Mr. Speaker, this last week I had the opportunity to

meet a true American hero in Iraq, Kirk W. Johnson. No matter what your

position on the war in Iraq, how it started, where it's going, how it

will end up, you should be deeply concerned by the 4 million Iraqis who

have been forced to flee their homes. And you cannot help but be

impressed by Mr. Johnson and his deep concern for their plight.

This young Arabist, who worked for the USAID as regional coordinator

on reconstruction in Fallujah--from, I might add, impeccable Republican

lineage--figured prominently in George Packer's haunting essay in The

New Yorker on March 26 of this year. That essay, entitled ``Betrayed:

The Iraqis Who Trusted America the Most,'' had a profound impact on me.

It is a harsh title, but the facts are harsh. In a country with a

population about the size of Texas, 4 million Iraqis have been forced

to flee their homes. Two million are currently outside the country,

primarily in Jordan and Syria where there are jarring press accounts,

for instance, of women forced into prostitution to feed their families

in Syria. Mr. Johnson has been focusing on a special subset of these

unfortunate people, people whose lives are at risk because they helped

the United States, translators, guides, people who worked on the

reconstruction effort. He has compiled a list of over 500 Iraqis that

he knows personally are in that category. Five hundred, not one of whom

has been able to yet make it to the United States for asylum. They are

part of the tip of the refugee iceberg. Two million, as I say, in

Jordan and Syria.

Mr. Johnson asks the question that each Member of Congress must

confront: What kind of superpower can't convert its ``very top

priority''--the words, by the way, of Ellen Sauerbrey, the Assistant

Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration in her

testimony before the United States Senate--can't convert its very top

priority into a program that starts saving the lives of people who

helped us before their visas expire?

The stark reality is that only 70 Iraqis since October of last year

have been admitted to the United States. Only eight in March, one in

April and another in May.

I strongly urge that my colleagues join me in supporting H.R. 2265.

This comprehensive refugee legislation will allow for more Iraqis to be

granted refugee status in the United States. Why should the United

States accept fewer refugees than Sweden? It would allow them to apply

for refugee status in Iraq. Why should they be forced to flee the

country, to Jordan, for instance, when we have the largest embassy in

the world in Baghdad? This legislation would put somebody in charge,

having a special coordinator to help us make sure that this problem is

solved. I strongly urge my colleagues to make sure that Congress does

its part to deal with the greatest continuing refugee crisis in the

world with the possible exception of the Darfur. This is a crisis for

which the United States has a unique responsibility and a unique role

in its solution.

Please examine H.R. 2265, add your name as cosponsor, but, more

important, join Mr. Kirk Johnson in making the plight of these millions

of unfortunate people, especially those who helped us, part of your

mission in Congress.