Mr. Speaker, let me thank the distinguished

chairwoman of the Ethics Committee, but also our leader on the Special

Order hour tonight.

What a timely hour that you have allowed us to participate in. I add

my appreciation as well to the chairwoman of the Congressional Black

Caucus and as well the leaders of the Out of Iraq Caucus and the

Progressive Caucus, of which I am a member.

And so I raise the question tonight, where do we go from here? And I

have standing in alongside of me the growing numbers of those fallen in

battle from the 18th Congressional District and surrounding areas.

Those faces represent families. They are husbands, wives, sisters and

brothers, mothers and fathers. They have left grandmothers and

grandfathers. They have left family and friends. And it is interesting,

as I look at a headline in the Houston Chronicle, it says: ``America

Has No Exit Strategy But Our President Does.'' And the gist of the

article is that the exit strategy for President Bush is his retirement.

For it is evident from his remarks last week that this administration

has no exit strategy other than to say, I will not have the exiting of

our troops. I will not cease the loss of lives until I leave the White

House. I will not have the legacy of the book being written to say that

I worked with the United States Congress, the American people, listened

to their voices, understood that this was a political solution and not

a military solution, but I will not sit down and reconcile with my

Congress, with the American people, and bring our troops home as

heroes. No, I am going to stay to the end and leave this to the next

President.

A GI who died had criticized the war in Iraq. Seven soldiers signed a

letter. Shortly thereafter, the soldier from Texas, Sergeant Omar Mora,

died, one of his other fellow signers of the letter asking why are we

here. Criticizing the war in Iraq. Soldiers on the battlefield. It is

interesting that what is represented is that there is one mind in Iraq

of these soldiers, but these soldiers are patriots who want to ask the

question based upon their constitutional rights. Tragically, as the

picture will show, this young man lost his life, and a fellow soldier

who signed the letter likewise lost his life.

Another headline: ``Texas City Sergeant Dies in Iraq Accident.'' Even

in the last 24 hours, we are finding that those contractors, paid-for

contractors, American contractors, one of our defense contractors, if

you will, wound up killing 10-or-so Iraqis under the allegation that

they were attacking a State Department envoy. We want those envoys to

be protected, officials traveling around, but what they wind up doing

is bringing Black Hawk helicopters. And these are private contractors

making $100,000 a year shooting up innocent Iraqis, creating then a

greater target of our own military personnel. What is going on in Iraq?

So, Mr. Speaker and Madam Chairwoman, I rise today to suggest that it

is time to declare a military success. This is not a question of

agreeing with the ``Mission Accomplished'' of the President of the

United States. This is to separate the political reconciliation that

must be done by the Maliki government and surrounding Mid East states

to resolve the conflict between Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds to the work of

our soldiers. Our soldiers have done their job.

So H.R. 930, the Military Success Act of 2007, wants to declare a

military success. Saddam Hussein is no longer there. We have had an

election where we have elected a democratic government. And so all that

our military has been asked to do, they have done it.

We have even gone further with the surge and collaborated with Sunnis

and created a peaceful area in Anbar, but yet the sheik was

assassinated. Why? Because you must have political reconciliation. And

while we stand here on

the floor tonight, soldiers are dying. These faces are growing.

Mr. President, do you understand that the American people have

spoken? And this is not cut and run, but this is recognizing that we

are spending $10 billion a month, which translates into $329,670,330

per day, $13,736,264 per hour, $228,938 per minute, and $3,816 per

second.

I believe that we should move to the floor of the House, declare our

soldiers victorious in the work they were assigned to do, and bring our

troops home.

It is important to note that any false representation that bringing

home troops in December is a reflection of the voices of the American

people is not true. Having 130,000 troops in 2008, July, does nothing

to bring our troops home. It is a reduction of the surge.

And so I am asking that our troops be brought home in a safe and

secure manner so that our equipment can be brought out and that the

announcement that the troops will begin to redeploy begins.

This is not a situation of fight them there or fight them here. This

is not typographing this to the enemy. The enemy is well aware of

everything we do. The President knows that General Petraeus said that

al Qaeda was not there when Saddam Hussein was there. They were not

there when we entered Iraq. They got there in 2005. And, therefore, it

is important for the Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds to join together to fight

al Qaeda. Everyone knows that Iraq is a place that is a training ground

for al Qaeda.

So I think it is important, as I close, to be able to again offer our

hand of reconciliation to the President, sit down with the leadership

of this Congress. As Speaker Pelosi said, don't let this be a 10-year

war. It is already longer than World War II. Save the lives of these

valiant soldiers, rebuild our military, and let the political process

in Iraq work so that peace and reconciliation can be brought forward.

It is a tragedy, and I offer my greatest sympathy to those who have

fallen in battle; those who have been injured, some thousands, 22,000,

25,000, and growing. We must bring our troops home. We must listen to

the voices of the American people. These are our heroes. The heroes are

still standing in Iraq. Bring them home with yellow ribbons. Bring them

home with celebration. It is time to vote and pass H.R. 930, the

Military Success Act of 2007. Our soldiers have been successful in duty

Mr. Speaker, may I also thank my colleagues

in the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) for gathering on the floor

tonight to discuss this important topic. This Congress will not, as the

previous Republican Congress did, continue to rubber stamp what we

believe to be an ill-conceived war. As we continue to receive reports

on the situation in Iraq, it is important that we continue to look

forward, to the future of Iraq beyond a U.S. military occupation.

Despite the multitude of mistakes perpetrated by President Bush and

former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, our troops have achieved a military

success in ousting Saddam Hussein and assisting the Iraqis in

administering a democratic election and electing a democratic

government. However, only the Iraqi government can secure a lasting

peace. Time and time again, the Iraqi government has demonstrated an

inability to deliver on the political benchmarks that they themselves

agreed were essential to achieving national reconciliation. Continuing

to put the lives of our soldiers and our national treasury in the hands

of what by most informed accounts, even by members of the Bush

Administration, is an ineffective central Iraqi government is

irresponsible and contrary to the wishes of the overwhelming majority

of the American people.

Our nation has already paid a heavy price in Iraq. Over 3770 American

soldiers have died. In addition, more than 27,660 have been wounded in

the Iraq war since it began in March 2003. June, July, and August have

marked the bloodiest months yet in the conflict, and U.S. casualties in

Iraq are 62 percent higher this year than at this time in 2006. This

misguided, mismanaged, and misrepresented war has claimed too many

lives of our brave servicemen; its depth, breadth, and scope are

without precedent in American history. In addition, the U.S. is

spending an estimated $10 billion per month in Iraq. This $10 billion a

month translates into $329,670,330 per day, $13,736,264 per hour,

$228,938 per minute, and $3,816 per second.

Mr. Speaker, we are here today because the Congress has listened to

the American people, and demanded accountability, oversight, and

competence. We saw fit to demand benchmark reports because the American

people lost confidence in the Rubber Stamp Republican Congress and the

Bush-Cheney team. The American people want a new strategy for success

in Iraq.

The Foreign Affairs Committee, of which I am proud to be a member,

has recently heard a string of reports from military and civilian

officials about the political, military, social, and economic situation

in Iraq. Two weeks ago, the Government Accountability Office (GAO)

informed the Congress that the Iraqi government has met only three of

the eighteen legislative, economic, and security benchmarks. Despite

the surge, despite increasing U.S. military involvement, the Iraqi

government has not made substantial progress toward stabilizing their

country.

President Bush rationalized his surge, over opposition by myself and

other House Democrats, by arguing it would give the Iraqi government

``the breathing space it needs to make progress in other critical

areas,'' bringing about reconciliation between warring factions, Sunni

and Shia. However, non-partisan assessments, such as last week's GAO

report, have illustrated that escalating U.S. military involvement in

Iraq is instead hindering that nation's ability to move beyond the

devastation of war and death, to build a successful new government, and

to create a stable and secure environment. In the seven months since

the surge began, increased American military presence has not been able

to end the relentless cycles of sectarian violence that continue to

plague Iraq. Nor have larger numbers of U.S. troops been successful in

unifying and strengthening the Iraqi government.

Instead, the security situation continues to deteriorate. Sectarian

violence remains high, and even the Bush Administration has noted the

unsatisfactory progress toward political reconciliation. The Sunni-led

insurgency continues, with insurgents conducting increasingly complex

and well-coordinated attacks. The August 2007 National Intelligence

Estimate cited ongoing violence, stating, ``the level of overall

violence, including attacks on and casualties among civilians, remain

high; Iraq's sectarian groups remain unreconciled.'' The report went on

to note that al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) ``retains the ability to conduct

high-profile attacks,'' and ``Iraqi political leaders remain unable to

govern effectively.''

The ever-increasing sectarian violence is causing immense daily

challenges for Iraqis. Millions have been displaced, and an Iraqi Red

Crescent Organization has reported an increase of nearly 630,000

internally displaced persons from February 2007 to July 2007. The same

organization predicts an additional 80,000 to 100,000 persons are

displaced each month. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has

estimated that 1.8 million Iraqis are now refugees, with an additional

40,000 to 50,000 fleeing to neighboring countries each month. Iraq has

become a humanitarian disaster, and one that continues to get worse

every day.

We are not here today to debate whether there has been some decrease

in violence in Baghdad. The United States military is a skilled and

highly proficient organization, and where there are large numbers of

U.S. troops, it is unsurprising that we see fewer incidents of

violence. However, it is our responsibility to take a longer-term view.

The United States will not and should not permanently prop up the Iraqi

government and military. U.S. military involvement in Iraq will come to

an end, and, when U.S. forces leave, the responsibility for securing

their nation will fall to Iraqis themselves. And so far, we have not

seen a demonstrated commitment by the Iraqi government.

In addition, evidence suggests that not only is increased U.S.

military presence in Iraq not making that nation more secure, it may

also be threatening our national security by damaging our ability to

respond to real threats to our own homeland. The recently released

video by Osama bin Laden serves to illustrate that President Bush has

not caught this international outlaw, nor brought him to justice.

Instead, he has diverted us from the real war on terror to the war of

his choice in Iraq.

The former chairman and vice chairman of the 9/11 commission, Thomas

H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton, share this view. In a recent op-ed, Kean

and Hamilton note that our own actions have contributed to a rise of

radicalization and rage in the Muslim world. Kean and Hamilton write

that ``no conflict drains more time, attention, blood, treasure, and

support from our worldwide counterterrorism efforts than the war in

Iraq. It has become a powerful recruiting and training tool for al-

Qaeda.''

Mr. Speaker, our troops in Iraq did everything we asked them to do.

We sent them overseas to fight an army; they are now caught in the

midst of an insurgent civil war and political upheaval. I have, for

some time now, advocated for Congressional legislation declaring a

military victory in Iraq, and recognizing the success of our military.

Our brave

troops have completed the task we set for them; it is time now to bring

them home. Our next steps should not be a continuing escalation of

military involvement, but instead a diplomatic surge.

This is why I introduced H.R. 930, the ``Military Success in Iraq and

Diplomatic Surge for National and Political Reconciliation in Iraq Act

of 2007.'' This legislation would make diplomacy and statecraft tools

of the first, rather than the last, resort. We must seek constructive

engagement with Iraq, its neighbors, and the rest of the international

community, as we work to bring resolution to this calamitous conflict

that has already gone on far too long.

Democrats in Congress will not continue to rubber stamp the

President's ill-conceived war effort. Last November, the American

people spoke loudly and clearly, demanding a new direction to U.S.

foreign policy, and we here in Congress are committed to seeing that

change be brought about. We are working to see the extensive funds

currently being spent to sustain the war in Iraq go to important

domestic programs and to securing our homeland against real and

imminent threats.

President Bush and Vice-President Cheney have been given numerous

chances and ample time by the American people and the Congress to

straighten out the mess in Iraq. They have failed. It is pure fantasy

to imagine that President Bush's military surge has created the

necessary safety and security to meet economic, legislative, and

security benchmarks. It is time for a new strategy, a new plan that

will encourage Iraqis to take charge of their own destiny, seek

constructive and sustained regional engagement, and substitute the ill-

advised military surge for a thoughtful diplomatic one. It is time to

be realistic and pragmatic, to recognize that our troops achieved what

they were initially sent in for and that continued U.S. military

engagement is not bringing about the desired results.