Mr. Speaker, I am here this evening to talk about

something new and wonderful that has happened in the Congress of the

United States of America. I am here to talk about a new caucus that is

named Out of Iraq Caucus. I am here to talk about the men and women of

this House who have decided they can be silent no longer. I am here to

talk about men and women who represent various points of view relative

to support for the President from the time that he first announced he

was going into Iraq to now. I am here to talk about why we have formed

this caucus, what we plan to do, but more than that this evening, we

are going to focus on our soldiers and those who are in Iraq serving

this country, those who are there in harm's way, those who have been

killed in Iraq, those who are up at Walter Reed Hospital suffering from

serious injuries, having lost limbs, having lost their eyesight, those

who do not know what the future holds for them.

We are going to focus on that this evening because it is extremely

important for the families of these soldiers to know and understand

that we support these soldiers. We know that many of them went there

because they were called to duty. They were recruited to go to Iraq

because their President asked them to do so, and they wanted to serve

this country despite the fact they did not understand all of the

reasons why. Many of them went to serve because they thought that

Saddam Hussein was responsible for 9/11. But, of course, we know now

that Saddam Hussein was not responsible for 9/11, and many of the

soldiers know that now.

So this caucus has been formed. We have 61 members, and they are

still adding on. We met this morning at 10 a.m., and we will continue

to meet as we develop our mission statement, as we help to define who

we are.

Basically, we have come together to say we want out of Iraq. We want

out, and this caucus is not putting a time certain. This caucus has not

concocted demands about how we want to get out. We simply want our

young people out of Iraq. So we will provide support to other Members

of Congress, other caucuses who want to get out of Iraq. We will

provide support to the citizens of this Nation, the organized national

groups who want to get out of Iraq.

We will organize not only coming to the floor as we are this evening

to talk about various aspects of this war. We will also organize

workshops and seminars. We will travel, some of us, to different

regions in this country, responding to citizens who are asking for

Members of Congress to come and explain this public policy to them. We

will be available to meet with the families of service members who have

been killed,

who have been injured. We have families who are asking to meet with

somebody, anybody. We have people who are asking to meet with Donald

Rumsfeld, who cannot get any response, who are not being talked to. We

are going to meet with them. We are going to talk with them. We are

going to share with them what we know.

But more than that, we are going to be an ear to family members who

need to talk with someone about why their son or daughter died in Iraq.

We are going to spend the time and give them some attention because we

think that the least that we can do is sit and talk and listen to

family members.

Some of them will say that they are very proud that their child or

their son or their relative served in this war, and we will commend

them for the pride that they feel and the fact that their relative,

their child, their brother, their father served. Some will say that ``I

once support the war but I no longer support it.'' We will listen to

them, and we will hear what they have to say. And we will explain to

them how we feel at this time about getting out of Iraq.

And so this is a caucus that will have the ability to extend itself

not only to the organized groups and organizations but again to the

family members.

I would like to point out something about this war. We have heard

many of the statistics and much of the data over and over again. But we

have to remind folks we have been there now since March 19, 2003. We

have 1,722 soldiers who have died in this war, and the numbers mount

each day. The number of soldiers injured: 13,074. We have many Members

of Congress from both sides of the aisle who are going up to Walter

Reed Hospital to see the soldiers there who are injured, and the

stories that we hear coming back from those visits break one's heart.

These are stories of young men and women who had hopes and dreams. Many

of them went to war because they had no jobs. They did not know what

the future held for them, and they thought, Perhaps if I go and serve

my country and get an income, perhaps I can do good. I can not only

serve my country, but perhaps I can get ahead. Perhaps I can learn a

trade. Perhaps I can learn something. Perhaps I can exploit some of my

talents and show what I can do. But when I come home, I want to go back

to school. I want to go to college. I want to get married. I want to

have children. I want to contribute to my community.

Well, unfortunately, these 1,722 will never be able to realize their

hopes and their dreams. They have died. But the question still remains

for many of us, Why are we in Iraq? What is the real story? We know now

there are no weapons of mass destruction. Why are these young people

dying?

I want to relate an interview that I watched on television this past

Sunday. This past Sunday, as many folks in America do, I watched some

of the great television shows, and I was watching George Stephanopoulos

as he interviewed the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. And he

interviewed her. They talked about, of course, the work that she is

doing in the Middle East, working with the issue of Israel, the

Palestinians.

But then he segued to the war in Iraq. And he said to Condoleezza

Rice, ``As you know, there has been a lot of talk back here in the

United States about these Downing Street memos, the minutes of a

meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair in the spring of 2002 where they

discuss their meetings with the United States.'' And then he said, ``I

want to show you what one mother, Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a U.S.

soldier, had to say about that memo this week.'' And then they showed

Cindy Sheehan, mother. She said this: ``The so-called Downing Street

memo dated the 23rd of July, 2002, only confirms what I already

suspected. The leadership of this country rushed us into an illegal

invasion of another sovereign country on prefabricated and cherry-

picked intelligence.''

And then George Stephanopoulos said to the Secretary of State,

Condoleezza Rice, ``How do you respond to this, to what Mrs. Sheehan

said? How do you respond to that?'' Condoleezza Rice started out with

her explanation. She started out by saying, ``Well, I can only say what

the President has said many, many times. The United States of America

and its coalition decided that it was finally time to deal with the

threat of Saddam Hussein.'' And she went on with the typical kind of

discussion and explanation in line with the message that is given by

this administration. Along the way, she said, ``When you consider what

the Iraqi people had gone through in the Saddam Hussein regime's reign,

what about the responsibility to the Iraqi people?''

I was struck by this conversation because not one time did the

Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, acknowledge Cindy Sheehan, who

had been on the screen with the question that was raised by George

Stephanopoulos. Not once on Father's Day did she say, we are sorry your

son died, we feel your pain, we understand how you must feel. Not once

did she recognize her. Not once did she recognize the death of her son.

Not once did she show any sympathy. But oftentimes we hear from this

administration how much they care about the soldiers.

Well, the Out of Iraq Caucus is going to show not only do we want

them out of Iraq but we care about them. We will never fail to

acknowledge a mother who is in deep pain about the loss of her son. Not

ever will we be on national TV and not take a moment to say we too care

about our soldiers. No. This conversation basically focused on our

responsibility to the Iraqi people.

My first responsibility is to Americans and to those American

soldiers. My first responsibility is to their safety. My first

responsibility is to their well-being. My first responsibility is to

acknowledge them and their families and their parents. And my

responsibility, as a public policymaker, is to tell the truth. We all

know now there were no weapons of mass destruction. We cannot tell

these young people why they are really there. We cannot tell them that

there is an exit strategy. We cannot tell them why many of their

friends that they met in this war died in vehicles that had no armor.

We cannot tell them why they died up in Fallujah. We cannot tell them

why they died in Operation Lightning. We cannot tell them what they are

doing in Operation Spear.

We hear all of these fancy, concocted names for the operations, but

what we do not hear is the definition of why they are doing what they

are doing. Are they simply being organized into these special

operations to try to send a signal to the American people that they are

really in charge? What are they to do when they go into these battles

and into these special operations? Are they to shoot whatever moves?

We know that, yes, thousands of Iraqis have died because we have

young people in these special operations, Operation Lightning,

Operation Spear, operation this, operation that, who were told to shoot

anything that moves. Many of them cannot live with the psychological

damage that is fostered upon them because they are shooting and they

are killing and they do not have all of the answers.

So today we focus on our soldiers, and we say to Cindy Sheehan we are

sorry about the loss of her son and we thank her for caring enough to

ask the questions, to be involved. We are trying to get public

policymakers to do the right thing. So tonight, as we further announce

the Out of Iraq Caucus and the Members who have signed up to do the

work of providing the platform of creating the voice for those who want

to speak out, we focus tonight on our soldiers in Iraq. Our prayers go

out to them. We want them to be returned home. We want them to realize

their dreams and their hopes and their aspirations.

I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Woolsey), who has

been on this floor night after night talking about these issues, the

gentlewoman from California that basically said we want out of Iraq;

administration, tell us how you are going to do it.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentlewoman from

California (Ms. Woolsey), not only for being here this evening, but for

all of the work, all of the hours, all of the time that she has put

into this effort.

I now yield time to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Lee), who

too has been a leader in opposing this war. She warned us early on that

we should not just give permission to the President of the United

States to go to war without understanding what the reasons were and

without having that debate. So, unfortunately, our debate is taking

place a little bit late, but it is taking place.

I would like to thank the gentlewoman from northern California, the

Oakland area, (Ms. Lee), for all of her work and for being here this

evening.

I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Lee). We

appreciate so very much the work that she has been doing and her wisdom

and early warnings about this war.

Next, I would like to call on the Congressman from New York (Mr.

Rangel), who is a veteran who knows a lot about war because he served.

He is a gentleman who has been unsettled about this war for months.

And he has taken many opportunities to ask what we are doing. When are

we going to have a discussion? When are we going to speak out? When are

we going to have hearings? What is going on with this?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank him for raising those questions. I

wanted to thank him for being a part of what we are attempting to do

with the Out of Iraq Caucus. And I welcome him this evening to this

discussion.

I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. Rangel)

and ask him to remain for a colloquy if he has a few moments with all

of us here. I thank the Members for focusing our discussion tonight on

our soldiers and helping to remind people that these are real human

beings, as I said before, with hopes and aspirations. And when they

die, not only are those hopes and aspirations gone, but the family

members are left devastated and destroyed by these deaths, and we have

got to do more to slow our support for them.

It is not their fault if they are there. They answered the call for

many reasons, some of which the gentleman described so wonderfully well

in his presentation. Some people looking for just a job, for income.

Some folks looking to serve their country, to answer the call for

whatever reason. And what we have got to be sure about is that we do

not allow these sacrifices to be taken lightly.

For example, we hear some Members saying, who wish to support the

war, to continue to support the war, saying all they show on television

are the bombings, the suicide bombings. All they show are the deaths

and the destruction. They do not show the good stuff.

Well, I get very upset when I hear that, because what they are

literally saying to me is that somehow the loss of lives of our

soldiers should take second place or third place to some news about

perhaps cleaning up a street somewhere. I cannot say news about new

electricity or clean water or schools or any of that, but they simply

say over and over again, all they show are these suicide bombings; they

do not show the good stuff.

Well, I do not like hearing that because, again, they are relegating

the loss of lives to some secondary status. And tonight we draw

attention to the importance of the soldiers, how we are proud of them

and their families. And I mentioned earlier that in this interview on

Sunday with Mr. Stephanopoulos and Condoleeza Rice, even though he drew

her attention to Cindy Sheehan, the mother who had a comment who had

been here in the Congress trying to raise the discussion, he drew her

attention to her and something she had said and Condoleeza Rice never

acknowledged her, never said she was sorry about the death of her son,

never gave any attention to the fact that this woman in pain was

attempting to create this discussion.

So tonight there is a mother who has not been answered, who has been

trying to get some response from Donald Rumsfeld. Now, the gentleman

from California (Mr. George Miller) has put together a letter to

Rumsfeld saying, please talk to her. Not only has she been knocking

down the door, making the telephone calls, she is talking about other

mothers and other families. Please talk to her. Please respond to her.

I signed on to that letter today. We are going to encourage all the

members of the Out of Iraq Congressional Caucus to sign on to that

letter. But I would like to ask all Members here tonight, do you think

that we should not only join as the Out of Iraq Caucus in asking Donald

Rumsfeld to respond to Ms. Sheehan and perhaps other mothers and

families, should we not have an organized way by which they really are

talked to, that they have an opportunity to even come to Washington?

If we can offer $40,000 to their children to come to Iraq, can we not

help them to come to Washington and be recognized and talk with them,

not just in ceremony, not just one day perhaps out of the year; but

when they say they need some answers that they want to know, should not

we encourage Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleeza Rice and this

administration to be more sensitive, more sensitive?

Those are certainly tough questions and, of course, just

as Condoleeza Rice gave the framed message that she always gives when

she is speaking publicly, Saddam Hussein was a terrible man,

Saddam Hussein was a threat to the United States. Now, the Middle East

will be better off without Saddam Hussein. Those are the kind of

answers I suspect that she would give. But I think when Condoleeza Rice

is on national television in an interview where millions of people are

watching, and you have a mother who is shown on television raising a

question and you do not even take the time to acknowledge that mother,

to say, Ms. Sheehan, I am sorry about the loss of your son.

Well, Cindy Sheehan has already made the inquiry. She had

made calls. She has written the letter and now she has asked the

gentleman from California (Mr. George Miller) to help her. He started

to circulate a letter, which I signed, and I would like to encourage

others, because we are not encouraging her to start this. She has

already been doing it. And she is simply put out with the fact that she

can get no response, no returned telephone calls, anything. And I think

that we should give her some support.

In addition to that, I do think perhaps one of the things we should

look at further is support for all the families who have questions,

because what I am hearing is families are not being told how their

children died. They get the message that it has happened, but when they

start to ask for details and particulars they are not getting it. And

as they put together these budgets, these budgets ask for whatever they

think it is they need. And I think it is time to include in the budgets

some assistance to the families, that they can at least be respected

enough to be given the information, for somebody to sit down and talk

with them and answer the questions, tell the truth. They may not get

the truth. They may not get the questions answered in the way they want

to, but I think we are going to have to try to work at forcing that to

happen.

I am awfully sorry that our time has expired. I see two more Members

just entered the room. The gentlewoman from California (Ms. Watson) and

the gentleman from New York (Mr. Towns) just entered the room and I

know that they wanted to be part of this.