Mr. Speaker, good evening to you and to those families

that are listening to us tonight.

I believe our Nation needs a policy to secure and stabilize Iraq, one

that constructively engages in diplomacy and partners with neighboring

countries and the region to create a stable and peaceful Nation in

Iraq.

Unfortunately, President Bush missed the opportunity to set the

United States on a new course in Iraq. Without a plan to secure the

peace and stabilize Iraq, President Bush's plan will do nothing but

unnecessarily risk the lives of more U.S. servicemen.

I have here displayed 13 of those service members who represent my

district, most of whom, if you can look through each, are under the age

of 30 and who left families, parents and children. They went to serve

our country with honor, no doubt, but many of them enlisted in the

Reserve and the Guard hoping that they would come back to get a college

education, to have a better life, to be able to get housing and to get

health care for their families. Unfortunately, that dream is not true

for many of them.

There are approximately, at this time, 132,000 U.S. troops serving in

Iraq. This war, as you know, is having a significant impact on our

families and our communities. Last December was the deadliest month of

the war in over 2 years. U.S. casualties have exceeded well over 3,000

lives, and more than 22,700 servicemen and women have been permanently

injured or disabled. Nearly half of those will not be able to lead a

normal life.

While Latinos make up just about 12 percent of the U.S. population,

they make up 17 percent of the service men and women in combat in Iraq,

and about 11 percent of those have already been killed.

In the District that I represent in California, we have lost these

young men. Sadly, Latinos, both citizens and noncitizens, and I mean

those that carry green cards, are proudly there to serve our country,

but we need to do more for them.

In 2001 to 2005 alone, the number of Latinos in the Army who enlisted

rose by 26 percent. There are currently 35,136 green card soldiers

proudly serving our country today. An additional 28,000 have become

U.S. citizens since 9/11, and 73 have been granted citizenship after

death.

This includes one of my very own, who was a fallen soldier early in

the war, a young man, Lance Corporal Francisco Martinez, in the

Marines, representing the City of Duarte in the San Gabriel Valley. His

service to this Nation is countless. He was not even a U.S. citizen. He

gave his life and was granted posthumous citizenship. But we need to do

more for our soldiers than that.

The plan the President is going to speak to us of tonight ignores the

real needs of our troops and the reality of the situation. Three times

in the past 2 years President Bush has increased the number of troops

in Iraq. Three times the approach has failed. From November 2004 to

March 2005, the level of U.S. troops increased from 12,000 to 150,000.

The increase did nothing to improve long-term security.

During the constitutional referendum in the fall of 2005, troop

levels increased by 22,000 soldiers, for a total of more than a 160,000

American service men and women in Iraq. Again, this increase, while

limiting major violence during the referendum, did nothing to improve

the long-term security in that particular area.

During Operation Together Forward, the Bush administration sent

additional troops to Baghdad. The U.S.

military spokesman, General William Caldwell, stated this effort was a

failure and had ``not met our overall expectations for sustaining a

reduction in the level of violence.''

Each of these instances has something in common. Each failed to

improve the long-term security situation and the violence and death

toll, which continues to rise. Even the Commander of U.S. Central

Command has testified that top military commanders in Iraq do not

believe increasing the number of troops is the right approach. He

stated, in fact, more American forces prevent the Iraqis from doing

more, from taking more of their own responsibility.

We know the solution is not to send more troops to Iraq without a

real plan to secure the peace. Fifty-five percent of Americans do not

believe more troops can secure Baghdad, and 59 percent of Americans

want redeployment of American forces, this includes two-thirds of the

Latino population, who want our troops brought home. A study done by

the Pew Hispanic Center found that 75 percent of Latinos now believe

that the U.S. made the wrong choice in using military force in Iraq.

Americans, as you know, voted November 7 for a new direction in Iraq,

and we must deliver that promise. Our Nation needs a policy to secure

and stabilize Iraq, one that constructively engages in diplomacy and

partners with our neighbors there. We need a plan that ensures that

there are no permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq and a plan to

decrease the U.S. presence there. We need a plan which investigates and

punishes companies like Halliburton engaged in war profiteering and

fraud, like the $1.4 billion in unreasonable and unsupported charges by

Halliburton which the Defense Contract Audit Agency identified.

We need a policy and a plan to put welfare of our service men and

women first so that they come home, rejoin their families and receive

the care that they deserve. This should also include services for all

of our veterans, both men and women.