Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Maryland (Mr.

Cummings) for giving some of us an opportunity to show what patriots we

really are and how much we love this country, which has given us one of

the highest opportunities, and that is to serve in this House of

Representatives.

On November 30, 1950, I found myself shot by the Communist Chinese on

the northern border of North Korea. When it was all over, I thanked God

I had my life with the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star and came home

and felt I was a patriot. That fighting was to give all Americans the

opportunity, some that had been denied my forefathers, to participate

fully, to support our government when we thought she was right and to

be patriotic enough to be able to criticize our government when we

thought she was wrong.

I think we in the Congressional Black Caucus have even a higher

responsibility than a lot of Members of Congress because our

constituents believe in us so much that they give us the latitude to

express their concerns and to talk about their aspirations as well as

their fears. That is one of the reasons why we do not have to take

polls, we do not have to get on the phone and ask them what do you

think about the war. But we know that as great as this country is, that

one of our responsibilities is to make certain that she is all that she

can be; and it is our responsibility, as our forefathers before us, to

take it to that higher level, and we cannot do that if the resources of

this country are depleted or we find our youth are not there to pick up

the baton and take it to a higher level.

If this country can decide because we do not like somebody or we

think that person is a threat or because they have demonized their own

people or they have talked in a way that we do not like against the

United States, that we can have a preemptive strike and remove that

person, and then we find out

later as we find every day that the information we relied on was

faulty, what happens if next time the information is reliable but just

no one believes us? What happens when the President says that there is

an imminent threat against the United States of America, and then we

find that Americans and the Congress say, yes, we have heard that

before.

It just seems to me that those people who voted to give the President

this authority felt in their hearts that there was an imminent threat

to the United States of America. But I listened carefully to the

President changing all of the reasons that he had given for why he

asked this Nation to send its young people to Iraq in a unilateral

preemptive strike against Iraq and Saddam Hussein. There used to be a

time when he would talk about the relationship to al Qaeda. There used

to be a time when he talked about weapons of mass destruction. There

used to be a time that he talked about an imminent threat to the United

States of America.

But if I hear him correctly now, he is saying, what difference does

it make, we got rid of Saddam Hussein. What difference does it make? It

makes the difference if the President had come here to the House of

Representatives and said, do you want to get rid of Saddam Hussein. We

probably would have had a unanimous vote, yes, we do. But what if the

next question was: Are you prepared to give us 532 lives of young

people in order to do it?

Suppose he said the price to get rid of this international terrorist

was to have 2,000 men and women maimed and crippled and in our

hospitals. Suppose he said in this war the Secretary of Defense would

report to the American people, albeit by a leak, that he did not know

if we were winning this war or not even after these losses. Suppose,

further, Mr. Rumsfeld would say he had no clue whether or not we were

creating more terrorists than we were killing. Suppose he said that he

was just thinking out of the box, but in his opinion the whole thing

was a slog.

Suppose he said that in addition to having our young men and women

who love this country and salute the flag every time it goes up, that

enlisted into the Army coming from our inner cities and rural areas in

order to get a better education and better handle on life, or like some

of us who volunteered, that we could not make it economically and this

was an opportunity to get better training. Suppose he said even though

they had 3-, 6-, and 9-year enlistments, that they would give them

additional time to serve because it was a national emergency, suppose

the President had told us when he asked the Congress to take out Saddam

Hussein that 20 percent of the soldiers over there would be men and

women from the Reservists and the National Guard.

Suppose he said they would not be all young people, they would be 30,

40, 50, even 60 years old. They would have to give up their civilian

jobs, and some have already served the military. Suppose he said they

would have a drop in their income from their civilian pay, and these

people who go away for weekends and 2 weeks to train would now have to

be separated from their wives and families for over a year. Suppose he

had said that they would have to go to Iraq two and three times and

that soon these civilian soldiers will be 40 percent of the occupation

of Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, suppose he had said that we are running out of people

and that we would have to consider a draft, that we are talking about

our Nation will have to make a sacrifice in order to remove terrorism

from this region of the world, and everybody had to share in the

sacrifice. Members of Congress, their children and grandchildren would

be drafted, members of the cabinet would be drafted. Suppose he said in

order to get rid of this demon, all of these things would be necessary,

I wonder whether or not the President would have gotten the vote if we

knew all of these facts.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I am saying it is so important for us to be

able to alert America that this whole idea of removing Saddam Hussein

had absolutely nothing to do with the terrible strike that the

terrorists had in my beloved City and State of New York. The President,

by the admission of Secretary O'Neill and other competent writings, had

already planned to remove Saddam Hussein, that the whole concept of a

preemptive strike was a part of our foreign policy, and it was the

tragic event of 9/11 that allowed him to connect an idea that they

already decided to do, taking advantage of the emotion of the Members

of Congress who thought they were reflecting the emotion of the people

in the United States.

If we just allow this to go by, if we do not have competent outside

investigations and if our Secretary of State said he did not know if he

would have gone to the U.N. and supported this invasion if that

information had been there, then what happens if we do have another

crisis and that is the situation that is before us?

So I ask the Congress to do this, please do not forget our true

fallen heroes. It is not the ones that just return home; it is those

that come home in the darkness of night. We do not even know whether we

have a flag over their coffin because the press are forbidden to be

there. We ask that those of us in the Congress form a caucus for these

fallen heroes to be there for their families and kids and to make

certain that we are treating them not like we are treating the veterans

in the budget today, but that we make a commitment that even though

they are not our kids in terms of being our biological kids or

grandkids, they are the children of our Nation and we have made a

commitment that we are going to protect them.

And we are going to raise the standard before we go to war to make

certain that our Nation is being threatened. Going over there and

having people being killed by land mines, just standing up as sitting

ducks or falling helicopters, that is not what you call fighting for

America. That is being put in a no-win position and we are losing the

life of one American a day.

I am asking Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, be

patriotic, be patriots. Sometimes it takes a little courage and we have

to explain to our voters and our constituents what we are talking

about. But we do not have a draft. Some Members do not know the pain

the families are going through, and the President says that some

Americans do not even know we are at war. Mr. President, the families

of those that have been struck in Iraq, they know we are at war. We in

the Congressional Black Caucus would like to educate the American

people that war is hell and we should never, never, never go to war if

we can negotiate a peace.