Madam Speaker, here is a quote: ``Victory means exit strategy, and

it's important for the President to explain to us what the exit

strategy is.''

Those words were not spoken by a Member of Congress, not by a

prominent opponent of the Iraq War. They were not even spoken about

this President or this war. Those words were spoken in April, 1999,

about President Clinton's military campaign in Kosovo, and they were

spoken by a Republican Governor named George W. Bush.

What a difference 6\1/2\ years makes because it is precisely an exit

strategy that is missing from our Iraq policy. With 2,000 of their

fellow citizens dead and 1 billion of their tax dollars being sent to

Iraq every week, the American people have a right to some honest

answers to some important questions like: What exactly defines victory?

What are the benchmarks of success? What is the long-term plan? What

does the end game look like?

We are paying for this war in blood and money. My home district lost

a 23-year-old soldier on Saturday. Why will the President not repay us

with some honesty and transparency? Why does he insult us with empty

platitudes about ``staying the course'' and ``staying in Iraq as long

as it takes''?

Madam Speaker, I had the privilege of traveling to Iraq last week

with a few of my House colleagues. We were briefed by the commanders on

the ground. We saw the military facilities, which I am happy to report

are state of the art. The quality of our soldiers' medical care in

particular is excellent as far as I could see. Good equipment and the

best docs that one could have.

The most rewarding and enlightening part of the trip was simply

having meals and talking with the enlisted men and women, mostly those

from California and particularly from my district north of the Golden

Gate Bridge.

Madam Speaker, these young people are the very best America has to

offer. They are brave. They are intelligent. They are loyal, loyal to

their country, to their mission and to each other. They are profoundly

committed to this mission, even those who told me privately they do not

support the policy that underlies it.

These are genuine heroes whose courage and resolve are greater than

our accolades can convey. We truly have the most capable military the

world has ever known. So what is the problem?

The problem is that we do not have leaders in Washington that are

worthy of these fine soldiers. Our troops have not failed. They have

been failed by their civilian superiors, those who sent them to Iraq on

false pretenses, on a poorly defined mission without all the tools they

needed and without a plan to get them out of there.

This morning's speech from the President was the same old shopworn

rhetoric: Terrorism bad, freedom good. We know that and we agree, but

that alone does not justify an open-ended military commitment. What

comes next? Do not tell us. Show us. Show us that there is some kind of

long-term strategy to return Iraq to the Iraqi people and the troops to

their families back home.

If the President will not lead, then we will. Last month, I assembled

a group of Middle East experts and military strategists to explore

viable and compassionate exit strategies.

I do not have all the answers, and I am not prepared to endorse a

single approach, but I have felt for many months now that it was about

time we started this conversation about troop withdrawal and started

throwing ideas out and on the table.

Madam Speaker, our troops have endured enough sacrifice. We need to

plan to bring them home.

At the same time, we must give Iraq back to the Iraqi people through

a range of economic, political, and humanitarian partnerships. The

American people deserve better than the poor planning that has

characterized every phase of this war, and the extraordinary men and

women whom I met in Iraq most certainly deserve better. They deserve

leaders as courageous and honorable as they are. In return for their

unfailing loyalty, they deserve basic competence and integrity.