Mr. Speaker, next Monday will mark the fifth anniversary

of the most calamitous day in the modern history of this country. Not

since the British torched Washington during the War of 1812 has the

American homeland suffered such a devastating attack. For all of us,

the terrible events of September 11th remain an all-too-fresh memory

that still casts a pall over our national life.

For the families of the more than 2,900 people killed in New York,

Washington and Pennsylvania, the 9/11 attacks remain an open wound.

Many of them have sought to redirect their anger and grief into

ensuring that we as a Nation are secure and safe from future attacks.

In pursuing this goal, they have only asked that our Nation's leaders

be honest in assessing the state of our Nation's security, willing to

address shortfalls in our defense and that we act together as Americans

and not as Republicans and Democrats.

Mr. Speaker, bipartisanship has been at the center of America's

national security policy-making for most of our history. In standing

behind our Armed Forces, in standing up for our diplomatic priorities,

in supporting the intelligence community and in supporting the

President in times of crisis, Congress has often spoken with one voice.

This unanimity was never stronger than in the aftermath of the

September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. When

President Bush addressed the Congress and the Nation on September 20,

this Nation was more united than at any time since the Second World

War.

That unity extended around the world, to friends and foes alike. In

the wake of the attacks, NATO invoked for the first time in its history

Article 5 of the NATO Charter, declaring the attacks on the United

States to be an attack on the alliance. As American military assets

rushed toward Afghanistan in preparation for the invasion that would

topple the Taliban regime, allied early-warning aircraft patrolled

American skies to protect us.

Five years later, this national and international unity seems quaint.

Here at home, the President and his fellow Republicans have made no

secret that they intend to exploit the 9/11 attacks and the war on

terror for political advantage in the upcoming midterm elections, and

they have sought to smear as unpatriotic anybody who questions their

conduct of our Nation's security policy, most recently, as Secretary of

Defense Rumsfeld did, likening war critics to Nazi appeasers.

Overseas, we are isolated. Where America was seen as a victim in the

wake of 9/11, it is wrongly viewed as an aggressor. American troops are

fighting and dying in Iraq while our closest allies sit on the

sidelines, many of them refusing to help.

President Bush and the Republicans have not only squandered domestic

unity and international goodwill, they have poorly prosecuted the war

on terror and failed to improve our security here at home. Even as we

spend $1 billion a week in Iraq, basic security here at home has not

been improved as it should have been. This failure has been most

clearly demonstrated by the administration's woefully inadequate

performance in implementing the recommendations of the independent and

bipartisan 9/11 Commission.

In fact, in December of last year, the 9/11 Commission Public

Discourse Project, made up of the members of the commission, issued a

report card on the lack of progress in improving our Nation's security.

The report card was filled with Cs, Ds and Fs. In a statement

accompanying the report card, Chairman Thomas Kean, a Republican, and

Vice Chair Lee Hamilton, a Democrat, said, ``Many obvious steps that

the American people assume have been completed have not been. Some of

these failures are shocking.'' What we have seen over the last 4 years,

Mr. Speaker, has been a failure of leadership and a failure of

initiative.

My friends on the other side of the aisle, as we heard tonight, I

guess have decided that their best response to the criticism of the 9/

11 Commission is to blame Bill Clinton. I guess that is the new

national security strategy of my friends in the GOP, blame Bill

Clinton. I suppose that would be fine if Bill Clinton was the President

of the United States, but the last time I checked, it was George W.

Bush and had been for a great many years. The last time I checked, it

was a Republican House and a Republican Senate.

If we step back 5 years to the immediate aftermath of September 11th

and we ask ourselves, would we as a country choose a course that would

lead us 5 years hence to a place where we were mired in civil war in

Iraq, where Osama bin Laden was still at large, where he and al

Zawahiri were issuing a dozen taped messages just in this year alone,

where North Korea is testing missiles to carry nuclear bombs that it

has manufactured, where Iran is thumbing its nose at the international

community and going forward with its nuclear program, where we have

become more dependent on foreign oil, not less, how many of us would

choose that course for the United States of America? I submit none of

us would. None of us would choose that course.

The administration, all they can say is, stay that course; stay a

course that has made us more energy dependent on the Middle East than

ever; stay that course where Afghanistan's opium production now exceeds

what it did under the Taliban; stay that course where sectarian

violence is increasing and it is now a civil war in Iraq; stay the

course where we have not protected the homeland; stay the course where

we have earned Cs, Ds and Fs from the bipartisan 9/11 Commission. Stay

the course is the best they can come up with.

If anyone is hitting the snooze button that my colleagues on the

other side of the aisle refer to, it is this administration and this

Congress. The majority has dubbed this Security September. Well, that

has a lovely ring to it, Security September. The problem with Security

September is I suppose that in October it will be something else. It

will not be security month anymore. Security September will be over.

What will October be? October will be, what is a good old term for the

political agenda on the floor?

The problem is the Nation's security is not a political agenda to be

talked about in the September before a midterm election under the

quaint title of Security September.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle say that everyone has a

role to play in the Nation's defense, and with that I wholeheartedly

agree, but who has the administration asked among us, other than those

brilliant and brave Americans wearing the uniform of this country and

their families, who has been asked to be Rosie the Riveter? Who has

been asked to make a sacrifice? Has the President asked the American

people to sacrifice on the war on terror?

When he was interviewed recently by Brian Williams, who said, Mr.

President, many have criticized that you have not asked the American

people for a sacrifice; the President said, no, that is not true; the

American people have sacrificed. They pay taxes.

That, I guess, was the extent of the sacrifice Americans have been

asked to make in the war on terror. The President could have gone on to

say he has asked the American people to sacrifice by paying less taxes,

by ringing up large deficits on our children to pay for the war, to pay

for our own security. That is not the kind of sacrifice, that is not

the kind of role that we have to play in the Nation's security.

Now I would like to go through briefly some of the criticisms of the

9/11 Commission that have not been addressed. One of the core parts of

the Democratic real security plan is, we will implement the

recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. We will put them into effect,

and when we go through some of those tonight, we will see just how

important they are, just how derelict the majority has been and the

administration has been in not implementing these recommendations.

I am joined tonight by Chris Van Hollen of Maryland and by David

Scott of Georgia, two leaders on national security issues, and I want

to turn to them after I go through some of the failing grades that we

have

earned as an institution and this Congress, under majority GOP rule and

that the administration has earned.

First, in its report, the 9/11 Commission talked about having a

national strategy for transportation security. The commission said,

``Hard choices must be made in allocating limited resources. The U.S.

government should identify and evaluate transportation assets that need

to be protected, set risk-based priorities for defending them, select

the most practical and cost-effective ways of doing so, and then

develop a plan, budget and funding to implement the effort. The plan

should assign roles and missions to the relevant authorities, Federal,

State, regional and local, and to private stakeholders. In measuring

effectiveness, perfection is unattainable. But terrorists should

perceive that potential targets are defended. They may be deterred by a

significant chance of failure.''

Well, that was what the 9/11 Commission recommended. Now let us see

what the 9/11 Commission said about how this administration and the

majority have done. The grade: C. ``DHS,'' the Department of Homeland

Security, ``has transmitted its National Strategy for Transportation

Security to the Congress. While the strategy reportedly outlines broad

objectives, this first version lacks the necessary detail to make it an

effective management tool.'' C on the National Strategy For

Transportation Security.

Airline passenger prescreening: The 9/11 Commission urged that

``improved use of `no-fly' and `automatic selectee' lists should not be

delayed while the argument about a successor to Computer Assisted

Passenger Pre-Screening continues. This screening function should be

performed by the TSA, and it should utilize the larger set of watch

lists maintained by the Federal Government. Air carriers should be

required to supply the information needed to test and implement this

new system.''

What grade did the 9/11 Commission, the bipartisan commission, give

this administration and Congress? An F, failure. ``Few improvements

have been made to the existing passenger screening system since right

after 9/11. The completion of the testing phase of TSA's prescreening

program for airline passengers has been delayed. A new system,

utilizing all names on the consolidated terrorist watch list, is

therefore not yet in operation.'' Remarkable. We do not have a unified

terrorist watch list in operation that is trustworthy, that we can rely

on to keep dangerous people off our planes. F, failing grade by the

bipartisan 9/11 Commission.

Checked bag and cargo screening. The 9/11 report stated that ``more

attention and resources should be directed to reducing or mitigating

the threat posed by explosives in vessels' cargo holds.''

Well, that has not happened either. The grade here: D. Now, we all

know we have got to take our shoes off and we cannot carry fluids on

the plane, but you can still ship a crate the size of a piano in the

cargo hold of a passenger plane, and it will not be screened for

explosives. This is a glaring hole. We have known about it for a long

time. The 9/11 Commission has talked about it, written about it,

cajoled about it, as have the Democrats in Congress. What has been done

about it? Very, very little. Precious little. Dangerously little.

Airline passenger explosive screening, the grade given by the 9/11

Commission for the administration and Congress work in that area: C.

Critical infrastructure assessment, where we determine the risks and

vulnerabilities that will guide the distribution of Homeland Security

funds to the most threatened areas. You would expect that when we are

identifying what the risks are to the country, that we would go about

it in a logical way; we would identify these are the most vulnerable

sites, these are the areas where terrorists could cause the most

catastrophic damage and losses, and we will prioritize our resources,

addressing the most significant risks first.

Well, if that is what you thought we were doing, then you were wrong.

Grade by the 9/11 Commission: D. ``A draft National Infrastructure

Protection Plan spells out a methodology and process for critical

infrastructure assessments. No risk and vulnerability assessments

actually made; no national priorities established; no recommendations

made on allocation of scarce resources. All key decisions are at least

a year away.'' That is negligence with the Nation's security.

Information sharing between government agencies. The grade the 9/11

commission gave: D. ``Designating individuals to be in charge of

information sharing'' within the government ``is not enough. They need

resources, active presidential backing, policies and procedures in

place that compel sharing, and systems of performance evaluation that

appraise personnel on how they carry out information sharing.''

Intelligence oversight reform, grade given by the 9/11 Commission: D.

International collaboration on borders, grade given by the commission

to this administration and this Congress: D.

Let me just talk about border security for a minute. Again, my

colleagues on the other side of the aisle blame Bill Clinton. Well,

that is great. Let us blame Bill Clinton for everything, but border

security? We have had a Republican President. We have a Republican

House. We have a Republican Senate. If the GOP wanted to pass border

security, it could have been done years ago. Positions that we

appropriated in this House to fill border patrol positions have

remained vacant. The administration has not followed through.

Well, okay, Security September, maybe October will be border Security

October. Maybe they will get around to it in October because, after

all, the midterms are in November. But one cannot help escape the

conclusion that this is driven by the midterm elections and not the

national security of the United States of America, and that is wrong.

Those brave people that protected this Capitol when that plane was

over Pennsylvania headed our way, those brave people that protected

this Capitol deserve better from the people working in this Capitol.

They have the right to expect that those working in this Capitol will

use their best efforts to protect the rest of the country and not just

with the midterm coming up, a couple of months away.

Now, I am joined tonight by two great leaders on national security

issues, and I would like to turn first to my colleague from Maryland,

Chris Van Hollen, who has joined me on several of these national

security Special Order hours, in fact, when it was not Security

September, and I thank Mr. Van Hollen for his leadership and yield to

the gentleman.

If I can interject for just a second, we had a

nonclassified briefing, so I can raise this point, before we had the

August recess with Secretary Rice, Secretary Rumsfeld, Director

Negroponte, and General Pace, and I asked a question that is based on

your comments. It was acknowledged at that time that the sectarian

violence now exceeded the violence from the insurgency.

I asked them how are we changing our strategy, militarily or

politically, because the strategy used in dealing with the

counterinsurgency effort and the strategy you use in trying to bring a

halt to a civil war are two very different animals. So I asked, how are

we adjusting to these new conditions on the ground? And the long and

short of it was, we are not adjusting to the conditions on the ground.

We are doing the same thing, the same strategy, the one-size-fits-all,

the stay-the-course.

That, I think, given the history you have outlined, where this

congressionally compelled report indicates things have gotten worse

across almost every metric, not better, that stay the course just

doesn't cut it any more.

Mr. Van Hollen.

On that point, Mr. Van Hollen, we had one of the very few

hearings, you were in attendance, on Iraq in committee, after years of

asking the committee leadership in International Relations to hold a

hearing on the Iraq war. You would think it wouldn't be so difficult.

We finally had a hearing.

During that hearing, I asked the administration witnesses, who has

been held accountable for some of the disastrous decision making that

has been made? Who has been held accountable for the standing down of

the Iraqi army? Who has been held accountable for the intelligence

failures that led to the Iraq war? Who has been held accountable for

any one of these innumerable errors?

There was this long, painful, prolonged silence. And the answer was

clear: No one. No one has been held accountable.

I thank gentleman. You really put your finger on it. The

reality is that ``stay the course'' is nothing but more of the same.

That doesn't cut it anymore.

I yield to my good friend, a leader on national security issues,

David Scott from the great State of Georgia.

Mr. Scott, I thank you for those words. They are right on

the mark. You pose the question, who would have thought, and it is a

good one. Who would have thought, here we are, 5 years after 9/11, that

the mastermind of the butcher of thousands of American lives would

still be at large? Who would have imagined that the strongest nation on

Earth would not have succeeded in hunting him down and killing him?

That is an astounding, astounding fact.

But I think the important thing here tonight is this country cannot,

must not, accept this as the best America can do. We can do better. We

can do better in aggressively taking it to our enemy. We can do better

defensively protecting America. We have to do better.

The fact that this crowd that runs this House, that runs this White

House, can't capture and kill bin Laden doesn't mean he can't be

captured and killed. He can. He must, but not on the course this crowd

is on.

The fact that this crowd can't stop Iran from developing a nuclear

bomb doesn't mean they can't be stopped. They can be stopped. They must

be stopped.

The fact that this crowd in this House and in the White House can't

stop North Korea from testing its missiles doesn't mean North Korea

can't be stopped. But it does require a certain competence in an

administration. It does require a certain diplomatic skill in an

administration. It does mean that you cannot alienate the rest of the

world and expect them to come to your assistance, to rally to your

cause.

We seem to compartmentalize and think that we can spurn the rest of

the world on other things, and then on the issues that we care about,

that we can count on them.

It hasn't worked that way. But just because this crowd has failed, it

doesn't mean that failure is inevitable. It isn't. I believe in this

country, as I know you do. I believe there is a better way. I believe

the Democrats have a better way. I believe part of that better way is

to make this country energy independent so we are not relying on these

Middle Eastern nations.

Do you know why Iran can thwart the international community, they can

thumb their nose at us? Because they are a petroleum-rich state, and

petroleum prices are through the roof.

It is the same reason Russia can thumb its nose at the United States

now, because they are awash in oil money. And part of the reason they

are awash in that oil money is because we have that addiction to oil

that this oil-soaked administration isn't willing to confront.

Mr. Scott, I think this is the key importance of our

being here

week after week, as you and I and Mr. Van Hollen and others have. The

country recognizes we cannot go on with business as usual in our

national security. We can't just have a policy that says more of the

same. More of the same has put this Nation at inordinate risk.

And so the country is asking, all right, we don't like what this

crowd is doing. We don't like what the crowd in the House is doing; we

don't like what the crowd in the White House is doing. What are

Democrats proposing? And for weeks now we have been laying that out, in

the pillars of our own security plan, where we will rebuild our

military, because that is what it really means at this point.

Our military is strained so thin, stretched so thin, we are now using

professional recruiters to try to recruit. We are getting bonuses to

recruit people in the Armed Forces. We are using involuntary recalls.

These men and women in uniform, they deserve our undying gratitude,

because, boy, are we asking a lot of them, not only them but their

families.

But our military is at the breaking point. Our forces are stretched,

our equipment is degrading in the conditions in Afghanistan and

elsewhere. It needs an investment, it needs to be better managed than

this administration has done, and we will build that 21st century

military. We are committed to the war on terror and to going after the

heart of that war, which is Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. When I was in

Afghanistan, Mr. Scott, do you know what one of our troops said to me?

He said, Mr. Schiff, you know, we here in Afghanistan, we feel like

we are the third front in a two-front war, third front in a two-front

war. This won't be the third front in a two-front war under Democratic

leadership.

Homeland Security? We will implement those recommendations of the 9/

11 Commission that the snooze alarm policy, the snooze button policy

this administration has ignored. In Iraq, we will recognize the facts

on the ground, which is now a civil war. We will adjust our strategy.

We will reduce and redeploy our forces so the Iraqis have to take

control of their own country.

If Shiite and Sunni are determined to murder each other in large

numbers, it is not the job of American troops to stand in the way and

catch the bullets. We ought to play a supporting role; we ought to do

everything we can to reduce the conflagration there. But ultimately

Iraqis have to decide they want to be one country.

Finally, we will achieve energy independence. That is a key part of

our national security agenda. The fact that this administration has

failed in so many of these respects doesn't mean failure is acceptable

or inevitable. This country has always done better and can do better,

will do better.

Mr. Scott, let's look at this, let's look at this through

the prism of more of the same, or stay the course, as our majority is

advocating, as opposed to what we have outlined in a new direction on

each of these items.

What does it mean to stay the course? Well, what it means in terms of

energy independence is that we continue and increase our reliance on

Middle Eastern oil, and all of the national security risk that entails

for that country. That is what stay the course means on energy

independence that we remain dependent on Middle Eastern oil.

What does more of the same mean in Iraq? More of the same in Iraq

means most costly, the continuing casualties, American troops losing

their lives and becoming severely injured. But in addition to that,

more of the same in Iraq means if you look at the course of Iraq, it

means an increase in the civil war violence, because when you look at

the curve of the Iraqi violence, it has been a steady increase in

sectarian violence.

So what does stay the course mean? It means stay the increasing

course of civil war violence. The insurgent violence, which has been on

the increase, the number of incidents over the summer reaching all-time

highs. What does stay the course wartime policy mean? It means more

insurgent violence.

Is that the course we want to stay on? The only, and, boy, I have

searched, I have searched high and low for some good news to report out

of Iraq. The only positive news I have seen out of Iraq has been in

terms of the political development in terms of the elections in Iraq,

the unity government.

But, unfortunately, that government has not been able to solidify its

control over Iraq. It doesn't have the confidence of the Iraqi people.

Unfortunately, if we stay that course, that doesn't offer much hope

either. Homeland security, what does stay the course, more of the same

mean for America under homeland security?

It means more Cs, more Ds, and for more Fs for our failure to do more

for airports, nuclear plants, chemical plants. More of the same on the

war on terror, more of the same means more messages from Osama bin

Laden, more of the same from Zarqawi, more of the same bombings in

London, Madrid, Turkey, elsewhere, more sanctuary in Pakistan. That's

what stay the course means in the war on terror.

More of the same in the military means people on their third

deployment, fourth deployment, sixth deployment. That is what more of

the same means in the military. That just is not right for America.