Mr. Speaker, today is the 161st time that I have come to

the floor to deliver a 5-minute Special Order about the United States

occupation of Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, this effort would not have been possible, it would have

been totally impossible, without the excellent words and guidance and

general assistance of a member of my staff, Eric Powers.

Mr. Speaker, Eric will be leaving my office tomorrow, after 3 years

of service and 161 5-minute speeches, to attend Washington University

in St. Louis, law school, where he will have the opportunity to further

his work in the international law department. Mr. Speaker, believe me,

Eric Powers will be missed and, believe me, Eric Powers is appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, Iraq is burning. It is becoming hard even to read the

news accounts. The last few days have been marked by two of the

deadliest attacks on civilians in months.

A new U.N. report concludes that roughly 6,000 Iraqi civilians have

been killed just in the last 2 months. Random violence, fear, and

lawlessness are ruling the day. People cannot leave their homes.

Vicious thugs and vigilantes control the streets where people are

pulled from cars, where they are tortured and executed.

Do not bother calling the police. They have been infiltrated by

militias and are brutally corrupt themselves. One Sunni sheikh laughed

as he said this about the police to the New York Republic: ``The good

ones just take bribes . . . the bad ones rip off your head.''

Monday's New York Times cited an Iraqi Army official who notes that

in a recent attack some of the gunmen wore the uniform of the Iraqi

Security Forces. As he put it, ``You cannot recognize your friend from

your enemy.''

To those who insist that all hell will break loose if our troops

leave, I say hell has already broken loose. How much worse can it

possibly get, and how many American lives must we endanger for a civil

war that we are virtually powerless to stop?

I am not saying that democracy will be busting out all over once the

last American soldier takes her last step on Iraqi soil. But we cannot

begin the process of putting Iraq back together again until our troops

come home. Every day that the occupation continues will make it that

much harder for the United States to play a constructive nonmilitary

role in Iraq as a construction partner rather than a military occupier.

If you will recall, the architects of the earlier Iraqi war and the

resulting occupation did not just promise us democracy in Iraq.

According to their fairy tale, an invasion was going to have this

glorious ripple effect, spreading peace and freedom across the Middle

East. These were Vice President Cheney's words in 2002.

Regime change in Iraq would bring about a number of benefits to the

region. Extremists in the region would have to rethink their strategy

of jihad. Moderates throughout the region would take heart, and our

ability to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process would be

enhanced.

Of course, this week's open hostilities between Israel and Lebanon

have proven that statement tragically wrong. The Iraq war hasn't spread

freedom anywhere. It has made all of us, Iraq, its neighbors, the

United States and the world, less safe.

There is no question, we have reached a point of diminishing returns

in Iraq. In fact, the bloodbath in Baghdad has only gotten worse in the

month since we moved more troops into the capital as part of a security

crackdown that we called Operation Forward Together.

You know how the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over

and over and expecting different results? Well, last week, General

Casey said that we might need still more troops to contain the violence

in Baghdad. This is madness, Mr. Speaker. Our soldiers were not trained

for this. They are largely powerless to control hostility that is

rooted in a religious conflict that dates back centuries. It is time to

bring them home