Mr. Speaker, the front page of the Washington Post

yesterday had the harsh and ugly reality. We cannot afford not to help

the Iraqis who trusted and worked with the United States with the

opportunity for refugee status.

I quote:

For the last 7 months, I have been working with a broad bipartisan

group of people on legislation that would deal with the largest ongoing

humanitarian crisis in the world other than Darfur. And unlike the

tragedy in the Darfur region of the Sudan, the United States is front

and center in Iraq. We have over 300,000 American soldiers,

contractors, and civilian U.S. Government employees. We see firsthand

every day the train wreck, while officials at the top of the food chain

appear, sadly, oblivious and powerless to do anything about it.

I am proud to say that there are young American soldiers who will try

to do something about it, even after they rotate out of the country.

That is how I first became involved in this issue, as young Oregonian

Guard members fought valiantly to try to save the life of their

interpreter when they returned to Oregon, knowing that her life was at

risk. Working with those young guardsmen and with high school students

from Lincoln High School in Portland, Oregon, we were able to have a

happy resolution in this one case. But, sadly, it is only one case.

I have become acquainted with another true American hero. Kirk

Johnson was a young USAID worker who, as he rotated out, embarked upon

a crusade to save the lives of Iraqis who were at risk because they

were known to have helped the United States. He has compiled a list of

over 500 Iraqis who were interpreters, who were guides, who were

civilian employees. Not one, the last time I talked to Mr. Johnson, had

been able to make it to the United States.

The sad fact is that we are failing miserably in terms of responding

to the refugee requirements. Since I became involved last fall, the

United States has admitted the grand total of 133 Iraqi refugees, a

shocking number when we consider that over 2 million Iraqis have fled

the country and another 2 million within Iraq have been displaced from

their homes. It's not that we can't figure out how to do it if we care,

if we establish a priority, if we work on it. In that same period of

time that we could only admit 133 Iraqis, we have allowed 3,500

refugees from Iran, a country with whom we have rocky relations, to say

the least, where we have deep concerns about terrorism.

It makes a mockery of our commitment to accept 7,000 during this

fiscal year which ends September 30. There must be a sense of urgency

and a profound sense of obligation. In order to make even that modest

goal of 7,000, we are going to have to admit more Iraqi refugees every

working day than we have for the entire last 9 months.

It is not just the right thing to do for these poor souls and their

families. There is a harsh geopolitical reality. With 4 million Iraqis

displaced, more than half fleeing the country, there's 1.2 million in

Syria, and the accounts of what these people are forced to do to keep

body and soul together are truly disturbing. Or three-quarters of a

million Iraqi refugees across the border in Jordan, threatening to

overwhelm that small country, adding another element of instability to

this already unsettled part of the world.

I urge my colleagues in the House of Representatives to look at a

letter that we are circulating to them today that includes this article

from the Post. I urge them to cosponsor our bipartisan legislation,

H.R. 2265, have them urge a markup and action before we recess for

August. Our failure to keep our commitment will be exceedingly serious.

We undermine our ability to carry out

our current mission in Iraq if people we depend upon know that they

can't depend upon us.