Madam Speaker, I thank my friend from Washington

State for yielding.

Why do we stand here and talk about this subject late at night? The

reason is because the people who have made the decisions which have

brought us to this current situation, this mess that we face in Iraq,

where we have lost well over 1,000 of our soldiers' lives, where

approximately 7,000 of our American soldiers have been injured, these

same people, and I am talking about from the President to the Vice

President Cheney on down to Secretary Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard

Perle and others, the so-called ``neo cons,'' they have made the

decisions which have led us to this place where we are tonight.

We are in a mess. We are in a quagmire in Iraq, and we talk about

what has happened in the past because the same people who have brought

us to this point want to remain in positions of decision-making. They

want to remain in power, and they want to make decisions for what we do

in the future.

I just a few moments ago left a dinner that I had with some of my

friends from Ohio. These are people who have children and young

relatives, and we were talking about the fact that we are in a

situation in this country where our military is stretched so thinly

that we are literally extending Reserve and National Guards persons

well beyond any reasonable length of service in Iraq. They have been

jerked out of their communities, away from their families, away from

their jobs and professional responsibilities, and they find themselves

now in Iraq.

We have a situation where we have instituted the so-called backdoor

draft where those who had felt that they had long since fulfilled their

military obligations to this country, some in their forties, even I

believe many in their fifties, are being pulled out of their

communities, away from their families, sent to Iraq.

We are taking our troops away from other really troubled spots in

this world, and I would especially mention South Korea. We know that

North Korea has stated they are going to go ahead and pursue their

nuclear strategies. We are bringing troops away from South Korea simply

because we cannot meet our military obligations.

We have got about 135,000 to 140,000 American troops in Iraq tonight.

The next country that has a significant number of troops in Iraq is

Great Britain. They have got somewhere in the vicinity of 6,500. We

have got 135,000 to 140,000, and the reports are that even Great

Britain is considering withdrawing up to one-third of their troops from

Iraq.

So what do we have? We have a situation where every mother and father

in this country should pay attention if they have a child and they do

not want that child facing a military draft and being forced to go

fight this war that George Bush has started in Iraq. I do not care if a

parent's child is 10 years old or 14 years old or 18 years old. If they

do not want that son or daughter to be subject to a military draft,

they should be paying attention, because although the President says he

has no intention of instituting a mandatory draft, if you look at the

situation, you look at our manpower needs, you look at the fact that

the National Guard is currently having difficulty recruiting sufficient

numbers, that they are even taking people who are pre-enlisting, they

may still be completing their education, for example, and will not

actually be eligible to enter the military for another year or so, they

are counting those people as new recruits in order to at least pretend

that we are meeting our current manpower needs. That is happening right

now.

Madam Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, my

understanding is that those people, those citizens out there, are now

being considered deserters because they have not reported.

This is a serious matter. I think the President should be talking to

the American people in a very straightforward way about how he intends

to meet our military personnel manpower needs without a draft.

Just simply saying we are not going to have a draft is not an answer,

because we have the need.

What happens, for example, if something were to break loose on the

Korean peninsula? What happens? North Korea is basically thumbing their

nose at this administration and basically saying, what are you going to

do to us? You are bogged down there in Iraq. Your military is stretched

thin. What are you going to do to us if we decide to continue to pursue

our efforts to acquire nuclear weapons?

Then there is Iran. Iran is saying basically the same thing. Do they

feel intimidated by us? Well, apparently not, because they are

indicating they are going to go right ahead with their nuclear program.

And we are bogged down in Iraq.

Now, the fact is that Iraq did not have a nuclear program. Iraq was

not an imminent threat to this country. Iraq did not present a danger

to the American people, but we have diverted our resources and our

military capabilities to Iraq, and now we are bogged down there. It is

a quagmire. The President wants to avoid that word, but when you have

large geographic areas and huge cities in Iraq that are off limits,

that are ``no-go zones,'' where our soldiers cannot even enter, then

you are living in a make-believe world to say things are going well;

that we are going to have elections in January; that democracy is on

the march. It is not.

We are not winning in Iraq. And it is not the fault of our soldiers.

We honor the service of our soldiers, all of us in this chamber do. But

we are just sick and tired of the lack of candor coming from this

administration.

Before the gentleman asks those questions, Madam

Speaker, if he will continue to yield, I would like to make one further

comment.

I would hope every parent in this country would ask themselves, as

they contemplate this war and the situation in which we find ourselves,

do they believe that this President's leadership is such that his

wisdom, his maturity, his judgment is such that they would entrust

their son or their daughter to go fight this war in Iraq?

And the reason I think that is a relevant question is because the

President is asking no one to sacrifice for this war save the soldiers

who are there risking their lives, in too many cases dying and being

injured, and the people who love them back here at home. No one else is

being asked to participate in this war.

We are not being asked to pay taxes to pay for the war. We are not

being asked to in any way discipline ourselves by saving energy so that

we are less reliant on the Middle East for oil and gasoline and such.

The President is not sacrificing for this war. It has not touched his

life in any direct way. Members of this House, our friends in the other

body, by and large, are not sacrificing for this war. I believe there

are maybe two Members of the 435 Members of the House and 100 Senators

who actually have a child, a son or daughter, who is a part of the

active military now.

So we are not sacrificing during this war. The American people

generally are not being asked to sacrifice. Are we being asked to pay

taxes so that the cost of this war will not be passed on to future

generations? No. No. That is not happening.

So it seems appropriate that as we contemplate the fact that some

moms and dads are sacrificing and have sacrificed, some husbands and

wives have sacrificed, this very night they go to bed wondering whether

or not their loved one is going to be safe, it seems that we should

reflect upon what is happening here with regard to the fact that we

have entered a war of choice.

Iraq did not attack us. Osama bin Laden attacked us. The al Qaeda

network attacked us. Iraq was not an imminent threat, yet we find our

sons and daughters fighting and dying in this war. So I think it is

appropriate to pause and say to the mothers and fathers in this

country, do you think this war is worth the sacrifice of your son or

your daughter?

And if the people who are listening cannot answer that question in

the affirmative, it seems to me then that they should start to question

whether or not the sacrifice of some other moms' or dads' sons or

daughters is worth the sacrifice.

Madam Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, I would

like to answer that question.

He was absolutely wrong. And in spite of all the evidence, the

evidence, for example, that is coming from the

9/11 Commission, this bipartisan commission that found that there was

no credible relationship between Saddam Hussein and the attack upon our

country, in spite of that evidence, the Vice President continues to try

to mislead the American people and to cause the American people to see

a connection that did not exist between Saddam Hussein and the attack

upon our Nation.

So the answer to the gentleman's second question is, the President

was wrong.

Madam Speaker, he was wrong again. The fact is that

this question points to the fact that the civilian leadership within

this administration really discounted the professional military advice

coming to us from the military folks who had given their lives to

studying and having knowledge about these issues. The fact is that

General Shinseki, they say he was not fired, but he was pushed aside.

He was forced into retirement because they did not want to hear what he

had to say. When he gave advice that they found inconsistent with their

own predetermined notions of what they wanted to do, they forced

General Shinseki into retirement. Once again, the President was wrong.

Madam Speaker, I know something about body armor.

There have been accusations that one of the candidates for president

voted against an $87 billion supplemental request, somehow deprived our

soldiers of body armor. I know something about this because, early on

in the conflict, a young constituent of mine, a graduate of West Point

and a gung-ho Army guy, wrote to me and said, my men wonder why they do

not have this body armor protection. The fact is I started writing

letters to Secretary Rumsfeld and General Myers.

I got letters back, and basically, they said to me, we did not plan

adequately, we do not have the materials that are necessary to provide

this body armor.

So the truth is, in answer to the gentleman's question, the President

was wrong because the President chose to send our young soldiers into

battle without body armor. It took this administration an entire year

from March of 2003 until March 2004 to protect all of our soldiers with

individual body armor. And the body armor I am talking about is

referred to as the interceptor vest. It costs about $1,500 a piece. It

is composed of a vest made of

Kevlar with pockets in the front and back for the insertion of ceramic

plates. This vest is capable of stopping an AK-47 round. I believe to

the core of my being that we have had soldiers lose their lives and be

unnecessarily injured simply because this administration prematurely

sent our soldiers into battle without this vital equipment. The

President was wrong when he sent our troops into battle without

adequate body armor.

On this question, this ninth question, I think the

President is partly right. I think he is mostly wrong because as my

friend from Washington has indicated, the people

in Iraq simply do not want us there. All the opinion polls indicate

that. When you see the people dancing in the streets when one of our

tanks has been exploded or something, oftentimes you see young Iraqi

children. These are not foreigners that have invaded Iraq. But I will

admit that the President is partly right, because some of the people in

Iraq now are in fact terrorists from outside the country.

But that leads to another question. When did they come there, and why

are they there? The evidence is that Iraq was not a country that was

filled with al Qaeda terrorists prior to this war, but in fact since

this war has started, now Iraq is becoming a haven for terrorists.

Terrorists are in fact coming. Some of the Taliban, we are even being

told, the former Taliban terrorists that were in Afghanistan are now

finding some haven for themselves in Iraq. Some of the large cities in

Iraq are havens for the terrorists. These are the so-called no-go zones

where our troops cannot go and say they are places which are really

breeding terrorists.

So I do think that we have created a mess in Iraq. We have taken a

country that was not an imminent threat to us, we took a country that

was controlled by an authoritarian, despicable dictator who abused his

own people, that is true. That is Saddam Hussein. Are we glad he is

gone? Absolutely. He was a terrible human being, a terrible person. But

the fact is that does not cover the problem we have of justifying

invading Iraq as the President indicated because they were connected to

the attack on our country or they were somehow an imminent danger to us

or were developing nuclear weapons or had weapons of mass destruction.

None of those things are true. So what I am trying to say to my

friend in regard to his ninth question, which I think is a thoughtful

question, we have created in Iraq, or this administration has created

in Iraq, a breeding ground for terrorists, and many of those terrorists

are homegrown Iraqis. Some of them are the result of outsiders seeing

an opportunity now to go into Iraq because of all the chaos that exists

there and join this effort against the United States.

Madam Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to

yield, to make an effort just to clarify what I am saying, the

President has made every attempt to convince the American people that

the war in Iraq is the war against terror, and he has tried to blur the

distinctions between Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. He has tried

to imply that al Qaeda, this terrorist network, was operative in Iraq.

The fact is that the American people know better. They know the war

on terror is the war against Osama bin Laden and against those who

attacked our country. And the fact is that when the President tries to

blur that distinction, I think he is doing a disservice to the American

people.

There is a war in Iraq, a preemptive war which we initiated. There is

a war against terror, against those who were associated with Osama bin

Laden and who are determined to once again strike our country. And I

would just remind the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt) and

the gentleman from Washington (Mr. Inslee) that the leader of the war

against us in terms of a terrorist network is Osama bin Laden. And

Osama bin Laden is alive and well somewhere. And this President spoke

for 63 minutes at the Republican convention and never once mentioned

his name.

Madam Speaker, I like that suggestion from my friend

from Washington State, that we need to convey to Iraqis that we do not

intend to stay there.

A second suggestion I would like to make is we need to convey to the

world community that this is their problem, not just an American

problem. Stability in the Middle East, access to the resources, the oil

resources in the Middle East, is important for so many countries, not

just us. But the fact is that this President and this administration

really have stuck their thumbs in the eyes, figuratively speaking, of

so many of our traditional allies.

The fact is that we had this administration announcing right off that

the work to do the reconstruction in Iraq would only go to certain

companies, Halliburton being the primary one, and no other countries

could or would be involved. So we basically said we do not want you

involved, because, as was said earlier, we thought it was going to be

easy sailing. We would go in there, they would love us, democracy would

bloom, we would have access to oil, and we did not want the help of

other countries.

Now it has gotten pretty tough, and we find more and more of even the

coalition partners pulling back, pulling away. Some countries have

pulled out entirely. Even Great Britain, they are talking about the

possibility of reducing their force in Iraq by one-third. So I believe

we do need to internationalize the effort in Iraq.

We need to go to the UN, we need to go to NATO. We need to say this

is a problem that is of importance to all of us, the solution must come

from all of us, and the burden must be borne by all of us.

Now, can President Bush do that? I doubt if he can. I think he has so

poisoned the water in terms of our international relationships that it

is highly unlikely that we will ever be able to develop the kind of

international cooperation and coalition that will enable us to

extricate ourselves from Iraq in a timely manner with honor. So that is

why I believe we need a change in administration.

Now, our traditional allies, and I am talking about the Europeans

that have fought wars with us and been our partners, I do not think

they like to be alienated from us. I do not think they like a division

between our country and their country. I believe they would welcome an

opportunity for a rapprochement, for a coming together, even to deal

with this most difficult issue. But I do not think it will happen under

the leadership of this President or this administration.

So my suggestion, in addition to the one I have heard from my

colleague and friend from Washington State, is that we move forward

with a renewed effort to internationalize the conflict in that part of

the world, and I think it can be done, and I think it will be done

under new presidential leadership.

Madam Speaker, I just want to thank my friend the

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

Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt) for participating tonight. What we are

talking about is quite serious, it involves life and death, it involves

the future of our Nation, and the American people need to be paying

attention, because this war could drag on for 50 years or more.

We have unleashed a hornet's nest in the Middle East and I see no

plan to bring it under control. All we are promised by this

administration basically is more of the same or something worse, out-

and-out civil war, with our troops caught in the cross fire.

So it is important that we talk about these matters, it is important

that the American people pay attention to these matters, because we are

going to be making a decision in 32 days, or something like that,

regarding the future of this Nation, and I believe under the current

administration we will have nothing but more of the same.