Mr. Speaker, it is time for Congress to take a good,

hard look at the role the United States is playing in Iraq and whether

or not it is in our national interest to maintain a military presence.

We need to acknowledge the fact that Iraq's insurgency is growing in

strength, not diminishing, and that the very presence of 150,000

American troops on Iraqi soil appears as though they see us as

occupiers that actually unites the growing collection of insurgent

forces.

Since our military presence actually encourages further fighting,

this war will continue as long as U.S. troops remain in Iraq. That is

why Congress must accept the fact that we cannot possibly bring our

involvement in Iraq to any kind of successful conclusion through

military means.

Yesterday, during consideration of the National Defense Authorization

Act for Fiscal Year 2006, I offered an amendment urging the President

to develop a plan for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. Surprisingly,

this was the first time the House has formally debated the possibility

of withdrawal from Iraq. We were allotted only 30 minutes for the

debate: 15 minutes on my side, 15 minutes on the side opposing my

amendment. But it is no surprise, of course, the amendment was

defeated. But in spite of that, it is clear that the Congress is

starting to get serious about a plan for leaving Iraq. 128 Members,

including five Republicans, voted for this amendment.

But there is much more work to do, Mr. Speaker. The Iraq war has now

raged on for more than 2 years, and we are no closer to winning this

conflict than we were when President Bush declared an end to major

combat operations under an arrogant banner declaring

Despite this lack of progress, the war has exacted a deeply troubling

human and financial toll. In just over 2 years of war, more than 1,600

American soldiers and an estimated 25,000 Iraqi innocents have been

killed. The Pentagon lists the number of Americans wounded as just over

12,000. But that does not take into account even the invisible wounds

many of our soldiers will be bringing home and have already brought

home, the painful mental trauma they have contracted from months and

years of fighting. When accounting for these psychological injuries,

the number of wounded jumps to nearly 40,000.

To date, Congress has appropriated more than $200 billion for

military operations in Iraq, despite little to no oversight as to how

these funds are going to be spent, which has allowed $9 billion in

reconstruction funds to just vanish from the coffers of the Coalition

Provisional Authority, which was the American governing body that

managed Iraq until the year 2004.

Given what is at stake here, do the American people not deserve a

plan? Do our brave men and women, who are selflessly sacrificing their

lives, not to mention their arms, legs, for a war that we should not be

in in the first place, not deserve a plan?

Let us not forget that the legislative branch is constitutionally

mandated to oversee expenditures from our National Treasury. Instead of

allowing fat-cat war profiteers like Halliburton and its subsidiary,

Kellogg, Brown and Root, to line their pockets as war profiteers, it is

time Congress started fulfilling our responsibility.

We must develop a smarter agenda. We must develop an agenda that will

help Iraq, and we will then be able to reduce our military occupation.

We must insist on planning by the Bush administration. This 2-year war

has left us disturbingly weak against the true security threats we

face. Let us not forget that Osama bin laden is still at large and al

Qaeda continues to recruit new members in Iraq as well as the rest of

the Middle East.

Fortunately, there is a plan that would secure America for the

future: the SMART Security concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 158,

which I recently reintroduced with the support of 49 of my House

colleagues. SMART is a Sensible, Multilateral, American Response to

Terrorism for the 21st Century. It will help us address the threats we

face as a Nation. SMART Security will prevent terrorism by addressing

the very conditions which allow terrorism to take root: poverty,

despair, resource scarcity, and lack of educational opportunity.

Instead of rushing off to war under false pretenses, SMART Security

encourages the United States to work with other nations to address the

most pressing global issues.