Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from California

(Ms. Waters) for her leadership and for really seeing the wisdom and

knowing that this is a defining moment to bring us all together in our

Out of Iraq Caucus.

The gentlewoman from California (Ms. Waters) has recognized the fact

that there were those who voted for the war and those who voted against

the war, but we know what is going on with our young men and women now,

and so the gentlewoman decided to bring us all together to try to help

us figure out how to get out of this mess. I think the country owes the

gentlewoman a debt of gratitude.

Also, to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Woolsey), I just want

to say to her, sometimes she is the lone voice in the wilderness.

Sooner or later, though, if you call it the way it is and stick with

your principles and stick with what you believe is right, people will

hear you; the country will hear and the world will hear, and I think

that is what we are seeing now. So I just want to thank her for her

leadership as well.

Mr. Speaker, so often we get caught up in the rhetoric of our

positions and what we believe, and oftentimes forget about the human

face and the toll of

such a war, such an illegal and immoral war.

The gentlewoman from California (Ms. Waters) so eloquently talked

about the callousness and the insensitivity of this administration

toward those who have died and who are risking their lives, when

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice did not acknowledge the sacrifices

and the pain that a courageous mother, Cindy Sheehan, must be feeling.

As the daughter of a veteran of two wars, I feel this, and I

understand this, and I think that our administration, whether they have

children in Iraq or not, I think that they should stand up for these

young men and women and feel their pain and try to help figure out how

to first say, I am sorry; and secondly, say, let us begin to figure out

how we develop a plan and begin to bring our young men and women out of

harm's way.

Mr. Speaker, that is how we really support our troops. Empty rhetoric

does not work when young men and women are dying.

So let me just say, I visited the troops, I guess it was probably a

couple of years ago at Walter Reed Hospital. This is the untold story

of this war. There are thousands of our kids who will be disabled for

life, thousands of our young men and women who lost their limbs, who

cannot see, their faces have been blown off. It has been a financial

difficulty; they have come back to the lack of financial and economic

security. Some of them are losing their houses, they have lost their

jobs, their credit cards. And we serve on the Committee on Financial

Services and we know how the credit card companies are messing with

them in terms of their debt and the bankruptcy issues.

They come back and, upon their return, they see that they have very

little in terms of veterans benefits. They have long lines they have to

wait in. The mental health services are almost nonexistent. We know

what post-traumatic stress syndrome is. Our young men and women need

mental health services like they have never needed it before. Yet, we

cannot get legislation nor funding to provide this kind of care for our

kids, and I think that is a shame and a disgrace.

Mr. Speaker, I went to a funeral of a young man who was killed in my

district in the war, and it was unbelievable. This young man was a

proud soldier, and I was so proud of him, because he was determined

that he was going to go and serve our country and wave the flag and

make sure that democracy prevailed in Iraq, and he honorably died, and

it was very sad. But his family told me that while they may not have

agreed with what he wanted to do in terms of going into the military,

that they supported him going; they loved him and they missed him, but

they wanted to get more involved in trying to help us figure out a way

to ensure that no more kids are killed like this. I hear this over and

over and over again. I think all of us here hear that over and over

again.

But yes, we went and we bombed the heck out of Iraq, so we have I

think a duty and a responsibility to help rebuild and reconstruct the

country. But as the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Woolsey) said, we

need to first begin to develop a plan to get our young men and women

and bring them home, get them out of harm's way, because they are the

targets of the insurgency. I do not believe there is going to be any

stability as long as the Iraqi people believe and see that their

country is occupied by U.S. forces. So we are putting them and keeping

them in harm's way.

So we need to bring them home, and we need to figure out a plan to do

that as soon as possible.

Also, let me just say that in the Committee on International

Relations, a committee upon which I serve, we had authorized or

reauthorized the State Department Reauthorization Act a couple of weeks

ago. So I tried to offer an amendment for withdrawal, and I think there

were 12 or 13 votes for that. But then I decided that since the

President and since Secretary Rice continued to say that we do not want

to permanently occupy Iraq, we do not want permanent bases, I said,

well, let me do an amendment to the State Department authorization bill

and all it would say is we just do not intend to have permanent bases

in Iraq. Well, I think, on a bipartisan vote, it got about 15 votes

there.

Mr. Speaker, I share that because we hear the administration saying,

no permanent presence, no permanent bases; yet we see just the opposite

in terms of funding and appropriations and beginning to create this

scenario to build permanent bases. So we have to ask the question: What

is really going on?

We know that the administration misled the American people and the

world that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. We knew

that then. Now, I think the Downing Street memo and the other facts are

coming out so that the public will understand what we said then, we

knew that there was no connection between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda

and 9/11 and Iraq.

We knew that then, but now, thank God for the gentleman from Michigan

(Mr. Conyers) and the hearings that we are holding. We are beginning to

educate the American people so that they know what we knew. And I think

people are listening, people are beginning to say was this worth it?

Was this worth it? Was this worth over 1,700 of our young people being

killed, countless number of Iraqi civilians being killed, $300 billion-

plus, and I think Defense Appropriations just had another $45 billion

in it, that was not with my vote, but to that, some voted for the other

day, and so where does this end? Where does this end?

And so I just wanted to say tonight in closing that we need to insist

that the administration announce that they will develop a plan for

bringing our young men and women home, announce a plan for stabilizing

and to help bringing in the international community to stabilize Iraq,

and this means the international community in a real way.

And we need to make sure that the administration says to the American

people that there will be no permanent bases in Iraq. Because, if we do

that, we are going to be up to trillions of dollars in terms of this

war. And I hate to see that happen, because here we have people who are

homeless, we have young kids who need a decent education, and we need

affordable housing, we need a universal health care system.

And we need to take care of some domestic needs. With the war going

on like this and with billions and billions of dollars being spent,

especially if we intend to have permanent bases, we will never meet our

domestic needs and the responsibility that we owe to our American

citizens.

So I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Waters) for her

leadership and for making sure that all of us come to this floor and

call it like it is and tell the truth, and begin to beat that drum and

begin to wake up America so that we can save our kids from being bombed

and from the suicide attacks and from the violence that they are

dealing with in such an honorable way.

These kids are courageous, they deserve our support, and they deserve

our support in a real way. And that means our support by insisting that

they come home so they can be with their families and get the type of

care that they need.

I have noticed this administration is so detached, totally

detached from the impact and the ramifications of what they have done

in terms of their policy, their warmaking policies. Remember, Secretary

Rice was one of the chief architects of this war. Perhaps it is very

difficult for her to realize that being one of the chief architects of

this war, that Cindy Sheehan lost someone that her policies were

responsible for.

So I think not only should we encourage Secretary Rumsfeld to meet

with them, we should insist on that. The Defense Department, the

Pentagon, and the White House, they owe these families an audience.

They owe them an audience.

And the gentleman from New York (Mr. Rangel) asked the questions that

would be very difficult, I think, for this administration to respond to

if, in fact, Cindy Sheehan asked those questions. But I believe they

have paid the supreme price and they deserve the Secretary of Defense

and the Secretary of State and all of those who crafted this war, they

deserve to meet with them to hear from them, and these parents need

that audience and that is the minimal thing that we should insist on.