Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California for

starting tonight's dialogue.

It is true. I have been on the House floor, I think, 79 times, maybe

80 in the last year for 5 minutes after the end of our workday, of our

congressional day. And my message has been we need to figure out how to

bring our troops home. Never in that message have I said it is the

troops' fault that we are there and that they are to be criticized. We

are not going to pick on the warriors. We are not going to blame them

because their leadership, their administration, sent them there to do a

job that was not necessary.

The death of over 1,700 of our troops does not say to me that to

honor those deaths we need to send more troops, we need to have more

death.

I do not think that honors those who have died. I think that, in

fact, it is a shame that we would even think of sending another young

person, male, female, another older person, our National Guard, our

Reservists, into an area that we did not need to be in in the first

place. There is no excuse for the United States to have started a war

in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, our Constitution states that Members of Congress must be

chosen by the people of the United States and that Congress must

represent the people of the United States. That means that we as

Members, Members of Congress, need to act and listen to the people when

they speak. Well, I have been speaking for 80 days, every time we are

in session, for 5 minutes, but now the American people are speaking.

They have spoken.

The latest Gallup poll released last week indicates that the American

people are ready for our military in Iraq to start coming home. They

are saying, bring our troops home. They say this, and some actually

supported the war at the beginning, but now, like the three of us up

here, they want to honor our troops, they want to honor the families of

our troops, they want to bring them home safe and whole.

When I say whole, I know what I am talking about. Two years ago, I

had major, major back surgery at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. And when

I was able to walk, I walked the halls and visited the troops that had

come home then. It was August 2 years ago, so they were just beginning

to come home from Iraq. I want to tell my colleagues, we are not

talking about people that are hardly wounded at all, we are talking

about young people who have virtually been destroyed physically. Their

minds are there, though. They know what happened. But we are doing such

a disservice to them if we send more young people, more troops in an

area where they too are going to get injured or killed.

Nearly 60 percent of Americans believe that the United States should

bring home some or all of our troops from Iraq, and the Gallup poll

tells us that only 36 percent of Americans support maintaining our

current troop level in Iraq. Only 36 percent. This is the lowest level

of support for the war since it began in March 2003, and nobody is

saying we do not support our troops. They know these statistics are all

about bringing them home because we do support them, and we know that

when they come home they will be safe. It is absolute in these numbers

that Americans are not criticizing the troops, the warriors; they are

criticizing the war, how we got into it, how badly it has been managed,

and why there is absolutely no plan on how to bring our troops home.

The American people have stated loud and clear, and their numbers are

increasing also; the more they see what is happening to their neighbor,

a friend of their son or their daughter, they are realizing that, oh,

my, it can happen to any single one of these young people that we send

overseas for a war that was not necessary in the first place. The only

way to end this death and destruction that occurs every single day is

to start the process of bringing our troops home. Clearly, the American

people are way ahead of Congress on this issue.

Unfortunately, the President of the United States is way behind on

the issue of Iraq. We have asked the President to come up with a plan

for ending the war. He has not. He has no plan for victory, except to

leave our troops in harm's way as targets for a furious insurgency who

look at our sons and daughters as occupiers. What, then, should Members

of Congress do?

Well, I have been working hard on this, as the gentlewoman from

California told us. For one thing, I came up with a plan in January

when I introduced legislation that is H. Con. Res. 35, calling for the

President to begin bringing our troops home. Thirty-five Members of

Congress support this legislation. And then we continued this effort on

May 25 by introducing an amendment to the defense authorization bill

calling on the President to do this simple thing: Create a plan for

Iraq and bring his plan to the appropriate House committee. Mr.

Speaker, 128 Members of Congress, including five Republicans and one

Independent, voted in favor of this sensible amendment.

It is clear that the United States must develop a plan to bring our

troops home. That is the only fair thing to do for the people of this

country but, most importantly, for the troops. They deserve to know

when they get to come home, and their families deserve it equally.

I have loved being up here with my colleagues. I am proud to be a

member of the Out of Iraq Task Force in the House of Representatives.

It is not that we want to run away from anything; we certainly believe

that when the United States pulls our troops home, that we do have a

responsibility and we must be working with the Iraqis to help them with

their failing economic and physical infrastructure. We know that we can

help them with that, but we know we cannot do it while we are in the

midst of destroying their cities at the same time we are trying to put

them back together. First, we bring our troops home, then we work with

the Iraqi government and we help them put their country back together.

We are also proud of the Iraqi citizens who went to the polls and

voted, but we are also very clear that what they were voting for was

the fact that they wanted their country back in control by the Iraqis,

not by the United States military. As soon as we do this, we can start

working with them, and we can work with the international world, get

them all involved, so we can be doing the right thing for Iraq and the

Iraqi people who are also being destroyed by this war.

So I thank the gentlewoman for letting me be a part of this. My

colleagues will hear more from us. We have a lot of ideas, but our

major idea is two words, ``troops home,'' in honor of those young men

and young women and the Reservists and the National Guard who are doing

something that they were told they must do; and they are serving their

country the best that they can, but they are getting very poor guidance

from the leaders of this country.

Well, I do not want to be a cynic but is not Donald

Rumsfeld the same individual who was stamping his names on letters to

families when he was sending his condolences to them when their family

member had died in Iraq? He needs a lot of training on how to be

compassionate.

I think it is a very good idea that we send that letter, but I do not

think we should be surprised that that is the reaction that Cindy

Sheehan has gotten from Condoleeza Rice and from Donald Rumsfeld.

There seems to be something missing in the picture, and that is

compassion and really understanding what this means to those who are

fighting the war and the families of those who have lost their loved

ones and who are getting loved ones back who are totally, totally

wounded, both physically and mentally. So yes, we should do that.