Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from

Oklahoma (Mr. Cole) for yielding me the customary 30 minutes, and I

yield myself 8 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, we will not be having a real debate on Iraq today. It

will be a pretend debate, one that will have absolutely no effect on

U.S. policy. No amendments, no substitutes, no chance for Members of

Congress to actually do their jobs by making thoughtful changes to the

resolution.

The distinguished chairman of the International Relations Committee

testified before the Rules Committee that the resolution before us will

at least give Members the opportunity to ``get things off our chest.''

Mr. Speaker, I am not interested in therapy. I am interested in

changing this failed policy.

This process is disrespectful to the men and women of our Armed

Forces, disrespectful to the people we represent, and disrespectful to

the traditions of this House.

The Bush administration is trying to encourage, cajole, and sometimes

even strong arm the Iraqi Government into being more inclusive, to

respect the rights and privileges of the minority, to embrace the

democratic process. Well, I hope the government of Iraq is not watching

today, because the Republican majority certainly has no intention of

teaching by example.

We are all committed to a sovereign, free, secure and united Iraq.

The important question remains, to achieve this goal, is the United

States committed to keeping 150,000 or 100,000 or

50,000 American military men and women in Iraq for an indefinite amount

of time, perhaps even decades into the future?

Under the current policy, the mission in Iraq is neverending. The

resolution before us asks us not just to stay the course, but to stay

forever.

The reason why so many of us, Democrats and Republicans, want to have

a meaningful debate and meaningful votes on the war in Iraq is because

the Bush administration has lost our confidence and our trust.

For too long this Congress has given the administration blank checks

and unchecked authority. We have abdicated our responsibilities. We

have not done our job, which is to legislate, to conduct oversight, and

to shape the policy of this Nation.

Mr. Speaker, the reality of our policy in Iraq is one characterized

by corruption, mismanagement, incompetence and self-delusion. 2,493

American soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen have died since the

beginning of the war, 94 percent of them since the President declared,

``Mission Accomplished.''

And despite unanimous congressional agreements against permanent

military base funding, the Republican majority stripped these

provisions from the emergency supplemental conference report presented

to the House on Tuesday.

In the period leading up to the war, the President said, ``Imagine a

terrorist network with Iraq as an arsenal and as a training ground.''

Unfortunately, we do not have to imagine that anymore. The State

Department now reports that Iraq is indeed a terror haven. The very

thing we wanted to prevent by going to war was actually created by the

war.

Certainly the death of terrorist Abu Musab al Zarqawi is welcome

news. We did not create Zarqawi, but it was the war in Iraq that

offered him the opportunity to kill American soldiers and innocent

Iraqi civilians and to inflame sectarian hatreds.

But as we all know, foreign terrorists represent only 6 to 8 percent

of those committing violence in Iraq. By far, most attacks are carried

out by Iraqi Sunni insurgents and by the growing Shiia and Sunni

sectarian groups battling each other.

The American-backed effort to arm tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers

and officers, coupled with a failure to curb a nearly equal number of

militia gunmen, has created a galaxy of armed groups, each with its own

loyalty and agenda. Sectarian violence has become almost as serious a

threat as the insurgency. As former commander of U.S. Central Command

General Anthony Zinni said in April, ``These militias will be a fact of

life after we are gone. No one seems to have a plan for these

militias.''

It is a disturbingly familiar refrain, Mr. Speaker: No one seems to

have a plan.

On the ground, reconstruction is not going well. A plan to build 150

health care clinics has not resulted in much more than empty shells and

uneven walls. Power blackouts remain a constant frustration. Only 19

percent of Iraqis today have working sewer connections, down from 24

percent before the war. While most Iraq reconstruction projects are way

behind schedule, there is one construction effort that is right on

target: the $592 million U.S. embassy, which will be the size of about

80 football fields.

The recent report by the Special Inspector General for Iraq

Reconstruction found massive corruption and mismanagement of U.S. aid.

Billions of dollars have been lost or squandered through fraud and

corruption, much of it by a handful of corporate contractors with

special, privileged ties to the administration and a near complete lack

of systematic oversight of funds.

And still, Mr. Speaker, there is no accountability for this money and

no accountability for this war, not within the Republican White House

and not here in this Republican House.

This is a critical point, because this debate must be about more than

simply how long we will stay in Iraq.

Where is the accountability for the corruption taking place in our

reconstruction projects? Where is the accountability for our troops

receiving faulty body armor and other equipment? Where is the

accountability for the lack of funding to provide services for all the

veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who are dealing with post-

traumatic stress and other needs? Where is the accountability for the

creation of death squad-type militias within the Iraqi police and

security forces? Where is the accountability for the abuse of prisoners

and detainees which is costing the United States so much of its

credibility and standing in the international community?

It is not the role of the Congress to turn a blind eye to whatever

the administration wants to do. Quite the opposite. It is our

responsibility to oversee every single taxpayer dollar that is being

spent on this war.

The total bill for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan stands at $450

billion. If we stay in Iraq for just one more year, we will have spent,

off budget, off the books, half a trillion dollars on this war, a debt

that President Bush and the Republican majority intend to pass on to

our children and our grandchildren.

Leadership, Mr. Speaker, requires courage. It requires taking

responsibility. It requires accountability. It demands competence. In

every single one of these areas, the White House, the Pentagon, this

Republican Congress score an F for failure.

Instead, all the American people are getting is a world class PR and

spin campaign coming out of the White House.

Make no mistake, H. Res. 861 requires no accountability from the

White House or the Congress on the war in Iraq. It will not provide any

increased protection for our troops on the ground. It will not protect

our tax dollars from further waste, fraud, or abuse.

It won't demand direction, let alone a plan, from the President about

how and when our troops will return home.

So here we are, treating the issue of war and the safety of our

troops with a resolution that carries the same force of law as a

resolution congratulating a sports team. Quite frankly, this process is

an outrage and it should be rejected by this House.

I reserve the balance of my time.