Mr. Speaker, tonight we start what I hope is the first of

a series of honest discussions with the American people, something we

have been unable to do up to now.

There are a number of issues, a number of problems with where we find

ourselves as a Nation tonight. One of the biggest problems is we have

not shared the sacrifice.

As we speak here tonight, 2,498 of our Nation's finest have been

killed in Iraq and Afghanistan; 18,000 have been wounded with over

8,500 unable to return back to duty.

Do we honor and revere and love our troops? Absolutely. Do we respect

and honor the sacrifices that their families have made and are making?

Absolutely. Are we concerned about those that are yet to fall, those

that are yet to come back with wounds? Absolutely.

Part of the debate that we want to have on this particular issue is

to make sure that we do not debate other auxiliary things except Iraq.

Iraq is the area, ground zero, for the kinds of issues that we are

dealing with, the kinds of things that my colleagues have spoken about

tonight. The kinds of things we have failed to do as a Congress in

exercising our oversight responsibilities.

I have been to Iraq six times, to Afghanistan 12. I have visited with

our troops. I have seen them. I have shared the environment that they

share. As a veteran who served 13 months in Vietnam, which seems like

in a different era, I can relate to the kinds of things that are going

on in the theater of combat. But the one thing that has been missing

for us, in my opinion, has been the ability of this Congress to hold

the administration accountable, to do the oversight that is necessary

and so vitally important. That is the debate that we want to have on

this very important topic.

So with that, my good friend and colleague, a member of the Armed

Services Committee, Congressman Udall, will now speak.