Mr. Speaker, it is a great honor once again to come to

the floor of the House as a representative of the landmark class of

2006 known as the majority makers, a group of 41 Democrats elected from

23 States who were sent here by the American people to change the

direction of the country.

Of course one of the primary issues that was at the heart of the

campaign in 2006 was our involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. And this

week that effort, national effort, has taken greater significance

because we once again heard from General Petraeus and Ambassador

Crocker about the progress or the situation, I should say, in Iraq.

They testified before two congressional committees, two Senate

committees yesterday and the House committees today. Their testimony, I

think, raises two issues that I want to address tonight.

Of course the first is what the situation is in Iraq and what the

prospects for success are in that part of the world. And, secondly,

what is the cost to the American people and to the American economy

because as we all know, the costs are varied and they are significant.

They rise to magnitudes that we are not used to discussing in this

country, both in human cost which of course is our top priority, and

also the economic cost. And then there is the future cost as well

because what we are doing is incurring obligations for our future

generations that are real, that are incredibly large, and that the

American people need to focus on because as we go forward and try to

establish policies and have a national debate about what the

appropriate course of action is in Iraq, we have to discuss again not

just the human costs but also the cost to future generations of the

American people, juxtaposed against the benefits and potential benefits

of our continued involvement.

There are two things I think we need to say from the outset that

really underlie all of these discussions and that is everyone in this

body, in the Congress and in the country wants the United States to be

successful, wants there to be a peaceful and beneficial result in Iraq.

We all want a stable Middle East. We all want a stable, peaceful world.

No one in this body or anywhere else that I know of is rooting for us

to be unsuccessful in Iraq.

The second thing that we need to focus on is that it is unavoidable

that we have to talk about economics and it is sad that we even have to

talk about money because already we have lost 4,000 American men and

women in Iraq. We have had virtually 30,000 wounded, many seriously,

many with life-altering injuries; and the cost to the Iraqi people, of

course, is also extraordinary with 2 million people having left Iraq,

hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, Iraqi civilians dying, and many more

dislocated throughout the country, families torn apart and lives

ruined.

So the human cost of the U.S. involvement in this effort in Iraq and

also in Afghanistan cannot be minimized, and nobody is trying to. That

of course is the ultimate cost. But we do have to talk about the

economic cost of this war because we are looking at a situation in

which we have potential exposure throughout the world. We have a

military that will be called on to be deployed in other situations, not

just in the Middle East. We have by almost everyone's estimation a much

more serious and ominous threat in Afghanistan and Pakistan that will

require continued involvement of American forces, and where it is clear

to everyone that terrorists, including particularly al Qaeda, are much

more active and we need to focus much more intensely on Afghanistan and

our involvement in Iraq is, of course, preventing us from doing as much

as we could and probably should in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

These are all of the dynamics that we face as we discuss these

issues. Two things in particular concern me about the testimony of

General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker yesterday. And, of course,

everyone quite justifiably honors their service and their commitment to

their duty, and they are certainly fulfilling their obligations well.

But two things in particular disturb me greatly, and one was when

asked continuously by a number of Senators and House Members to

describe the conditions under which we might be able to withdraw a

substantial number of our forces from Iraq, General Petraeus basically

said we will know them when we see them. He could not identify them.

And he said, Well, we will look at it again in a few months. We will

look at it in September. Maybe we can start withdrawing them then;

maybe we can't.

What's the measure for success? He wouldn't specify. He couldn't

specify. And I don't think he was being coy. I think, in fact, his

unwillingness to specify or identify the conditions under which we

might be able to leave was purely a function of the fact that we don't

know what the conditions are, and we have never known exactly what we

were trying to accomplish in that country.

The goalposts have been moved continuously. There have been dozens of

different reasons for our involvement mentioned over the last 5 years.

And it is, I think, quite indicative yesterday when asked on numerous

occasions again what would you see, what would you have to see before

you would recommend withdrawing more troops, General Petraeus and

Ambassador Crocker said, Well, we'll know it when we see it; it is a

matter of what the conditions are.

That is an important point to make.

Another answer that he gave to a question asked by Senator Biden, I

think, was quite revealing. When Senator Biden asked when you come back

and make your evaluation and assessment in September of this year, at

that point do you think there is any chance that we could be within 30

days of having troops withdrawal?

General Petraeus said at that point, Well, it might be that very day.

Of course he went on to say it could be a month later, it could be many

months later, it could be years later.

When I heard him say that it occurred to me if he was willing to say

there was a possibility that we could be out, be able to start

withdrawing significant numbers of troops in September, if that was a

possibility, he should know what the metrics are, what the conditions

he would have to be looking for in September to allow us to do that.

And yet when asked what are the conditions, he couldn't identify them.

So again, I think all of these points, reading between the lines,

indicate that we are not getting the full story about what we should

look for as a measure of success in Iraq because the people on the

ground don't know what the measures are. I think they would tell us if

they knew, but I don't think they know. And that is a pretty

frightening thought because we are being asked to carry the burden of

an incredibly large cost as a society.

Now many of us are not asked, unfortunately, I think in many ways, we

are not asked to bear any of the burden. Most of the burden is being

borne directly by the military families and the soldiers who are

overseas in deployment, many for several deployments. They are bearing

the hardest burden; but we are also bearing a serious cost, and it

mounts by the second.

As a matter of fact, every minute that I spend speaking here, we are

spending, the American taxpayers are spending $230,000. Every minute,

$230,000 is being spent in Iraq; $4,000 a second. That mounts up. It

becomes real, real money. It becomes $14 million an hour; $340 million

a day; $2.5 billion a week, $10 billion a month; and while some

estimates are higher, $125 billion a year, and that is just in Iraq.

Now I know, believe me, that many people have a hard time grasping

what a billion dollars is, what $120 billion are, but there are a

couple of easy ways to describe it. With $120 billion in 1 year, you

could give every teacher in the United States a $20,000 a year raise.

Every teacher. Every one of our 6 million teachers in the United

States, and I think most people agree teachers are drastically

underpaid, we could give them a $20,000 a year raise with what we are

spending in Iraq.

We could pay for the health care of about 16 or 17 million people

every year. That 47 million people we have uninsured, we could cover 16

or 17 million of those people with that $125 billion that we are now

spending in Iraq.

We all know we have huge infrastructure needs in this country,

bridges to repair, highways to repair, schools to rebuild. Throughout

the country we face trillions of dollars of needed repairs and new

construction on our infrastructure. This would make a considerable

investment in that seriously needed national agenda. But that is going

overseas. And, unfortunately, it is going to where it is not an

investment, it is money that is irretrievably lost.

We could also, and this is taking what we spend every day, that $340

million or so we spend every day in Iraq, we could hire 2,000 more

Border Patrol agents; 18,000 more students could receive Pell Grants to

help them attend college for an entire year; 48,000 homeless veterans

could be provided a place to live; 317,000 more kids could receive

recommended vaccinations for a year; almost a million families could

get help with their energy bills. The list goes on and on. This is the

cost of this war in economic terms to the American people. This is the

lost opportunity, the lost opportunity for our American people.

What is even worse is it would be one thing if we had this money, but

we don't have this money. We know we are running a deficit of almost

$500 billion this year, so we are borrowing this money. We are not just

saying we have $125 billion lying around, we can allocate this to Iraq,

no problem. We are borrowing it. At least half of it we are borrowing

from foreign countries. So we are having China and other nations who

are financing our debt, who are actually paying for this war, but it is

not free. China is going to want to get paid back some time, and that

is going to be on future generations. So again, whatever we feel about

this war, we have to understand the cost, and the cost is real. The

American people understand that this cost is real.

A recent New York Times CBS poll, 89 percent of Americans surveyed

said that the war in Iraq is a drain on the U.S. economy; 66 percent

said it is a big drain, and 22 percent said it is some drain.

So the American people understand this. The American people

understand that while we have a housing crisis, while we have a crisis

in our financial markets, where we're having trouble actually making,

having funds made available to make student loans, we understand that

there's a connection between the economic problems we face and our

involvement in Iraq.

And again, I don't think any of us would argue if this were a war

where there were clearly defined goals, and if there were an

existential threat to the United States, our security. But our national

intelligence estimate, our 16 agencies said no, that's not the case,

that we don't face an existential threat in Iraq. We are, essentially,

refereeing, as we know, a sectarian dispute.

And I think what is most frustrating, again, reading between the

lines, listening to General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, is that

there was never a mention that I heard of anything that we could do to

change the outcome there; that the implication was we were just sitting

there, and that we had to wait until they decided that they were going

to make it okay for us to leave. And that's a very, very frustrating

position to be in.

And I wish somebody, maybe somebody did ask that and I didn't hear

it, but I wish that they had been asked that specific question; is

there anything we can do to change the dynamics there to improve the

conditions that would allow us to begin withdrawing our troops and to

reduce this incredible cost to the American people?

So I would hope that as we go forward, and you hate to say, as we go

forward, because we've been going forward, now, for 5 years, and the

outlook is not any brighter. The prospects for resolution in Iraq are

not any greater.

And unfortunately, listening to General Petraeus and Ambassador

Crocker yesterday, I think it's, unfortunately, true that the people

who are in charge don't know where we're going and most importantly,

why we're going.

So these are things, as the months roll by, while the cost

accumulates, and while, unfortunately, we will suffer, no doubt, as we

have suffered, just in the last few days, 13 new American casualties,

that the American people understand and demand, both of us and the

administration, that we get a clear picture of what the objectives are,

what the cost is, and will be, because we have estimates, Professor

Joseph Stiglitz has estimated the total cost of the war in Iraq and

Afghanistan, ultimately, of $3 trillion.

But we need to understand what our goals are, what our objectives

are, what the possibilities are, what the risks are, what the potential

benefits are, and of course, what the costs are, because we're not

playing with small numbers. We're not playing with insignificant lives.

And this is the greatest challenge facing this country.

And I hope that we can have the type of dialogue, continuously, which

focuses on these points, because the American people, rightfully, are

looking for leadership and progress on Iraq.

So once again, I thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a great

privilege to stand in the House and represent the freshman Democrats

who came to Congress to change the direction of the country, who are,

in many ways, changing the direction of the country. And I think we

will continue to ask the questions that need to be asked, and try to

bring a much quicker resolution in Iraq and a new direction for the

American people.