Mr. Speaker, this morning the President noted with a

report that we were at the starting line; 3,600 American lives, $485

billion spent, $10 billion a month, 5 years into the war. If that is

the starting line, then I ask you, what is the cost to get to the

finish line? If the President describes today that we are at the

starting line, I ask you, what is the cost to get to the finish line

after all those lives?

That would not be the words I would choose to tell the American

families who've lost their loved ones. That would not be the words I

would choose to tell the people who've put up close to a half a

trillion dollars that we are at the starting line after 5 years, and

our reputation sullied around the world.

Our American men and women in uniform have done brilliantly.

Everything we have asked them to do, they have done. They have defeated

an army. They have seized a nation, deposed a dictator, taken a castle.

There is not one thing we've asked our men and women in uniform and

their leadership to do. The only thing they've asked is that their

civilian leadership do what they have done, and they were let down.

They have won the war, and this administration has failed in the

occupation.

Now, President Kennedy once said, ``to govern is to choose; choices

are between bad and worse.'' And my colleagues on the other side are

not all wrong. They fear that if we leave precipitously, there could be

real violence, worse than we're seeing; not totally wrong.

Those of us have said, after 4 or 5 years of more money, more troops,

more time and more of the same, at a certain point, you have to

understand that there are costs to that because today we see in the

report that, in fact, al Qaeda is reconfiguring and stronger than ever.

There are costs to staying, and there are costs to leaving.

So what are the choices we all have to make? They are choices between

bad and worse. There are those who want to stay and fight the war in

Iraq, and there are those of us who want to fight al Qaeda. This is a

road to fighting al Qaeda.

There are those who want to police a civil war between Sunnis and

Shia, and those of us who believe in fighting the war on terror. That

is the choice. Neither is easy. There are consequences to both, but all

of us recognize that.

But after 5 years, 3,600 American lives, $485 billion, you have to

ask yourself, are we getting stronger, or are we diminishing our

reputation and our power?

As our military's stretched, as we see al Qaeda reconfiguring and

stronger than ever before, that is the choice before us. And I do

agree; it's not a free choice. But staying blindly, without ever having

asked a question, only more money, more time, more troops and more of

the same with no other clear policy has consequences to America.

In that sense, as we measure the Iraqi progress, as the President

noted today, there are also ways to measure our progress.

We were told the insurgency was in its last throes. Not happening. We

were told, at another point, they were placing democracy is the

Mideast. Not happening. We were told that we were going to find WMD,

weapons of mass destruction. Not happening. At every point that this

administration has put a benchmark down for itself, it is not

happening.

There are consequences to moving just down this path that has been

traveled. Too costly. It is time for a new direction for America and

Iraq.