Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman of the Out of Iraq

Caucus, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Waters), in bringing all

of the voices together in the Congress, because we all have a lot to

say. And we are all getting to the same conclusion, the conclusion that

I reached a couple of years ago, actually. We do not need to be in

Iraq. We are making a mistake. It is a faux war, and we need to bring

our troops home now.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share a quote: ``Victory means exit strategy,

and it is important for the President to explain to us what that 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 by

this President about 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. But what a difference 6\1/2\ years

makes. It is precisely an exit strategy that is missing from our Iraq

policy.

With over 2,000 of our citizens dead, $1 billion of tax dollars being

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

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? These are the questions that my leader of

the Iraq Caucus has been asking about tonight.

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

a 23-year-old soldier less than a month ago. Why does the President

insult us with empty platitudes about staying the course and staying in

Iraq as long as it takes?

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of traveling to Iraq 1 month ago. I

went with a few of my colleagues here in the House. The most rewarding,

the most enlightening part of the trip was simply having dinner and

talking with the enlisted men and women, particularly those from my

district, California's 6th Congressional District. It is Marin and

Sonoma counties just north of the Golden Gate Bridge across the bridge

from San Francisco.

These troops are online over there, believe me. They know I am

against this war. They knew I was. They looked me up before I got

there. And they immediately asked me, and they had every right to,

Congresswoman, why are you here? You are against this war. My answer

was straight. My answer was true. And my answer they believed. Yes,

indeed, I told them, I am against this war. I have been against this

war from the very beginning.

But I want you to know that I support the troops. I have been working

within this Congress to make sure that you have the equipment you need

to make sure that you have the health care over there, the best you can

have; and when you get home, that you will have the benefits that we

have promised you.

But in all of that, I remain against this war because I want you to

come home and I want you to be home with your families. I want you to

be alive. I want you to be mentally whole, and I also want you to be

physically whole.

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

offer. They are brave. They are intelligent. They are loyal. They are

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

profoundly committed to this mission, even those who told me privately

that they do not support the war or the policy that underlies it.

They are genuine heroes whose courage and resolve is greater than our

accolades can begin to 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 worthy of these fine soldiers. Our

troops have been failed, failed by their civilian 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 get them out of

there. If the President will not lead to bring our troops home, then we

will.

And that is what the Out of Iraq Caucus is all about. Last month we

assembled a group of Middle East experts and military strategists to

explore viable

and compassionate exit strategies because the American people deserve

better than the poor planning that has characterized every single phase

of this war.

The extraordinary men and women who 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. I have some suggestions of what the President

should be doing next in order to bring our troops home immediately.

Part of what he must do is eat crow. He has to apologize to the rest

of the international world for going into Iraq in the first place and

trying to bring them into the war with him.

He must become a diplomat instead of a warrior because the way he is

doing it now is not working. He also must reach out to the global

world. He must ask worldwide for assistance to help Iraq return their

country to their people.

He also must work internationally with the United Nations, with NATO,

with the experts who have been through this before in South Africa and

in Ireland. He must work with them, help them, give them the room to

help the Iraqis in their reconstruction and reconciliation. We do not

know how to do it, obviously. We only know how to cause a war. We need

to work now on how to end that war and how not to totally leave the

Iraqi people in a quagmire.

But speaking of quagmires, that is what our President has us in. He

has us in a corner. It is a lose-lose situation. Actually, if we stay

in Iraq, our troops will continue to be killed and maimed and innocent

Iraqi civilians will lose their homes and their lives and their

families.

If we leave, indeed we will leave Iraq in a bad way. It will be a

bloody mess until they can figure out how to get their country back

together. But we can help them put it back together, not militarily,

but with a non-militaristic presence. Why we are not doing that is

beyond me. That is how we should have been doing it in the first place.

So what I would like to suggest is that our President, I do not want

to suggest it, what I would like to demand is that the President of the

United States put together a plan to bring our troops home and to bring

them home immediately.

I yield to the gentlewoman.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Congresswoman totally, and

the American people know that you are right in what you said. This

Congress, this Pentagon, this administration will eventually catch up

to the American people who know that we should not be in Iraq in the

first place and that our staying there will not solve any problems. We

will lose more troops. They will come home maimed or dead, and we will

injure more innocent Iraqis and destroy their communities and their

neighborhoods and their lives; and when we leave, whatever is going to

happen will happen anyway. In the meantime, our troops will be losing.

What I would like to ask is, if the President really believes that we

are ending terrorism by being in Iraq, why in the world has he not

found Osama bin Laden? Iraq was not an Islamic terrorist country until

we went in, and now they are.

I asked the commanders directly, first, who is the enemy? The answer

was more than once, as a matter of fact, the insurgents are fighting

the very presence of the United States in Iraq because we do appear as

occupiers. When I asked the question who are the insurgents, they are

not coming from across the border. The great majority of the insurgents

are indeed local. They want us gone because they see us as occupiers.

We are helping build local insurgents by our presence. Our presence

needs to be there over time, but not in a militaristic way. Our

presence needs to be to help the Iraqi people rebuild their

infrastructure, their economic infrastructure and their physical

infrastructure that we have so destroyed. If we want the end of

terrorism, go after the guy that blew up our buildings in New York, go

after Osama bin Laden.

Mr. Speaker, my last word is wake up, catch up with the

American people. Bring our troops home if you support them.