Mr. Speaker, Cindy Sheehan, who was arrested yesterday

for simply exercising her constitutional right to freedom of speech

outside the White House, has awoken a

sleeping American public. She deserves a great deal of credit for her

tireless campaign against the Bush administration's lies and abuses

which have governed the war in Iraq from the very beginning. Her

campaign awakened the American people to realize just how awful this

war truly is.

This weekend over 300,000 Americans, and I know it was more than

100,000 as reported by the press because I was there, over 300,000

Americans demonstrated the same resolve as Cindy Sheehan by showing up

in force at a rally in Washington, D.C. It was one of the first times

since the 1970s that so many people had descended on the Nation's

capital to protest a war.

If strength of numbers demonstrates the injustice of a particular

policy, then the thousands who participated in Saturday's march

depicted the wrongness of the Iraq war.

Most Americans know that the war in Iraq is not increasing our

national security, that by continuing to fight an unwinnable war the

President is ensuring our national insecurity.

Most Americans know that the Bush administration had no plan for how

to conduct the war. They had no plan for securing the country once

Saddam was deposed; and now they have no plan for ending the war.

Most Americans know the terror and chaos that plague Iraq cannot be

resolved simply by staying the course. I am sure the families of the

2,000 American soldiers and countless thousands of innocent Iraqi

civilians killed in this war would argue that the last 2-plus years of

fighting have not brought much stability to Iraq or to their lives.

Let us not forget about the thousands of American soldiers who were

not killed in Iraq, but whose lives will nonetheless be changed forever

as a result of injuries sustained during the war: arms and legs lost,

shrapnel wounds cutting into every body part, emotional trauma. How

will these wounds ever heal?

The thousands of Americans who bravely serve in our Nation's military

deserve better. In fact, all Americans deserve better. They deserve

better than an endless war that is slowly draining our national

coffers. They deserve better than $9 billion of congressionally

appropriated funds being lost; $9 billion lost. That is really pretty

hard to imagine. Lost under the Coalition Provisional Authority's

watch, or the new $1 billion that has gone missing to the Iraqi

Government, U.S. money intended for training of Iraqi security forces.

While the Bush administration is failing the American people through

its foreign policies, they are also neglecting priorities at home. Just

take the recent hurricanes that have bombarded the southeastern United

States over the past month.

If anything, Katrina and Rita have demonstrated just how skewed our

national priorities have become. The Federal Government failed to

assist thousands of Americans, mostly poor, mostly underprivileged,

mostly African American during their great time of need.

What we need now is an independent commission to investigate how the

hurricane response was botched so badly. Unfortunately, the Bush

administration's response to the failures at home is just like his

response given to its failures in Iraq: deflection and misdirection of

any blame whatsoever.

President Bush has announced that he will establish a partisan,

congressionally appointed oversight committee; but that is not what the

American people need. That is not what the American people deserve. We

need an impartial, independent commission to get to the bottom of why

the National Guard was in Iraq and not in the United States to protect

its citizens.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that we need a drastic change in policies,

both at home and in Iraq. The American people know when they are being

lied to, when they are being misled.

It is time that Congress started doing what it was created to do:

represent the will of the American people, rescue victims of natural

disasters, and rescue our troops by bringing them home.