Madam Speaker, the carnage and the bloodshed continue in

Iraq. Things are getting worse, not better. April is indeed the

cruelest month for 63 American soldiers who won't be making it home. In

fact, it is the deadliest month so far in the year 2006.

We are coming up on the 3-year anniversary of the President's

infamous aircraft carrier flight suit stunt, and I am still looking for

someone who can answer this question: How is it possible that we have

lost more than 2,000 of our troops after this mission was supposedly

accomplished?

Today's big headline? The President has a new spokesman. As if the

same talking points, the same platitudes, the same wretched ideas

coming out of a different mouth is going to make a lick of difference.

The White House doesn't have a PR problem, it has a policy problem. Do

they actually think two out of every three Americans are unhappy with

the President's performance because of his Press Secretary? Are they

that dismissive of the intelligence of the people they are sworn to

serve?

It is as if the administration were our landlord in a house that was

being condemned, with a foundation crumbling and every corner infested

with vermin, and when we register our complaints, they go ahead and

change the drapes. There will be a new talking head at the briefing

room podium, but the administration's approach remains stubbornly

resistant to change.

The other big news of the day is that Secretaries Rice and Rumsfeld

dropped in on Iraq, and from this visit we learn that there may be a

troop reduction by the end of the year. But that strikes me as a

cosmetic, contrived move that is driven by the political calendar. It

is clearly not enough.

Remember, this President, who says he doesn't believe in timetables,

made it perfectly clear that he intends to keep our troops in Iraq for

at least as long as he is in office. And there is every reason to

believe that the construction of permanent military bases has begun.

This is exactly the open-ended, long-term occupation that fuels the

rage of the insurgency.

I, for one, am not willing to stay silent on the sidelines. I will do

everything in my power to make the case that the troops should come

home now. I will continue to explore alternatives to our current Iraq

policy, and I will continue to shine a spotlight on conditions on the

ground in Iraq.

To that end I invite my colleagues to join me tomorrow morning as I

convene a forum that will help put a human face on the Iraq conflict.

We will hear from an impressive panel of witnesses, including:

A Georgetown professor, who spent the bulk of his career with the

CIA, where he was considered one of the Agency's preeminent

counterterrorism experts.

We will hear from a Shia Iraqi woman, a civil engineer married to a

Sunni, who has lived through the invasion and the occupation and then

fled to Jordan after her son was briefly detained as a political

prisoner.

A marine who served in the Iraq war and was discharged last year due

to his post-traumatic stress disorder.

A young American doctor, half Iraqi, half Jewish, who recently

returned to Iraq, where she lived as a young child. She has put her

medical practice on hold to raise awareness about the devastating

impact the war is having on the people in Iraq.

I will also be joined by several of my colleagues, the gentleman from

New York (Mr. Hinchey), the gentleman from Maine (Mr. Allen), the

gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. McGovern), the gentleman from North

Carolina (Mr. Jones), and the gentlewomen from California, Ms. Lee and

Ms. Waters, among other Members of the House of Representatives. We

will engage in a dialogue with these panelists, and we will offer our

own thoughts on Iraq.

I had a similar forum last fall, which was focused more on shifting

policy direction and brainstorming about how we might carry out a

military exit strategy. That will be a component of tomorrow's

discussion, but my intent tomorrow is to present firsthand accounts

from people who have lived through this war and can speak

authoritatively about its human cost.

We hear virtually every day from the White House, the civilian

leadership at the Pentagon, and the military commanders. I think it is

important that we give a platform to those who have stared this war

directly in the eye, outside of the Green Zone, without a security

detail or an armored limousine. I hope you can join me tomorrow.