Mr. Speaker, his name is Staff Sergeant George T.

Alexander of Clanton, Alabama. He died on Saturday, 5 days after a bomb

exploded near his vehicle about 60 miles north of Baghdad. He was the

2,000th brave American to give his life in the Iraq war.

My deepest sympathies go out to his family, who I hope finds some

comfort in the knowledge that Sergeant George Alexander is remembered

by all of us as a true national hero. We mourn the loss of Staff

Sergeant Alexander just as we continue to mourn all 1,999 who came

before him.

In my recent visit to Iraq, nothing made a greater impression on me

than the intelligence, decency, and loyalty I saw in our soldiers. They

really are the best our country has to offer. It pains me to think that

any one of them could become casualty number 2,001; 2,002; 2,050; or

2,060. And it pains me that we clearly do not have civilian leaders

worthy of our troops.

It pains me that these soldiers have been betrayed by their superiors

who sent them to Iraq on false pretenses, on a poorly defined mission

without all of the tools they needed and without a plan to bring them

home.

2,000 deaths is 2,000 too many for this mission, a mission which was

immorally conceived and has been incompetently managed. The devastating

truth is that Americans are not safer because of this war. We are not

defeating the insurgency; we are inspiring it. That is not the fault of

the men and women wearing the uniform; it is just the nature of this

conflict.

Every day that we occupy Iraq breeds more resentment, more vicious

and violent anti-Americanism. As one military commander put it, for

every insurgent killed, three more are created. How do we win such a

war? And let us not forget that the very first casualty in this war was

the truth.

The President waxes idealistic about spreading freedom. But we all

know that if spreading freedom had been the stated rationale for war

back in 2002, there is no way this body would have authorized the use

of force.

No, this was about the world's most dangerous weapons in the hands of

most dangerous people. Remember, it was about yellow cake and aluminum

tubes, mushroom clouds and nuclear winters. They engaged in a campaign

of fear based on a lie.

Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction, a very expensive

lie that has cost America 2,000 of its finest patriots. Their campaign

of deceit was absolutely reprehensible. But I think we also have to

look forward, as well back; to focus on not just how we got into Iraq,

but how we are going to get out.

I held a hearing last month to explore in detail that very question.

But the President meanwhile can offer nothing but the emptiest of

platitudes: it is hard work. Stay the course. We will be there as long

as we need to be there. Terrorism bad, freedom good. That is all well

and good, but what is the plan?

He says he is confident of victory. But what exactly constitutes

victory? What are the benckmarks of success? What is the plan? What

does the end-game look like?

If the President will not lead, then I guess the rest of us will have

to do it for him. There are three measures that we can take

immediately: first, multilateral corporation. The Iraq campaign never

was a global coalition. But now we can prevent further loss of life by

bringing the U.S. Armed Forces home while simultaneously encouraging

the United Nations and the NATO Alliance to establish a multinational

interim security force for Iraq.

Second, diplomatic nonmilitary initiatives. The U.S. must lead a

diplomatic offensive, making its presence in Iraq a humanitarian

partnership, rather than a military occupation.

Third, post-conflict reconciliation. The U.S. should work with the

U.N. to designate an international peace commission to oversee Iraq's

postwar reconciliation. It is time for the President to admit his

mistakes, eat a little crow and shift course.

It is time to return Iraq to the Iraqi people and the troops safely

home to their families.