Madam Speaker, I rise to make an important and urgent

announcement to the House: the conflict in Iraq is still going on, and

we are still occupying that country.

I have to make this announcement because apparently some people have

forgotten all about Iraq or don't think it's an important issue

anymore. That's because it doesn't dominate the TV news like it used

to. As an example of that, a recent story on CNN began with the words,

``Whatever Happened to the War?''

Well, I hate to spoil everyone's day, but I have to report, with

great regret, that the occupation is still going. As proof of that,

nearly 300 American and Iraqi soldiers and Iraqi civilians have been

killed or wounded so far this month alone. Yes, the bloodshed

continues.

And after nearly 5 years of occupation, our leaders still have no

exit strategy. They have even stopped pretending that they have one.

Last year they told us we couldn't get out of Iraq because things on

the ground were going badly. This year they're telling us we can't get

out because things are going well; and if we get out, they'll go badly

again.

So if you follow the administration's argument to its logical

conclusion, this is what you get: we can't leave when things are good;

we can't leave when things are bad. Which means we can never leave. The

result is permanent occupation, which is precisely what the

administration appears to want.

Forgetting about the bloodshed in Iraq is bad enough. But it's

dangerous for many, many other reasons. It gives the administration a

free hand to ratchet up the threats against Iran. It takes the pressure

off the Iraqi Government to make progress toward national political

reconciliation. It means our military will continue to be overstretched

and less capable of meeting real challenges to our national security

that may and will arise elsewhere. It continues to make America appear

to be a lawless and arrogant Western occupier of the Middle East. And

it allows our budget to be plundered at a time when our economy is more

than shaky. People are in danger of losing their jobs here at home; but

thanks to the administration's policies, the boys at Blackwater will

always have their high-paying military contractor jobs in Iraq where

they can continue to terrify the Iraqi people.

We are spending over $300 million every day in Iraq, Madam Speaker.

We couldn't afford that when the economy was good, and we certainly

can't afford it as the economy goes into recession.

But thankfully, thankfully, the American people are too smart to fall

into the trap of believing that everything is just swell. According to

a recent CBS News poll, nearly 60 percent of Americans continue to

believe the occupation is going badly, and 58 percent believe the U.S.

should never have gotten into Iraq in the first place.

Madam Speaker, we cannot stick our heads in the sand and pretend that

Iraq isn't a problem anymore. The only way to change course is to hold

the administration accountable, and the only way to do that is to keep

the pressure on the administration every single day. That's why I'll

continue to raise my voice against the madness of this occupation, and

why I will continue to urge the House to use its power of the purse to

end it.

Iraq is not a television show that got canceled because of the

writers' strike. Iraq is a real place where real people continue to

die. We must redeploy our troops. We must give the Iraqi people back

their sovereignty, and we must give them their hope for a brighter

future.