Mr. Speaker, this is a moment that I had hoped would

never come. I am rising for the 250th time to oppose the occupation of

Iraq. It's a sad task, because 250 times means that the occupation has

dragged on and on nearly 5 years.

I had hoped that my first speech would be my last, or my 50th or even

my 100th, but the administration continued to follow its blind and

destructive path year after year. As the saying goes, ``All that is

necessary for evil to triumph is that good people do nothing.''

So, to be sure, I have raised my voice time and time again on this

floor to protest the administration's folly and hold it accountable for

its reckless actions and its reckless policies.

The American people have raised their voices, also, Mr. Speaker. They

have said that they want an end to this occupation and a responsible

redeployment of our troops. But our leaders in the White House, who

first turned a deaf ear to the people of the world when they invaded

Iraq, continue to turn a deaf ear to their very own people in the

United States of America.

What makes this occasion even sadder for me is that I will have to

rise many more times before the occupation ends because the

administration has made it absolutely clear that it will continue its

occupation right to the bitter end of its term in office.

And I fear that the occupation may go on long after that. A leading

Republican Presidential candidate said that he has no problem with the

occupation lasting 100 years. No problem. And this same candidate said

the other day, and

I quote, ``There's going to be other wars.'' This is exactly the kind

of ``shoot-first, ask-questions-later'' thinking that got us into

trouble in Iraq in the first place.

Fortunately, the Democratic Presidential candidates have a different

mindset, a mindset that uses diplomacy and international cooperation to

solve problems, not war. But the current administration is working hard

to tie the hands of the very next President. It's negotiating to

establish permanent bases in Iraq. And it is planning to keep troop

levels absolutely as high as possible.

Remember all the sweet talk, Mr. Speaker, last September about

possible troop cuts? It was an absolute sham. And what are we getting

for the tragedy of Iraq? Are we any safer? Absolutely not. In fact, the

director of National Intelligence has warned that al Qaeda is getting

stronger in its cozy safe haven in Pakistan, and that they are busy

training more and more operatives.

A whole new generation is growing up in occupied Iraq. Their memories

begin after U.S. forces rolled in. Since electricity and water and

basic services have been on the fritz. Since whole neighborhoods have

become wandering refugees. Many have never known the cultural gems of

their own country. This cannot bode well for the region.

Secretary of State Rice has admitted that the Taliban is resurgent in

Afghanistan. And the report of the Congressional Commission on the

National Guard and Reserves found that there is an ``appalling gap'' in

our ability to defend the homeland because of Guard and Reserve

redeployments to Iraq.

Meanwhile, we are squandering $12 billion per month on the occupation

while our economy slides into recession and the American people face

the loss of their jobs, their health care, and their homes. Let's be

clear, Mr. Speaker, the main reason we are in this recession is because

of the senseless and unending occupation of Iraq.

And our brave men and women in uniform, what about them? They're

paying a very high price for this occupation. Every day, five U.S.

soldiers try to commit suicide because the frequency of deployment has

put tremendous stress on them and their families. This is simply

unacceptable and a national disgrace if we do not act to reverse this

trend.

Mr. Speaker, I will be back on this floor talking about this some

more, but this is my 250th time, and I want you to know, it's time that

this occupation be over.