Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman for

yielding to me.

Earlier today I had in my office a large number of members of the

different posts of the Ohio American Legion. And we were talking about

the fact that we have got so many young Americans and middle-aged

Americans in Iraq. And I just want to share with the gentleman

something that continues to gnaw at me. It causes me great personal

concern because it is a matter that has yet to be recognized, admitted

to, and corrected by this administration.

I have talked earlier in recent weeks about the fact that we sent our

soldiers into harm's way without providing them with the most basic

equipment of the body armor that was capable of giving them the fullest

protection possible. As a result, I believe young Americans and some

middle-aged Americans have lost their lives in Iraq because of the

negligence of this administration and this Pentagon.

I have gone to Walter Reed Hospital and visited with soldiers; and

some of the soldiers there have missing arms and legs, and I believe

some of those terrible injuries are the result of our failure to

provide them with the right kind of protection.

Now, I will talk a minute about the body armor; but I would also like

to talk about the vehicles, the Humvees that are not adequately

protected as a result of the negligence, the negligence of this

Pentagon.

Way back in the early spring, I received a letter from one of my

constituents who happens to be a West Point graduate, a young man who

is serving this very night in Iraq; and he told me that his men did not

have the interceptor vests, this high-quality vest that became

available, I believe, in 1998. It costs about $1,500 a piece, capable

of stopping an AK-47 round. It is made of Kevlar and it has ceramic

plates in both the front and back, designed to protect the core of a

soldier's body, the vital organs of a soldier's body.

So I wrote Secretary Rumsfeld and I asked him when he was going to

make sure that all of our soldiers were adequately equipped with this

vest.

He wrote me back and he said sometime in mid-November. A couple of

weeks later, I get a letter from General Myers, and he says, well, it

is going to be in December.

Before we left this city for our holiday period, the Christmas

period, the Pentagon held a briefing, and they said, well, it is going

to be January. Now just last week we were told that there is an

assumption that all of our soldiers in Iraq are equipped and perhaps

all of our soldiers in Afghanistan, we do not know. There is no

definitive statement on that, but certainly our soldiers in Kuwait do

not yet have this equipment.

But there is something that bothers me even more because we have a

large number of humvees and other vehicles in Iraq that are not

sufficiently provided with armor, that when they drive over a bomb that

is planted in the road, for example, the soldiers in those vehicles are

protected as best they can possibly be protected.

One of the reasons this is of concern to me is because the company

that is the sole provider of this armored vehicle, as well as the kits

that can be used on the vehicles that are already in the theater and

are not yet armored, that company is in Ohio. It is located near

Cincinnati, Ohio. The President's going to be in Cleveland tomorrow for

his 15th visit to Ohio since being President.

That has not happened.

In Ohio.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to be here tomorrow. If I was

going to be in Ohio tomorrow and could speak to the President, I would

ask him why he has not requested a sufficient amount of funding to

provide these armored vehicles and the kits that can provide armory to

the vehicles that are already over there so that our soldiers will not

have their arms and legs blown off when they drive over these

explosives.

Many of our soldiers are being killed, but many, many more are

sustaining these terrible injuries as a result of the explosions that

are occurring in Iraq, and the company officials have been to see me.

They tell me that they can produce many more of these vehicles in a

more rapid fashion, but the fact is that the President has not

requested the money. It is a funding problem.

After this House has passed $87 billion and the President's going to

come back later and ask for $50 billion for the effort in Iraq, we have

got soldiers who have gone without body armor,

and as most Americans are sitting in their homes safe and sound and as

we stand here in this chamber, we have soldiers that are in harm's way

simply because this administration has failed to provide them with the

best protection possible.

I am not the President, but if I were, I would say to those beneath

me, those in charge of the Pentagon and military equipment and the

like, I would say correct this problem as quickly as possible, I do not

care how much it takes; we are going to make sure our soldiers are

protected as best we can protect them.

The sad fact is that we cannot protect them from all danger. The sad

fact is that there will be continuing loss of life and continuing

injuries, but at least we should do everything that we can possibly do

within our power to make sure that our troops are adequately protected.

Mr. Speaker, if my friend will yield, I want to

believe what you are saying is true, but I have reason to believe that

if the administration was willing to spend the necessary funds that we

could provide this protection in a more rapid manner.

We are told that we did not expect the aftermath of the war to go as

it has gone. We were told our soldiers are going to be welcomed; they

will be throwing rose petals at us; we will be considered liberators

and all of that. So obviously there was inadequate planning, and that

is a sad fact, but this war has been going on for almost, what, a year

or more?

And the fact is that it should not take a year to

correct a problem. It should not take months to get body armor to our

troops. Do my colleagues know what the Pentagon is saying now? They are

saying it will be at least the end of 2005 before the vehicles in Iraq

are provided with this armor. That is much too long. How many soldiers

are going to be injured between now and the end of 2005?