Madam Speaker, I come to the floor tonight and will be

joined shortly by my colleagues who have been consistent in manning our

stations in the Iraq Watch. Now, for several months, my colleagues and

I in the Iraq Watch have been coming to the floor of the House of

Representatives to discuss our policy in Iraq and to ask if we are on

the right course in Iraq.

I am reminded why we have been doing that when just before I came to

the floor in the cloakroom, watching the TV, I saw a tribute to another

fallen American hero in Iraq. That is all too regular an occurrence

recently and reminds us why we come here for the Iraq Watch, because we

are dedicated to the proposition that the men and women who fall in

Iraq should not be shuttled off to page 12 and 14 and forgotten by

Americans and have this trial and tribulation in Iraq somehow become

sort of a back-burner issue.

We who have participated in the Iraq Watch are committed to the

proposition that we need to be diligent in asking hard questions of our

government as to whether or not our government is doing the right thing

or making mistakes in Iraq. This is important to do for a variety of

reasons.

The Vice President of the United States has suggested that only

Members of Congress should just act as good little Members of Congress

and be silent about Iraq and simply defer to the administration. The

Vice President has suggested, at least implicitly, that whatever the

administration is doing must be right and that all good Americans must

fall in line and be silent about the Iraq policy and to do otherwise

would give somehow aid and comfort to the enemy.

Let me suggest that that would be the least patriotic thing for

Americans to do, from the U.S. Congress all the way down to the voting

booth on November 2, because the people in Iraq serving tonight deserve

the right American policy. That is only going to happen if Americans

stand up on their hind legs and speak their minds about what we should

be doing in Iraq.

So we are doing that, and representing my 600,000 constituents, and I

know I will not be alone in expressing some sentiments tonight, to

suggest that this administration has not made the right decisions in

Iraq and, in fact, has repeatedly made the wrong decisions in Iraq that

have now been responsible for us being in this terrible situation that

we are now in tonight in Iraq.

Before I yield to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Strickland), I would

suggest in our discussion tonight there will be two parts of our

discussion. One, we will ask whether or not this administration has

been right or wrong on a variety of decision-making in Iraq. That is

the first part of our discussion. The second part of our discussion is

what should we do now to get a fresh approach in Iraq to increase our

chance of success in bringing our troops home in a reasonable fashion.

Those are both important parts of our discussion.

I have some questions that I would like to pose to the

administration, but before I do so, I would like to yield to my friend,

the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Strickland), who has been a very stalwart

member of the Iraq Watch to start our discussion this evening.

Madam Speaker, I just want to add to the point backup for

what you are saying.

I read in the last 3 days two very disturbing things. Number one, for

the first time in 15 years, the National Guard has fallen over 5,000

people short in their recruiting, for obvious reasons, that we see the

stretch that has resulted in a silent draft already of pulling people

back repeatedly, and 50-year-old people who have gone to Iraq once for

a year, come back for several months, now have to go back again,

leaving their families and careers. Of course, the National Guard is

going to fall short.

We already have a silent draft because now the Army's pulling people

back who served 4- and 5-year terms already, who never understood that

they could realistically thought they would be pulled back, and it is

disturbing to show you how bad this is. I think something like 25

percent of those people have not appeared for duty. They are so upset

about what has happened. This is a major problem in our military

because the President planned so poorly about what was going to be

involved in Iraq.

Reclaiming my time, Madam Speaker, I want the gentleman

to know that it is not only our sort of hard military assets, when we

think of soldiers and tanks and ships that have been pulled away from

the real threats that we face, it is our intelligence services. Our

intelligence services were pulled off of hunting Osama bin Laden to

deal with Iraq.

They actually took the Predator aircraft that was searching for Osama

bin Laden up in Afghanistan and moved it to Iraq. And we still have not

found Osama bin Laden. We actually diverted intelligence sources that

could have been used to find out what Iran is actually doing with their

nuclear program, a real threat to this country, a real statement that

Iran wants to develop fissionable material. But we moved it to Iraq.

Instead of having intelligence services in North Korea to find out

what they are really doing, it is in Iraq. Our intelligence services

have been malpositioned as a result of this.

Before we go on into a lot of detail, I would like to suggest ten

questions that we in Congress have a duty to ask the administration,

and I think the American people have a duty to ask the President of the

United States. I think, during the next 5 weeks, this is a very

important time to ask these ten questions, and I will posit these ten

questions and maybe even hazard an answer about the President's

performance in Iraq.

The President's performance is a life or death matter, and we have to

ask whether the President's performance has been up to snuff or whether

it has been something below expectations and whether it has cut the

mustard.

Madam Speaker, this Congress needs to ask an additional

question. Do we have the right people making the decisions that have

exposed our sons and daughters to this life-and-death situation? It is

certainly appropriate to ask at least ten hard questions in that regard

to see whether this administration has been right or wrong in Iraq.

So I will ask quickly ten questions and posit an answer, and they all

are very simple. Was the President right or wrong on various issues in

Iraq? I will ask these ten questions, and then I have pretty clear

answers that should be pretty obvious to anyone.

Question number one: Was the President right or wrong when he started

a war under the statement clearly made to the American people that

there is no doubt, no doubt, he said, that Iraq had weapons of mass

destruction? Was he right or was he wrong on this life-or-death

question?

The fact simply is, he was wrong. He was wrong not only in hindsight,

which is easy, but in foresight, because we now have seen the

intelligence, and we know there was lots of doubt. This President says

there was no doubt, and he was wrong. Then when he made that statement,

and over 1,000 Americans have died as a result of that misstatement.

The President was not right. He was wrong.

Question number two: Was the President right or wrong when he led

Americans to believe that Saddam Hussein was connected to the attack on

America on September 11? Was he right or wrong when he led Members to

believe that?

Let us go to question number three: Was the President

right or wrong when he led the American people to believe that we would

be welcomed as liberators, with rose petals aplenty, with joy in the

streets for months welcoming us, which would reduce the need for

American troops? Was he right or wrong?

He was wrong, unfortunately. And he was wrong not just in hindsight

but he was wrong in not listening to his own intelligence reports that

we now know that he had. A report came out last week about the

intelligence report he had at that time that predicted because of the

ethnic tensions in Iraq that we would be seen as occupiers from day

one. He was wrong.

Question number four: Was the President right or wrong in rejecting

the advice from his own military personnel that we would need several

hundred thousand troops in Iraq to provide security immediately after

the collapse of the Iraqi Army or else loitering would run crazy and

anarchy would run through the streets? Was he right or wrong when he

sent out his hit men to defame General Shinseki, to say that General

Shinseki did not know what he was talking about when he said we would

need at least 300,000 or 400,000 troops to do this job?

Madam Speaker, my fifth question: Was the President right

or wrong when he said or the assumption was made that not all of our

troops needed body armor and we did not need heavy armor in the streets

of Baghdad because only the people in the front lines would be targets?

He was wrong. Anyone who knows anything about insurgency should have

reached that conclusion. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Strickland) has

done yeomen's service in fighting this administration to get that body

armor to our people.

Madam Speaker, the sixth question: Was the President

right or wrong when he told Americans that, after the mission was

accomplished and the President made his grandiose landing on the

aircraft carrier in full regalia with the wonderful flight suit and

helmet on, and stood in front of a banner that said ``Mission

Accomplished'' and led Americans to believe it was going to be a

decreased violent situation, was he right or wrong? And let me suggest

that it was 800 lost American heroes ago. He was wrong sadly.

But the problem with this is this is a repeated circumstance with

this administration. The administration said that after the Iraqi Army

collapsed, things would get better. They got worse. The President said

that when we had the turnover, the purported turnover to a provisional

Iraqi government, things would get better. They have gotten worse. We

are having an accelerated loss of men and women since the turnover.

The President says after the election, things will get better. The

President simply has been wrong time and time again with his rose-

colored glasses and not facing the truth of the situation in Iraq.

The seventh question: Was the President right or wrong when he

decided that the way he was going to do the reconstruction of Iraq was

not to hire Iraqis, not to hire Iraqi personnel to do the work, not to

hire poor Iraqis which he might get off the street and reduce

unemployment, but instead give the contracts to his friends at

Halliburton so Halliburton could hire people from the Philippines with

our taxpayer money? He was wrong in giving the money to Halliburton and

the reason he was wrong is we know that every employed Iraqi is one

less potential recruit for the insurgency, and we have been wasting

billions of American taxpayer dollars, not using it effectively in the

reconstruction of Iraq.

Madam Speaker, my final question, my eighth question is: Was the

President right or wrong in saying now that we have done enough, at a

proper rate of training the new Iraqi security force, was he right or

wrong?

I am going to give Members one tidbit that I read today. Today, a

year and a half after the invasion, this administration still has less

than 40 percent of the infrastructure for the military necessary to

train the Iraqi Army. So here we are with our GIs in harm's way and a

year and a half later this administration has less than half of the

people they need to do the training of the Iraqi Army, and they expect

to have an election in 3 months.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr.

Delahunt).

I think the ninth question dovetails with what you are

saying so eloquently that all of us can make mistakes. It is human. And

these are difficult situations, obviously. But my ninth question, I

think, goes to an issue that exposes why we are in such a difficult

situation in Iraq. The ninth question is, Is the President right or

wrong when he tells us, or leads us to believe that most of this

violence against Americans in Iraq are outside forces of Iraq, sort of

these outside terrorists who are coming into Iraq to commit this

horrendous violence against us? The reason he has said this, I think,

is he wants to believe that because he does not want to believe that

the Iraqis themselves do not view us as liberators, because he always

believed that apparently we would be greeted as liberators. He

apparently cannot get out of that mind-set that some Iraqis view us as

occupiers.

So was the President right or wrong when he says that most of the

violence against Americans is caused by people from outside of Iraq?

The President is wrong. The reason I know that is they finally did an

evaluation of the people in custody in our prisons, Abu Ghraib where we

obviously had a lack of leadership as far up as the Secretary of

Defense; but what they found was of all the people we had in custody,

less than 2 percent were from outside of Iraq. Less than one out of 50

of these people that we had in custody were from outside Iraq.

What does that tell you? That is bad news for us, because what it

means is that 49 out of 50 of those people are Iraqis who are fighting,

who are domestic and who live there. That means that the President's

working assumption from day one that we would be seen as liberators

simply is not the case, and he refuses to recognize that reality.

Madam Speaker, I really think that is a perceptive

comment, what he said, which I agree with, that while Iraq may not have

presented a terrorist threat before this invasion, it does now. And I

think that is a very perceptive thing to say and I agree.

Madam Speaker, reclaiming my time, I have heard it said

that he is really ``Osama been forgotten,'' and unfortunately that has

some truth to it.

Let me ask my tenth question about whether the President has been

right or wrong on these critical issues.

Was the President right or wrong when he told us that the American

taxpayer would not have to pay for this effort because the Iraqi oil

fields would be producing enough to essentially pay for this operation

in the reconstruction of Iraq? Something Mr. Wolfowitz told I think

every single Member, 435 Members of Congress, looked us in the eye and

said not to worry, the Iraqi oil revenues will pay for this; the

American taxpayers are not going to have to sacrifice a dime for this

operation.

Madam Speaker, I yield to Mr. Delahunt to answer that question, was

the President right or wrong in that regard?

Madam Speaker, reclaiming my time, let me add insult to

injury. The President has essentially wanted to fight this war on the

cheap and not pay for it, the first time in American history where a

President has done massive tax cuts in the middle of a war. And as a

result of that, what this President has done has put the real cost of

this war and the reconstruction of Iraq not on our generation. It is

all deficit spending. The $200 billion-plus is all deficit spending

because the President has not had the gumption to go to the American

people and ask them to pay for this war. Winston Churchill said, ``All

I have to offer you is blood, sweat, toil, and tears.'' This President

has not been willing to level with the American people to really say, I

am asking them to buck up for the cost of this. And when one is not

willing to be candid with the American people in that regard, how can

we continue to maintain support for this operation? This deficit

spending is wrong.

I just want to summarize before we go to the future and use our

remaining time talking about where we go in the future. I just want to

summarize our discussion. We have asked ten questions tonight, the ten

critical questions about this President's performance in Iraq, was he

right or wrong? Here is the summary of the answers:

He was wrong on WMD. He was wrong about al Qaeda's links. He was

wrong about our being greeted as liberators with rose petals. He was

wrong about the number of troops that we would need to maintain

security in Iraq, despite the advice of his own generals. He was wrong

about not saying that we needed body armor for everyone. He was wrong

about saying, as soon as mission is accomplished and there is a new

government, things would get better. He was wrong about saying it is

better to give deals to his friends at Halliburton than it is to Iraqis

working to get this work done. He was wrong about saying there would be

a decrease in violence. He was wrong about saying that the majority of

the people essentially are outside of Iraq. He was wrong about not

providing enough trainers early enough to get an army of Iraqis up to

face this threat. And, lastly, he

was wrong in not facing the real cost of this operation and wrong in

making this all deficit spending.

Those are ten very serious failures of leadership by this American

President. And these are not peripheral issues. And it shows a pattern.

And one thing the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Strickland) said and the

gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt) both, these are difficult

issues. We can all make mistakes. But this is a pattern of repeated

failure that has now resulted in a terrible situation where things are

getting worse rather than better in Iraq. There has been one person in

the administration who has said that, and that is the Secretary of

State. Exactly one person in the administration has recognized how dire

this situation is. And now the American people are going to be called

to ask, was this good enough performance in difficult situations? And

that is a decision they will make in November.

I hope we can turn our discussion for our remaining time now about

our suggestions about where we go from here, what we suggest we need to

do because we are in this pickle together. Democrats and Republicans,

we are all in the lifeboat together. Let me just make one quick

suggestion I would make.

I believe it is important for the American President to make very

clear to the Iraqi people that we are not going to be in Iraq forever.

We are not going to be a permanent presence in Iraq. Unfortunately, he

is sending different messages and building 14 permanent military bases

in Iraq that obviously are going to be there for decades, the way they

are under construction.

We need Iraqis to realize their destiny is in their hands, that they

cannot rely on us. They need to get on their own two feet and shoulder

these burdens. These groups we are putting in the army have to decide

they might have to engage for their own benefit, they cannot rely on us

as a crutch forever. We need to make that statement very clear to the

Iraqis to encourage them to take responsibility for their own destiny.

I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Madam Speaker, reclaiming my time, the gentleman brings

up the issue of our relationship with these contractors.

Let me make a third suggestion, and that is that this administration

stop pouring money into Halliburton and start getting it to Iraqis so

they can get to work rebuilding their own country.

There is no reason for us to be giving our taxpayer dollars to

Halliburton so they can hire Filipinos and take, I don't know what the

percentage is, but to skim profits off the top in this cost-plus kind

of contract, no-bid contracts. That is wrong to taxpayers. But, more

importantly, it is wrong in our effort to stop the insurgency in Iraq.

You have got thousands of idle young men in Iraq with no job, and yet

we are paying our taxpayer money to hire Filipinos in Iraq? This makes

no sense whatsoever. Whatever relationship the vice president had with

Halliburton, it should not be driving bad decision making when it comes

to contracting in Iraq. That has got to stop. That is my third

suggestion.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Strickland).

Madam Speaker, reclaiming my time, we will note that we

will continue our discussion about Iraq in the weeks to come. We owe

this obligation to our men and women serving proudly tonight. We will

not be intimidated into stopping to ask these hard questions of the

Federal Government. Americans deserve these questions to be asked, and

they will be answered.