Mr. Speaker, last month the House surprised us all by

unanimously agreeing to an amendment to the Iraq supplemental spending

bill declaring that the United States has

Who knew this Republican-controlled Congress would make such a

positive statement?

The lead authors of the amendment were my colleagues and the

Progressive Caucus co-Chair, Representative Barbara Lee from California

and Representative Tom Allen from Maine, both of whom have been

instrumental in demanding that the United States not maintain any

permanent military bases in Iraq.

Unfortunately, however, some people working inside the Bush

administration are doing their very best to make sure that last month's

efforts will be for naught.

One of the senior spokespersons at the U.S.-led coalition

headquarters actually in Iraq had this to say about our lasting

presence there:

So there you have it. The administration is not even hiding the fact

that we are planning on maintaining four permanent bases on Iraqi soil,

something they bureaucratically call ``the coalition footprint.''

This appallingly casual reference to what the rest of us call an

occupation is deeply insulting. Anyone who has heard the President tell

the American people that we will leave as soon as Iraq is secure and we

won't stay a single day longer should be equally offended, because the

evidence on the ground suggests that this statement is deeply

misleading.

Mr. Speaker, last fall I traveled to Iraq as a part of an official

congressional delegation. I visited the Green Zone and the Balad

military base, and I had the privilege of meeting with our soldiers

serving overseas.

There were two powerful lessons that I took away from my visit.

First, I saw that the troops stationed in Iraq are the very best that

America has to offer. They are brave, they are intelligent, they are

loyal, loyal to their country, to their mission and to each other. They

are profoundly committed to this mission, even those who told me

privately that they do not support the policy that underlies it.

The second lesson I learned in Iraq is that the perception among the

military generals on the ground is that we will be there for a very

long time. The military bases that we are building are like little

cities. They have their own restaurants, supermarkets, and even their

own gyms, theaters and bus routes. The troops deserve no less during

their stay in Iraq, but our stay there must be for the short term. Our

troops need to come home to their communities and these bases must be

given over to the Iraqis.

The U.S. has already spent $280 million to construct the four biggest

bases in Iraq, and the supplemental spending bill that the House passed

in March provides nearly $200 million more to enlarge these bases. This

is the real Iraq policy, not those phony platitudes and nicely worded

sound bites about standing down when the Iraqis stand up, platitudes

that President Bush and Donald Rumsfeld want the people to believe.

In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Bush

administration's intention all along was to secure a lasting foothold

in the Middle East. Forget all that stuff that you heard about going to

war because Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, which we all

know wasn't true. Forget about Saddam Hussein's supposed ties to al

Qaeda. We know that wasn't true either. And forget about freeing the

Iraqi people from the thumb of a brutal dictator. My guess is that

right now most Iraqis feel brutalized after more

than 3 years of a preemptive war that now the President charges was

about democratization.

The real rationale for going to war in Iraq is much more sinister and

much more dangerous to our long-term foreign policy. It has become

clear that the U.S. needs to end the war in Iraq and bring our troops

home. Our soldiers need this, their families and loved ones back home

need this, and of course the Iraqi people need this. But in order to

truly end the occupation, we need to leave no lasting American presence

in our place. That means no coalition footprint, nothing even close.

That means bringing our troops home and giving Iraq back to the Iraqis.