Mr. Speaker, I rise with grave concerns about

the situation in Iraq.

As I indicated during a Special Order organized last week by the

gentleman from Connecticut, Mr. Larson, I believe the war in Iraq is

the centerpiece of the administration's failed foreign policies. The

war in Iraq has proven to be a diversion from what should be our

primary foreign policy focus, winning the global war on terror. Our

preoccupation with Iraq is decimating our Armed Forces, who now find

themselves entrenched in a civil war where they do not belong.

The administration's failure to measure progress in Iraq is matched

by its broader foreign policy failures. North Korea and Iran present

greater risks to our safety and security than they did when the

President identified them as the ``axis of evil'' in his 2002 State of

the Union address.

Today, the situation in Iraq is a tragedy, for America, for our brave

troops in uniform, for the future of our Nation, and for the prospect

of Middle East peace which fades every day we stay in Iraq and as the

violence between Israel and Hezbollah continues.

Although 2006 was supposed to be a ``year of significant transition''

pursuant to last year's defense authorization law, we are no closer to

finishing the year with any measure of positive transition than we were

when the year started.

I call my colleagues' attention to a new book by Thomas Ricks, the

Washington Post reporter who appeared on Meet the Press on Sunday, to

discuss ``Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq.'' As Mr.

Ricks explained, the administration's foresight and planning was as

poor as its conduct of the post-war period. It is why, 3\1/2\ years

later, we are is still paying the price for such negligence, and why

2006 is not on track to be the year of significant transition that not

only had we hoped for, but that we simply must have.

Halfway through the year, these statistics show that we are moving

backwards, away from our goal of handing Iraq over to a safe, secure

and stable democracy. There were 3,149 civilians deaths in the month of

June. That is up from 1,978 civilian deaths in January. For the year,

more than 14,000 Iraqi civilians have died. That is an average of 2,400

a month. Another way of looking at that is every 5 weeks, Iraqi

civilians die in the number that we lost on September 11.

The overwhelming majority of deaths have occurred in and around

Baghdad. If the Iraqi police and army can't provide security, is it any

wonder that the Iraqi people have turned to the militias? That is not a

measure of progress in any year, but particularly in a year of

transition, that would be a turn for the worse.

Every day focusing on combating sectarian violence is another day and

another dollar we divert from what should be our priorities, increasing

oil production, rebuilding infrastructure, promoting more dialogue

between Sunnis and Shia and developing a long-term political solution

for a stable, lasting democracy.

The Iraqi leadership isn't showing much progress either, particularly

following remarks by Prime Minister al-Malaki and Speaker al-

Mashhadani, who both openly condemned Israel in recent weeks.

Combined with the fact that nearly 50 percent of Iraqis support

attacking our troops, Iraq is no closer to what the neo-conservatives

envisioned as a partner for Israel who would catalyze change and bring

about stability in the Middle East.

When the prime minister addresses a joint session of Congress

tomorrow morning, I would hope he says the following: First and

foremost, that Iraq is indebted to America for the sacrifice of 2,500

of its sons and daughters. Second, that he regrets and retracts his

comments about Israel. Third, that he is committed to routing

terrorists, sectarian violence and corruption and disarming the

sectarian militias. Fourth, that his government will honor the rights

of ethnic and minority constituencies by revisiting divisive sections

of Iraq's constitution.

Still, Mr. Speaker, it will take much more to accomplish the long-

term political goals necessary to restore stability, liberty and

democracy, not only in Iraq, but to a region suffering under the strain

of so much violence and uncertainty. But we have a long way to go.

Reaching our objectives will be further down that path as a result of

the administration's failure in the pre-invasion planning and the

conduct of the post-war period.

The tragedy of Iraq is perhaps the most solemn and vivid reminder of

why a change in leadership is long overdue, and why America deserves a

new direction in its foreign policy.