Mr. Speaker, If the gentleman would yield. I have

enjoyed this conversation, but I would like to take just a moment and

call our colleagues' attention to something that is perhaps a little

more homebound and immediate in terms of my concerns.

I think we went into Iraq based on false information that was coming

from the administration. But we are there now. But I think the American

people need to know that when we went to war after the Afghanistan

conflict, we sent our sons and daughters into harm's way without

providing them with the most basic protection. And I am talking about

this interceptor body armor which is comprised of a kevlar vest with

inserts where they can put ceramic plates in both the front and the

back.

And these ceramic inserts are capable, we are told, of stopping an

AK-47 bullet. And we sent our soldiers into Iraq into a battle, life-

and-death situation, without adequate protection. Now, this is after we

were told that this vest was credited with saving some 19 lives during

the Afghanistan conflict. So we knew this protection was effective.

And General Abizaid, when he was testifying before a Senate

committee, was asked, why did we do this? And he said, and I am

quoting, ``I cannot say for the record why we chose to go to war with

an insufficient supply of these vests.''

Well, in May I got a letter from a young soldier in Iraq, one of my

constituents, a West Point graduate, an Eagle Scout, the best kind of

kid that this country can produce. And he was in Iraq and he wrote me a

letter. He said, ``Congressman, my men are wondering why they are not

given this protection. They have been given old Vietnam-era flak

jackets that are capable of stopping fragments but are incapable of

stopping these bullets.''

So I wrote Secretary Rumsfeld a letter. And I asked the Secretary to

please tell me how many soldiers had lost their lives without this

protection. I asked him to please tell me when he could assure us that

all of America's soldiers were protected with these vests. And I asked

him to promise me that we would not provide these vests, these life-

saving vests to foreign troops until all of our soldiers had been

equipped.

The Secretary wrote me back and he said that they cannot answer my

first question because they do not collect that information from the

battlefield. So we do not know how many soldiers have been needlessly

killed simply because they were not adequately protected.

In answer to my second question, he said that it was their

expectation that all soldiers would be equipped with this vest by mid-

November.

A couple of weeks later I get a follow-up letter from General Myers,

the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And General Myers says, in

answer to my third question, ``Whether or not our troops are going to

be protected before foreign troops,'' I am paraphrasing, ``our State

Department has entered into certain agreements with some of our

coalition partners, and we are providing certain equipment to them; but

we have been assured that the companies that are producing the

equipment for the foreign troops do not have a contract with our

government to provide these materials for our troops, but if they were

to get such a contract from our government they would honor it first.''

Well, the question that I have is, if we are trying to get these

soldiers protected as rapidly as possible, and there is a company that

is capable of producing these vests, why do they not have a contract

with our government?

Well, so General Myers then said it will be mid-November before all

of our troops are protected. So Secretary Rumsfeld says November and

then General Myers in his letter says December. And then, lo and

behold, right before we left here for Christmas, the Pentagon had a

briefing and some of my staff were there and they said, Well, it is

going to be January. Think of that. Months after this war started, we

had many months leading up to the war, adequate time to prepare, to

develop the equipment our troops needed, and it was not done.

So 10, 12, 13 months after the war started they are finally telling

us, and I do not know if I can brief them, quite frankly, they are

finally telling us that they have, in fact, gotten a sufficient supply

of these vests to our troops.

Then the vehicles that are being driven, the Humvees and other

military vehicles that are being driven in Iraq, we are here in the

safety of this Chamber, and we are protected by the Capitol Police; and

as we stand here, there are American soldiers in Iraq in hellish

circumstances, and they are driving vehicles that are not armor plated.

I received an e-mail from a soldier in Iraq this week, and he told me

of being out on patrol and of one of his colleagues being shot by a

sniper. The bullet went through both sides of his face and lodged in

his shoulder.

We have got soldiers over there, the least we can do, the least we

can do is to give them the best protection possible. And I am outraged,

I am stunned that after all the billions of dollars we have allocated

for this war that the leadership of this administration, our Secretary

of Defense, our Pentagon officials, have failed to adequately protect

our soldiers.

I have gone to funerals of soldiers who have come back from Iraq, a

20-year-old, I remember going to his funeral, a young man who was

abandoned by his parents as a child, reared by his grandmother, a 20-

year-old who had purchased the engagement ring for his fiance before he

left for Iraq. He simply wanted to be able to afford an education. So

he joins our military hoping that that will be a route to get an

education; and he comes back as a 20-year-old, and we bury him on a

hill overlooking the Ohio River. Ironically, he had drowned in the

Tigress River as he had jumped into that water to try to save his

sergeant who had fallen in and he sunk, and it was 12 or 14 days before

they found his body.

It disturbs me, it disturbs me that decisions were made to send our

troops into war, and we did not provide them with the protection they

need and deserve. Somebody needs to answer how that happened, why it

happened; and more importantly, they need to ensure us that it will

never, never, never happen again.