Mr. Speaker, I call upon the President of the United

States to present a plan to Congress to start bringing our troops home

from Iraq.

It has been almost 4 years since the President came to Congress and

sought the use of force in Iraq. At that time, Mr. Speaker, I voted

against giving the President the use of force. It was not a popular

vote in my congressional district, but it was the right vote. I was

proud of my vote 4 years ago, and I am proud of my vote today.

I have remained an outspoken critic of the President's policies in

Iraq. There was no connection between Iraq and the attack on our

country on September 11. There was no evidence of any weapons of mass

destruction or nuclear weapons, and other weapons information was

distorted. There was no direct threat against the United States.

We have paid a heavy price for the war in Iraq. Over 2,400 soldiers

have died, 18,000 have been injured, and we have spent $300 billion-

plus of taxpayer money.

Our international standing has suffered. In December 2004, I visited

the troops in Iraq. I wanted to see firsthand what was happening in

Baghdad. My experiences I will not soon forget. I thanked our soldiers

for their service to our country. They deserve to come home to their

families and a grateful Nation.

A lot has changed in Iraq. It has been 3 years since the Saddam

Hussein regime fell. It has been 2 years since an interim government

was formed and the sovereignty of Iraq was transferred to that interim

government. It has been 15 months since the first elections in Iraq.

Iraq has a new constitution. They have elected a permanent government.

In December of 2005 we went on record in the defense authorization

bill that 2006 should be a year of transition in which the Iraqi

security forces take control of their own security. That has not

happened.

It is time to change the policies in Iraq, and yet the President

still says let's stay the course. We need a new direction in Iraq. That

direction should include the drawdown of American troops. We have

130,000 soldiers serving in Iraq. 20 percent are from our National

Guard and Reservists. Military experts have recommended a drawdown of

10,000 troops a month.

Although we should not announce a specific time schedule, it is

reasonable to expect that one-half of our combat troops could be home

by the end of 2006, and all of our combat troops home by the end of

2007. It should start with our National Guard. They were never intended

to be the primary coverage for a military operation. We need them home

to meet local needs.

This would allow us to achieve certain necessary objectives, bringing

our troops home to their families and not in the middle of a civil war.

It is an important message to the Iraqi government that they cannot

assume that American soldiers will be there indefinitely to take care

of their own security needs. It would remove propaganda for al Qaeda in

which they look at the United States as being an occupation force, and

it allows us to stage outside of Iraq to work with our allies and

international community to fight international terrorism. We have lost

our focus in the war against terror. It would help us preserve an all-

volunteer military.

We also need to organize an international conference, including the

Iraqi government and our friends internationally. The United States is

the only superpower. We need to mend our diplomatic fences. We need to

engage the international community. It is in their interest to help us

in Iraq, to create a ceasefire for the Iraqi government and its

militia, train the security forces, and coordinate humanitarian aid and

infrastructure assistance.

We need to honor our commitment to our military veteran families and

strengthen troop recruitment. The voluntary military is in danger

because of excessive deployments. Morale is down because of long tours

of duty and our failure to live up to our commitments on veterans'

benefits.

The recruitment goal in 2005 was missed by 6,000, and our National

Guard and Reservists have only hit 80 percent of their goal. The answer

is the proper deployment of our military and honoring our veterans,

commitments on benefits, including health benefits, so that the 18,000

who are returning injured from Iraq and the 50,000 who we anticipate

will have battle fatigue related issues are dealt with as we have

promised.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon the President to change course in Iraq in

order to further U.S. interests.