Mr. Speaker, since the United States went to war in Iraq

over 2 years ago, Congress has approved spending bill after spending

bill to pay for military operations in Iraq. But one thing Congress has

never done is provide any meaningful oversight over the war and the

spending on the war.

Think about it. Congress will spend money on Iraq to the point of

busting our already fragile budget, but when it comes to truly managing

the war, Congress is nowhere to be found. Every single Member of

Congress and the people that elected them should be utterly ashamed of

this absence of Congress on this crucial issue.

With nearly 2,000 United States troops killed, another 15,000

wounded, and countless thousands of Iraqis killed, the U.S. Congress

must, must exercise its oversight responsibilities to determine why

things are going so drastically wrong in Iraq.

I have repeatedly asked the House Armed Services Committee and the

House International Relations Committee to hold hearings on Iraq.

Unfortunately, no committee has undertaken a serious and thoughtful

examination of the war.

Since Congress has continually failed in that duty, I have decided to

take matters into my own hands. Last Thursday I held a hearing to

assess how to end the war in Iraq and start bringing our troops home.

Such luminaries as former Senator Max Cleland, four-star Marine Corps

General Joseph Hoar, and former U.S. Ambassador David Mack testified at

this hearing.

Thirty Members of Congress, bipartisan Members at that, all of whom

are frustrated by the same tired policies when it comes to Iraq, joined

me at this hearing. The purpose of this hearing was to address not the

when of ending the war, but how to end the war. After all, we should

all be able to agree that the United States cannot continue to fight in

Iraq indefinitely.

Given that fact, we need to start thinking about how the United

States can responsibly leave Iraq without making a bad situation worse.

As Senator Cleland so eloquently stated,

If the hearing demonstrated anything, it is that we need to start

bringing our troops home because it is our very presence in Iraq that

is encouraging and uniting Iraq's insurgency. But the sad truth is that

the Bush administration is doing nothing to help end the war. They have

no plan for how to conduct the war, they had no plan for securing the

country once Saddam Hussein was deposed, and now they have no plan for

ending the war.

Well, if they do not, we will. That is what our hearing was about

last week. We are trying to jump-start a debate in Congress that should

have begun long ago.

The hearing was not about endorsing any one exit strategy, it was

about putting all of them on the table and getting the discussions

started. It was about encouraging the rest of the Congress to take a

strong stand against permanent U.S. military bases on Iraq's soil and

Iraqi control of Iraqi oil.

The American people have known for many months that the rationale for

going to war in Iraq was based on fraud and lies. They have known that

the war will continue to drain our resources and kill our young men and

women in the military.

Now, two-thirds of Americans support a partial or complete military

withdrawal from Iraq. It is time for Congress to start getting that

message. And it is time for Congress to catch up with the American

people and to catch up with the witnesses at Thursday's hearing.