Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Washington State

for yielding.

It is a sad fact that just yesterday we observed the 1,000th death of

a soldier in Iraq, and that is a tragedy. When you think of what that

means, not only to the individual lives that have been lost, but when

you think of the pain and tragedy of the families who are left behind,

the moms and dads, the children, the loved one's wives, husbands and so

on, they will have to endure the rest of their lives without their

loved one.

I sometimes talk to people about this war, and they seem sort of

uninvolved. The war seems to be something that is distant to them. They

know of no one who is currently serving in Iraq. They know of no one

who has been lost or terribly injured over there, but I say to them, if

you are a mother or a father and you have a child, a son or a daughter,

especially a teenage son or a daughter, you had better be paying

attention to what is happening in terms of this war.

Senator McCain has said publicly that it is possible this war will

require our soldiers to be in Iraq for 10 or 20 years, and if the

administration currently in power and the people who are advising this

President remain in power and they continue the same kind of foreign

policy that we currently have, I believe it is inevitable that we will

have to impose a military draft. So every mom and dad who does not want

to see their son or daughter sent to fight this war in Iraq ought to be

paying attention.

I would just like to take a few moments to share with my colleagues

here, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Hoeffel), and the gentleman

from Washington State (Mr. Inslee), and my friend, the gentleman from

Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt). We hear a lot of talk, and there have

been a lot of political charges about the $87 billion supplemental

bill. The President recently made the accusation, I believe at his

speech in New York, implying that when Senator John Kerry voted against

the $87 billion, he was voting to deprive our troops of body armor, and

so I would just like to share the truth about the body armor issue.

I would remind my friends that the war began in March of 2003. March

of 2003. And at that time, long before there was ever a vote on the $87

billion, in fact 7 or 8 months before that vote occurred, this

administration, this President, this Secretary of Defense sent our

American soldiers into Iraq in that initial assault, an invasion of

Iraq, without protective body armor.

The body armor that I am talking about is the interceptor vest, the

body armor that was first available, I believe, in 1998. It is a high-

tech piece of equipment. It is made of Kevlar, with ceramic plates.

These ceramic plates have the ability to stop an AK-47 round. We knew,

because they were used in the Afghanistan conflict, which was the war

on terror, by the way, we knew that they were used in Afghanistan and

that they protected American lives. The Pentagon has indicated that a

number of American soldiers were probably saved because they had

interceptor vests, this body armor.

When we sent our soldiers into Iraq in March of 2003, thousands of

them went into that country without this protective body armor. And I

repeat, this was months before the $87 billion vote on the supplemental

request.

Now, last September, in September of 2003, I received a letter from a

young soldier in Baghdad. He happened to be a West Point graduate, a

gung-ho Army guy. He said to me in that letter, Congressman, I am so

proud of what we are trying to do here, of the effort we are making to

help these people. But he said to me in that letter, Congressman, the

men that are serving with me are asking me why they do not have this

body armor for protection, this interceptor vest.

That was in September of 2003. I wrote Secretary Rumsfeld a letter

that September, and I asked him how many of our soldiers had been

killed or unnecessarily wounded because they were not protected with

body armor. I asked him to commit to us that he would not make this

protection available to foreign troops until all of our American troops

were protected, because there were reports in the press that we were

making these interceptor vests available to some of the foreign troops

before our troops were equipped. And I asked him if he could give me a

date certain when all of our troops would have this protection.

Now, that letter I sent to Secretary Rumsfeld in September of 2003,

long before the vote on the $87 billion supplemental.

I received a letter on October 27 from General Myers, the Chairman of

the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He said that Secretary Rumsfeld had asked

him to respond to my letter. And in his letter to me, General Myers

said that they expected that our troops would be equipped with this

body armor by December of 2003.

Lo and behold, the very next day, on October 28, I received a letter

from Secretary Rumsfeld's chief of staff; and in his letter he said it

would probably be November of 2003. So even Secretary Rumsfeld and

General Myers were not able to agree on the issue.

In regard to my question about how many troops had been killed or

wounded without this protection, I was told in the letter from

Secretary Rumsfeld that they did not collect that information on the

battlefield, so he could not answer that question for me. Well, at

least, I thought, I can believe what Secretary Rumsfeld has said and

General Myers, that our troops will be protected by November or

December.

Lo and behold, before we left this city for the Christmas holidays, I

am talking about last year, the Pentagon held a briefing; and in that

briefing a high-level Pentagon spokesperson told us that our troops

would probably not be equipped with this body armor until January of

2004.

Now, I emphasize the war started in March of 2003. Now they are

saying it is going to be January of 2004 before they are equipped. So I

wrote a second letter to Secretary Rumsfeld in mid-January of this

year. I reminded him that he had failed to keep his word regarding

having our troops protected with this body armor by November, and I

asked him once again to please step up to the plate, accept

responsibility, and provide this equipment to our troops.

Finally, in March of 2004, one entire year after the war started, the

war started in March of 2003, finally in March of 2004 I get a letter

from the Pentagon telling me that at that point all of our troops had

been given this lifesaving protection.

It was not Senator Kerry that made the decision to send our troops

into combat without this protection. The responsibility rests with

George W. Bush, the President; with Secretary Rumsfeld, the Secretary

of Defense. That is where the responsibility rests. And it troubles me

that the President would stand before the American people and fail to

accept responsibility.

The President talks a lot about accepting personal responsibility,

and yet he is trying to shift the blame for our troops going without

this vital equipment, when it was the President and the Secretary of

Defense that sent our troops into battle. And for those who may listen

to this discussion and question me, I would just urge all Americans to

check with the soldiers that are or have been in Iraq. Ask them how

long they went without this protection. Ask them how many of their

friends were injured, some of them killed, unfortunately killed because

they were not adequately protected.

That is the truth. I have the letters that I sent to Secretary

Rumsfeld and the letters that I received from him, which I would be

happy to make available to every Member of this Chamber to verify what

I have shared with my colleagues this evening.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back to the gentleman from Washington.

In the letters I received from Secretary Rumsfeld and

General Myers, there was never a mention of a shortage of money. They

said there was a shortage of materials, which means that there was a

failure

to plan ahead. We knew months before this war began that we would

likely need this body armor, and yet the plans were not made.

The fact is that initially they were not even wanting to give the

body armor to all the troops. In the letters that I received from

General Myers, he said that the body armor was initially planned only

for the troops that were on foot. If a soldier was in a Humvee or in

some other mechanized vehicle, they were not even issued body armor,

and there were no plans to issue body armor to these. Only those who

were foot soldiers, basically, were to be provided with this

protection.

Now, as my colleagues know, many of our soldiers that have been so

terribly injured are injured as a result of being in vehicles and there

are explosions and other kinds of artillery fire. This body armor could

have protected many of them.

I am afraid some were wounded unnecessarily.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, the

President frequently says, I will not allow our troops to be under the

control of foreign commanders. Well, that may be technically correct,

but what the gentleman has pointed out is the fact that our troops are

serving at the behest of the Interim Iraqi Government. They are being

told, you cannot go into this city, you can go into this city, you can

go there, you cannot go there. It troubles me that young men and women

from my district, from southern and southeastern Ohio, many of them

have probably never traveled very far from home ever, are now in a

foreign land, and they are basically serving the needs of the Iraqi

Interim Government rather than looking out for the international

interests of this Nation.

I just want to point out that the person who was

responsible for the attack on this country was Osama bin Laden. He has

taken credit for that. He has boasted to the international community,

to the world, that he was responsible for the attack upon our country.

The President stood right at that podium and he said, Osama bin Laden

can run, but he cannot hide. Well, he ran and thus far he has hidden.

Osama bin Laden is somewhere free on the face of this Earth tonight

planning the next attack upon our country. So the person who was

responsible for attacking us has gone free and we have diverted our

resources to Iraq, costing 1,000 of our soldiers' lives, 6 or 7,000, I

guess nearly 7,000 injured now. And Osama bin Laden is a free man

tonight.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I appreciate this conversation tonight. I think what is

interesting is that while we speak about Osama bin Laden, we have to be

very clear that because of the delay that has occurred and the

diversion of effort and resources into securing Afghanistan and

nurturing democratic institutions, not only has Osama bin Laden, who is

obviously a symbol to those who share his world view but has encouraged

new groups, al Qaeda has morphed into a number of groups, some of which

have names, some of which do not have names, and that terrorism is

spreading throughout the world as we speak today. If the President is

suggesting that the invasion of Iraq somehow served as a deterrence to

these terrorists, he is absolutely wrong.

It is interesting to read that in terms of the efficacy of Iraq, of

the invasion of Iraq, an NBC news analysis that was reported September

2 of this year showed that of the roughly 2,900 terrorist-related

deaths since the 9/11 attacks on our homeland, 58 percent of them, in

excess of 1,700, have occurred this year.

This year. So terrorism is burgeoning. We identified the wrong enemy,

and now we are playing catch-up, and the world is more dangerous.

And I would like to just to conclude with a quote from someone whom

we

all respect who has served this country well, a good Member of

Congress, the Vice Chair of the Permanent Select Committee on

Intelligence of this branch, a conservative Republican from Nebraska

who retired recently to assume a new position of some stature in terms

of foreign affairs, by the name of Doug Bereuter. He wrote a letter to

his constituents because he recognized what we have been talking about,

and this is what he said: ``It was a mistake to launch'' the invasion

of Iraq. ``Our country's reputation around the world has never been

lower.'' In other words, our credibility is suffering. ``And our

alliances are weakened. Now we are immersed in a dangerous, costly

mess, and there is no easy and quick way to end our responsibilities in

Iraq without creating bigger future problems in the region and, in

general, in the Muslim world.''

That is from Doug Bereuter, a good Member, someone who made

substantial contributions to the debate and discourse in this House,

who is a Republican with excellent conservative credentials.

This is nonpartisan. It should not be a partisan issue. This is about

identifying the right enemy and taking the necessary action to defeat

those who would harm the United States.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman from Washington (Mr.

Inslee) would yield, what we have here is a situation where we have

lost 1,000 of our troops, nearly 7,000 injuries, $200 billion has been

spent, and we are in effect giving over Iraq to the bad guys. The

President is not willing to admit it, but when we have huge cities and

large geographic areas in Iraq where American soldiers cannot even

enter, it seems to me that we are capitulating, that we are giving in

and giving over this country that we have shed blood to try to

liberate.

I would just like to say something, though. I know our time is nearly

coming to an end. We have talked about several things here. What we

have talked about I think can be characterized as miscalculation. That

is the word the President used. He said he miscalculated. He

miscalculated, and 1,000 soldiers have died. He miscalculated, and

almost 7,000 soldiers have been injured. He miscalculated; over $200

billion of the taxpayers' resources have been spent there.

But this is what I would like to just emphasize in my closing

remarks. The only people sacrificing really for this war are the

soldiers who are fighting and risking their lives and the families back

here at home who love them and who worry about them. They are the only

ones sacrificing. None of us here in this Chamber are sacrificing, or

over in the Senate Chamber, or down there at the White House. We do not

have sons and daughters fighting this war. I think there may be two

Members out of the 535 Members of the House and Senate with a child

that is an Active-Duty soldier, and I do not know how many at the White

House. I doubt if there are many, if any at all. And yet it is easy, it

is easy, under those circumstances to talk tough, to say we will pay

any price.

We are not paying a price. We are not even paying for this war. The

cost of this war is being passed on to the children and the

grandchildren that will follow us. They are the ones being asked to pay

the cost of this war. What did the President asked us to do to

sacrifice for this war? He told us to go shopping. He told us to go

shopping. Where is the sacrifice other than those who are at this very

moment risking their lives for us, the moms and dads who are grieving

and will grieve for the rest of their lives over the loss of their son

or daughter, the husbands and the wives and the children who will live

out the rest of their lives without their loved one because of the

miscalculation of this administration and their unwillingness to even

recognize what they have done?

That is what bothers me. We all should be sacrificing and sharing in

the sacrifice, but we are not being asked to do so. Go out and live our

life. Go shopping, go to the ballgames, spend money, do what we want to

do, and let someone else's kid fight this war for the Iraqi Interim

Government. That is totally unacceptable.

If the gentleman will yield for a moment, I remember

being in the Chamber that night of the State of the Union address and

looking up there and seeing Mr. Chalabi. I believe Mr. Chalabi was

fairly close to Vice President Dick Cheney.

Now, the accusations are, as the gentleman says, and they are

credible accusations, yet to be proven but under investigation, that

Mr. Chalabi got information from a member of this administration, from

the Pentagon, took that information and shared it with Iran. Iran, this

country that we all now recognize is developing nuclear weapons,

probably a much greater threat to this country directly than Iraq ever

was, and it is under investigation that this man took information and

shared it with Iran. If that proves to be true, that is a terribly,

terribly serious thing that has happened.