unfortunately for our nation, our current President has not felt the weight of this guilt, for if he had our loved ones in the Armed Forces would be home now. This Administration told us that the international community would join us in Iraq; they said the world would be a better place because of this war and then they said major combat in Iraq was over. Today as we see our men and women every day giving their lives in Iraq, we know that this war has only caused a greater divide between our nation and the international community, this war has only increased hatred for our nation, it has not made us safer as promised, it has in fact put us in greater danger. President Abraham Lincoln speaking after the conclusion of the Civil War, gave a vision for our nation that I hope we can follow today, he said: ''With malice toward none; with clarity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan- to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace, among ourselves and with all nations.'' Before I conclude I would like to take time to read some of the names of the soldiers from Houston who have given their lives in Iraq and honor them with a moment of silence.

Spc. Adolfo C. Carballo, 20, Houston, Texas Died: April 10, 2004, Baghdad, Iraq.

Pfc. Analaura Esparza Gutierrez, 21, Houston, Texas Died: October 1, 2003, Tikrit, Iraq.

Spc. John P. Johnson, 24, Houston, Texas Died: October 22, 2003, Baghdad, Iraq

Spc. Scott Q. Larson, 22, Houston, Texas Died: April 5, 2004, Baghdad, Iraq.

Sgt. Keelan L. Moss, 23, Houston, Texas Died: November 2, 2003, Al Fallujah, Iraq.

Pfc. Armando Soriano, 20, Houston, Texas Died: February 1, 2004, Haditha, Iraq.

Cpl. Tomas Sotelo Jr., 20, Houston, Texas Died: June 27, 2003, Baghdad, Iraq.

Staff Sgt. Brian T. Craig, 27, Houston, Texas, April 15, 2002, Afghanistan

Capt. Eric L. Allton, 34, Houston, Texas September 26, 2004, Ramadi, Iraq.

Capt. Andrew R. Houghton, 25, Houston, Texas August 9, 2004, Ad Dhuha, Iraq.

Lance Cpl. Thomas J. Zapp, 20, Houston, Texas November 8, 2004, Al Anbar Province, Iraq.

Cpl. Zachary A. Kolda, 23, Houston, Texas December 1, 2004, Al Anbar Province, Iraq.

Staff Sgt. Dexter S. Kimble, 30, Houston, Texas January 26, 2005, Ar Rutba, Iraq.

Pfc. Jesus A. Leon-Perez, 20, Houston, Texas January 24, 2005, Mohammed Sacran, Iraq.

(Moment of Silence.)

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, we have spent over $200 billion so far on the war in Iraq. According to the Congressional Budget Office, by 2010, our expenses might be as much as $600 billion.

The two hundred billion dollars we have spent so far would be enough money to provide health care for the 45 million Americans without health insurance.

That two hundred billion dollars would permit us to hire three and a half million elementary school teachers.

That two hundred billion dollars for the war in Iraq is going on America's credit card and that goes right to the deficit—a debt to be paid by our children and grandchildren.

All this might be worth it if we had something to show for it. I think two hundred billion dollars for peace and democracy is a bargain.

But we haven't gotten peace and democracy. That two hundred billion has bought us: over seventeen hundred dead Americans; an unknowable number of Iraqi civilian deaths; a dysfunctional country that cannot move its political process forward; a new haven and proving ground for anti-American extremism; a wellspring of mistrust from longtime friends and allies around the world; and a devastating erosion of American leadership and credibility.

So what are we still doing there? The President says we are pursuing our ''ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.'' But the President has dragged onto a path that, at best, muddles that message.

We are building our nation's largest embassy in Iraq; even before it is complete, we have more than 1,000 embassy staff in Iraq. What is the average Iraqi on the streets of Fallujah—or average Jordanian on the streets of Amman—going to think when he sees that we are building the Largest American Embassy in the World in Baghdad?

I am sure the average Iraqi does not mourn the savage brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime. The question is whether he equates our never-ending American presence in Iraq with a new form of tyranny, rather than the freedom the President says he seeks to spread.

The underlying problem with our endless occupation of Iraq—a country that does not threaten the United States—is that it undermines our leadership on issues that DO threaten the United States. North Korean and Iranian nuclear weapons, global terrorism, emerging deadly international diseases—all these issues are imminent threats that we must confront. Our ability to convince other nations to join us in boldly confronting these threats has been hobbled both by our deceptive entry into Iraq and our lingering departure from it.

Mr. Speaker, our Iraq policy has become a festering wound that bleeds away more and more of America's wealth, America's security, America's leadership, and even America young men and women in uniform. I ask all my colleagues to join me in asking the President seek an exit from this venture at the earliest possible moment.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Monahan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 1282. An act to amend the Communications Satellite Act of 1962 to strike the privatization criteria for INTELSAT separated entities, remove certain restrictions on separated and successor entities to INTELSAT, and for other purposes.

ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FITZPATRICK of Pennsylvania). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. BARTLETT. Mr. Speaker, what I want to spend a few moments talking about this evening is something that will be new to most Americans. They will not have heard about this subject. Indeed, nobody knew about this until 1962; that is, no one in this country knew about it.

There was an experiment over Johnston Island out in the Pacific Ocean that was called Operation Starfish. It was part of a series of nuclear tests that were called the Fishbowl Series. This was a unique one. The others had all been at ground level or some little distance above the ground. This one was an extra-atmospheric, a detonation above the atmosphere.

Nobody knew what was going to happen. It was the first time we had detonated a nuclear weapon in a test series above the atmosphere, and there were a number of ships and airplanes and radar, theater-like, that were tracking the missile that launched this nuclear bomb and noted its explosion. The explosion occurred about 400 kilometers