Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be joined here this

evening by my colleague, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. Jackson-Lee)

and another of my colleagues, the gentleman from the State of Hawaii

(Mr. Abercrombie) as we talk about what is happening in Iraq, the needs

of our troops, and what the American people need to know. Much of the

information is just now becoming clear to us as a result of Mr.

Woodward's book, which became available to the general public today.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my comments by making reference to

a comment the President made in his most recent press conference when

he made reference to what he would say to the troops. In that statement

he said, ``We will provide them what they need.'' That sounds like a

rather direct and simple statement, but the truth is we have not

provided our troops in Iraq with what they need, not in terms of

equipment certainly, equipment that has the potential to save lives and

to avoid serious injuries.

Mr. Speaker, the war began in March 2003. Soon after that war began,

I received a letter from a young soldier from my district who is a West

Point graduate and a gung-ho Army guy, and he started his letter by

saying, Congressman, I am so proud of the Army. I am so proud of what

we are trying to do here to help these people. But later in his letter

he said to me, my men are wondering why they have not been provided

with these life-saving interceptor vests, which became available, I

believe, in 1998. They cost $1,200 to $1,500 apiece. They are made with

Kevlar with pockets in the front and back where ceramic plates can be

inserted which will stop an AK-47 bullet. They are life-saving

equipment, and yet we send our soldiers into battle in Iraq, and

thousands and thousands were without this equipment.

Now, the war began in March. I received this letter from this young

soldier in the early summer. I wrote the Secretary of Defense Donald

Rumsfeld a letter sharing what I had been told by this young West Point

soldier, and asked him when our troops would be provided with this

life-saving equipment. He wrote me back. I got a letter in September

from the Secretary telling me that he expected that our soldiers would

be fully equipped with this life-saving equipment in November. Within a

day of getting the letter from Secretary Rumsfeld, I received a letter

from the chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff General Myers, and in his

letter General Myers indicated it would be December, not November as

Secretary Rumsfeld had said, but it would be December before all of our

soldiers were equipped with the interceptor vests.

Then before we left this city for our Christmas vacation, our holiday

vacation, the Pentagon held a briefing, and in that briefing we were

told that it would be January before our soldiers were equipped with

these life-saving vests. I remind my colleagues that the war began in

March, and we are being told that it will be January before the

soldiers are provided with life-saving vests. Lo and behold, after I

came back to this city after the holidays, and I was continuously

troubled that this problem had not been solved, so I wrote Secretary

Rumsfeld another letter reminding him that the self-imposed deadline

had passed.

Finally, finally, in March of this year, I received a letter

informing me that finally all of our soldiers had been equipped with

this life-saving vest, 1 full year after the war began.

Now we have a similar problem because many of our soldiers are being

killed and wounded in Iraq because they are driving around in Humvees

that are not up-armored Humvees. In other words, they do not have the

proper armor that will protect them if the soldiers are attacked while

on patrol. Soldiers are driving in Iraq with unarmored Humvees. I am

concerned about this, and I say to the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr.

Abercrombie) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. Jackson-Lee) the only

company that has a sole contract with the Pentagon to provides these

up-armored Humvees and the kits to armor those already deployed is an

Ohio company, O'Gara-Hess.

O'Gara-Hess officials came to my office, and they told me under their

current contract with the Department of Defense, they are being asked

to produce 220 of these up-armored Humvees each month. However, they

are capable of producing up to 500 a month. The Pentagon says there are

about 4,000 of these Humvees in Iraq that need to be so armored to

protect our soldiers, and it will probably be sometime in 2005 before

it is all done. The question that I would ask: If the President was

standing where you are standing, I would say to the President, Mr.

President, this is a life-saving matter. Why are you not directing your

Pentagon to provide our soldiers with this protection as quickly as

possible?

I received a call a few days ago from a soldier

returning after 14 months in Iraq. He said, ``Congressman, your Ford

Explorer that you drive around is better armored than the Humvee that I

drove around Iraq.'' The fact is so many of the wounds and the deaths

are occurring because of these devices that are planted in the

roadways, and our soldiers are driving over them, and they are

exploding, and there is nothing in that vehicle to protect them.

These up-armored Humvees have steel plating in the bottom and on the

sides. They can even reinforce the windshield so that the windshield

itself is impenetrable. It can be done. The President said to our

soldiers, we will provide you what you need, but the President is not

providing our soldiers what they need.

Regardless of what people feel about this war, Republican or

Democrat, liberal or conservative, the one thing we should be able to

agree upon is if we are going to send our soldiers into harm's way, we

provide them with every bit of equipment that they may need to be safe.

Why we are not doing it, and why we are not doing it as rapidly as

possible, I do not know.

MS-NBC had a TV program about this last week. They identified the

problem, and they indicated steps were being taken to correct it as

quickly as possible. I can tell Members tonight, steps are not being

taken to correct this problem as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker, if I were the President, I would get on the phone to

Secretary Rumsfeld, and I would say, fix this problem as quickly as it

can be fixed, regardless of what it takes, 7 days a week of work, 3

shifts a day, whatever it takes. Get our troops the equipment they need

to be protected, and do it as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie).

Mr. Speaker, a point well taken because I have had

three of my constituents killed in this war. The last one I heard about

today, a 21-year-old Marine who had served time in Iraq came home for a

brief period of time and was married, was sent back, and was killed in

an explosion last Saturday, 21 years old. Earlier than that, a couple

of months ago, a 20-year-old, but a 37-year-old as well with three

children, a 15-year-old son and two young daughters. So my friend is

correct. Young people, middle-aged people are losing their lives.

And I would just say this before I yield to my friend from Texas.

This has been the most costly month of this war. We are not through

this month yet, but we have already lost over 100 precious American

lives just this month, well more than a year after this war started.

And I just wonder if the President had told the American people before

we went to war that it was going to cost $150 billion plus billions and

billions and billions more in the years to come, if it was going to

cost more than 700 precious American lives, if it was going to result

in about 3,500 to 4,000 being seriously wounded, if we were going to be

there not for a year or 2 years, but perhaps 5 or 10 or more years, if

there were no weapons of mass destruction, if he had said to the

American people Iraq was not responsible for the attack upon our

country and we have no reason to believe there is a connection between

Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorism network, I just wonder under those

circumstances what the reaction of the American people would be.

But the fact is that Vice President Cheney, we now know as a result

of Bob Woodward's book, and Mr. Wolfowitz and Richard Pearl and others

had decided that this is what we needed to do and so they manipulated

and distorted and exaggerated and shaved the truth, and we find

ourselves now in a situation where our troops are not being well

equipped, not being well equipped in spite of what the President says

in his press conference, not being well equipped, and I believe that

those who were responsible for persuading this President to take us to

war under these circumstances were immature in their understanding of

history, were naive in their understanding of what war is all about,

and to this very day refuse to acknowledge their mistakes.

Some may say, why talk about the past? We are there now. We have got

to deal with this. And that is true. We cannot just leave. We are

there, and we have got to deal with this terrible situation. But the

reason we need to talk about how we got into this situation is because

those who got us there are still in power and they want the ability to

make the decisions for the future. They want the ability to make

decisions about what this country is going to do with our military,

with our foreign policy, years into the future. And that is why we need

to talk about this issue, because the American people need to learn the

truth, and they need to know the complete story.

I yield to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. Jackson-Lee).

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that bothers me about

this administration and its apparently overwhelming desire to go to war

was the fact that according to the Woodward book that in January the

President and I believe Mr. Rumsfeld met with Prince Bandar, this Saudi

ambassador, this prince, in the White House and informed him of our

plans to go to war with Iraq, and according to Mr. Woodward, this

happened before the President even told our own Secretary of State,

Colin Powell. Mr. Powell is now disputing that account, I believe. But

the fact is why would the President discuss his plans to go to war with

this ambassador from Saudi Arabia before he informs the Congress of the

United States and talks to the American people about this?

Fifteen of the 19 pilots that were involved in the attack upon our

country on September 11, 2001, were Saudi Arabian citizens. There is an

unusual relationship between the Bush family and the Saudi royal

family. It is starting to come out. I do not know if that has anything

to do with the fact that a few days after the attack upon our country,

Saudi citizens were allowed to be flown out of this country at a time

when all of the other private aircraft were grounded and planes went

all over this country picking up Saudi citizens and some relatives of

Osama bin Laden and flew them out of this country before they were

thoroughly questioned and vetted by the FBI. Why would that have

happened? It is almost beyond belief.

Now, Mr. Woodward implies in his book that there may be a secret deal

between this administration and the Saudi Government regarding the cost

of gasoline; that they have been asked to lower the price of oil before

the election so that the election prospects of President Bush may be

enhanced.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it is true, but I know that is what Mr.

Woodward says in his book, and Mr. Woodward is a very credible author,

widely respected journalist, who had access to Colin Powell and to the

President, and he makes that accusation in his book.

Now, the American people are paying outrageously high gasoline prices

today, outrageously high. Secretary Abraham, the Secretary of Energy,

was before my committee not many days ago, and we asked him in that

committee meeting, has the President called the members of the Saudi

royal family and asked them to do something about these outrageous oil

prices?

Well, apparently not. In fact, the Saudi family cooperated with OPEC

in voting to cut production, which has had the effect of raising

prices. So during the spring and summer, the American citizens are

paying these outrageous gasoline prices, and, apparently, if Mr.

Woodward is correct, maybe in late fall we will find that the Saudis

suddenly decide to increase production, thereby lowering the cost of

gasoline and making the President a hero. Now is when the American

consumer needs help with these high gasoline prices, not in September

or October.

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, there is only one

other exception, and that is prescription medications. The

administration does not believe in free trade when it comes to

prescription medications, because we can trade everything else with

Mexico and Canada except medications, and the pharmaceutical companies

do not want that.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the gentleman from

Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie), for joining us and thank my friend, the

gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. Jackson-Lee), in closing so the gentleman

from Michigan (Mr. Smith) can have his time to talk about his concerns.

I go back to something that I mentioned earlier in this time together

and that is the fact that this very night we have young soldiers and

middle-age soldiers in Iraq driving around in Humvees that are not

armored. It puts them at greater risk. This problem can be solved much

more quickly than the Pentagon is willing to solve it.

I talked to a radio personality back in my district today and she

said, ``Congressman, what can the people listening do about this?'' I

said, ``Call the White House. The message ought to be this: Mr.

President, provide our soldiers with armored Humvees as quickly as

possible because life and limb are at stake.''