Madam Speaker, as chairman of the Armed Services

Committee on Air and Land Forces, my overriding concern on every issue

that comes before us is whether and how it supports our men and women

in uniform.

Every decision about equipment, procurement, training, end strength

or budget authorization must meet this test: Does it support our

troops? The question before us today, increasing U.S. forces in Iraq by

some 21,000 combat troops and somewhere between 3 and 28,000 support

personnel fails this test in every respect.

Both the immediate and long-term effects of the war in Iraq on our

Nation's military preparedness are evident and drastic. Extended

deployments, premature redeployments, and sustained combat under

unbelievably harsh conditions have taken a terrible toll on our forces

and their equipment.

The results are an overstretched U.S. Army and Marine Corps with no

fully mission-capable Reserve forces, and an urgent need for billions

of dollars to repair or replace worn and damaged helicopters, tanks,

other armored vehicles, including up-armored Humvees and other

equipment.

I recently returned from an inspection of two of the Army's busiest

repair depots in Corpus Christi, Texas, and Anniston, Alabama. What we

saw there were skilled and dedicated employees working feverishly to

make sure that our men and women in uniform, particularly those in Iraq

and Afghanistan, have every piece of equipment they need to do their

jobs and keep themselves safe from harm.

What we saw were the results of an administration's abject failure to

mobilize this country's industrial base for this war of choice. Only

now are we ramping up America's manufacturing capacity to fully support

our troops at home and overseas.

Smugly self-righteous in its belief that U.S. troops would be

targeted with nothing more lethal than rose petals, this administration

has been complacent in leaving the burden of the war on the men and

women of our Armed Forces, active, Reserve and National Guard. The

impact of this attitude hit home for me in Corpus Christi when I read

recently about the death in Iraq of a 48-year-old Army sergeant with

five children.

Newspaper Columnist Dan Thomasson asked: What in the world was a 48-

year-old man with five children doing in the military in Iraq? The

answer is obvious, he was a member either of the National Guard or the

Reserve. The Guard and Reserve are being used in a way never

contemplated. Their repeated and sustained deployments turn lives

upside down, sometimes permanently, and have a profound impact on

families, businesses and whole communities.

Why have they been so misused? Because there is not anyone else.

Because our active duty force is too small to sustain our engagement in

Iraq and Afghanistan. To have acted to ensure the burden of this war

would be more broadly shared, that the industrial sector would be

mobilized, and the military equipment, supply and maintenance and

repair systems put on a war-time footing would have been expensive and

an admission of a reality the Bush administration did not want to

confront.

The real and immediate concern is that forces now being deployed as

part of this surge will not have the equipment they need when they get

there. They will have to borrow it. We are not fully prepared to

respond effectively.

The House then is considering an expression of support or opposition

to another failure of leadership. Nearly 23 years ago, President Ronald

Reagan's Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, outlined in a speech

entitled ``The Uses of Military Power,'' six tests that need to be

applied whenever combat forces are contemplated.

One: never commit forces unless the particular situation is vital to

our national interest or that of our allies. Two: if we are willing to

commit the force or resources necessary to win, we should commit them

all.

Three: we should have clearly defined political and military

objectives. Four: the relationship between the objectives and forces,

size, composition, disposition, must be continually reassessed and

adjusted.

Five: we must have the support of the American people and their

elected representatives in Congress. Six: the commitment of U.S. troops

to combat should be a last resort. President Bush's policies have

failed every one of then-Secretary Weinberger's tests.

What then are the consequences of this failure? Our troops are in

peril. Our credibility is shattered and the lessons of the past are

submerged in empty rhetoric and political dribble.

Make no mistake, we are engaged in a war of choice, a catastrophe

conceived in ideological zeal, cloaked in misinformation and

administered with breathtaking incompetence.

It is an outrage that we have not had a single policy in Iraq worthy

of our men and women in uniform. This surge is yet another misstep in

this tragic journey to disaster. We need to end it and end it now.