Madam Speaker, this week was the beginning of the 111th

Congress, and it is absolutely clear we face enormous challenges. We

must deal with an economic crisis that is robbing the American people

of their savings, their jobs and their homes. We must tackle our

problems in health care, energy, education and the environment. The

domestic agenda is going to be long, it is going to be hard, and it is

going to demand our time and our energy.

But I rise today to make this plea: Let us not forget Iraq. About

140,000 American servicemembers remain in harm's way in Iraq. Military

families and veterans continue to struggle and to suffer, and the

occupation continues to cost us over $11 billion a month. That is money

that is desperately needed to help the American people right here at

home. Yet Iraq seems to have disappeared from our radar screens, from

our newspapers, from our media. The three major television networks

have decided to remove their full-time reporters. With Iraq off

television screens, I am concerned that it will be out of sight and out

of mind.

But forgetting Iraq would be wrong. It would be dangerous. The dying

hasn't stopped. Nearly 100 civilians have been killed in the first few

days of this month alone. In addition, over 300 died in December and

over 300 died in November. Many, many more are sure to die in the days

and months ahead, not to count those that are being injured and

displaced. The number of Iraqis being killed today is about the same as

the number that were being killed in 2003 and 2004.

There are other issues that demand our attention as well; the new

Status of Forces Agreement, which is bound to create confusion and new

problems for our troops. And we must come up with a plan, a plan to

meet the refugee crisis. Four million refugees must be resettled. The

humanitarian crisis goes on and on.

But despite all these problems, there is reason for hope. The

administration that decided to destroy Iraq in order to save it will be

gone in 2 weeks, and I am confident that the new administration, with

President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton leading the way, will

put us on the right path. They are committed to ending the occupation

within 16 months. I actually urge them to do it even sooner and to

ignore the voices that will advise them to leave residual forces and

permanent bases behind. I also urge them to engage the international

community and Iraq's neighbors, including Iran, in a diplomatic effort

to stabilize the Middle East, which is absolutely essential.

A full redeployment of our troops in a new diplomatic effort will

send a signal to the world that a compassionate America is committed to

peace; that it is committed to human rights instead of war and instead

of torture.

Madam Speaker, the pundits and neocons who got us into the Iraq mess

in the first place are calling it a victory. This is the second time

they have called it a victory. They would like us to close the book on

Iraq and to move on. But the occupation is still standing in the way of

peace, it is still undermining our moral authority in the world and is

draining our Treasury at the worst possible time.

We have more than enough domestic problems to deal with, but ending

the occupation of Iraq must also be at the very top of this new

administration's agenda. I am confident that it will be, because we

will finally have the leadership in the White House and the State

Department that will do the right thing.

Madam Speaker, let's not forget Iraq.