Mr. Speaker, just a few hours ago, this

House engaged in a debate, one I believe that is one of the more

important debates that we have in this House, and that is, the

appropriations for the defense of this Nation. Clearly, there were so

many themes and so many issues that go yet unanswered. I think it is

important to elaborate for the American people some of the concerns

that needed to be addressed but were not addressed in the fullness of

the debate that took place.

I acknowledged when I was on the floor that I respected and

appreciated the hard work of the chairman of the full committee, the

ranking member of the full committee, as well as the ranking member of

the subcommittee and certainly the chairman of the subcommittee.

I also have noted in the past my full commitment for our troops on

the frontline and have had the pleasure of interacting with them in my

visits to them in Afghanistan, more than once, in Iraq and other places

in the Mideast, and will continue to interact with them as my other

colleagues do; and I continue to indicate that my door remains open to

their concerns and their family members.

That is why I rise today, because when the administration announced a

$25 billion supplemental that is necessary for Afghanistan and Iraq, I

made the point that I would like to see some strategy, some long-term

exit strategy, some way and means of bringing our troops home, some

understanding of how many troops we will need, do we have enough

troops; and yet in the course of the designing of this appropriations

bill, outside of the process of those committees, there has been no

known process that I have or known statement to the actual road map

that we are going to take out of Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is a due date of June 30 for the transition of power. I frankly

believe in al Qaeda assessing the situation that we actually need to

have, if you will, a greater understanding as to whether that

transition of power will truly work. We do not have that, but yet we

have been asked to give $25 billion, $25 billion in order for those

dollars to go to Iraq and Afghanistan.

I stand here in full support of increased military personnel pay, of

support for families and children of the military personnel, of

veterans, in support of an increase in their salaries; and, in fact,

Mr. Speaker, I had an amendment that would offer $100 million taken

from the missile defense dollars that cost $20 billion to train, equip

and provide related assistance to the military security forces.

Had that amendment been accepted, I might have voted for this

appropriation; but the reason why I think this point was extremely

important, and again, this may have been something that was discussed

in the midst of the committee process, but it was not brought to this

body, not in a full debate, and that is, in my visits I spoke to

Reservists and National Guard who indicated, I was trained as a cook,

trained as a carpenter, trained as a driver, and yet I was being

utilized as an MP; I have been utilized as a prison guard for Abu

Ghraib, for example. In many instances, because of the shortchanging of

personnel, we have seen those ill-equipped to be in the midst of combat

or to be used or be involved or engaged in combat action, not defense

action, not meaning I am doing something else and I am being attacked,

but to go out offensively and be part of combat.

We are seeing those individuals untrained doing those duties. We have

seen tragedies occur. Certainly, we saw the tragedies of soldiers being

kidnapped on convoys. We see the tragedies of MPs not really being

trained as MPs; and certainly, there is no greater tragedy for the

American personnel and for the Iraqis of Abu Ghraib.

So this amendment was to be offered, and unfortunately, because of

the unfortunate restraints, or the restraints that we have, that

amendment was not accepted.

I would have also offered an amendment to deal specifically with

contracting companies because we realize that we had a problem with

outside contractors, though many have done very able work; but I

believe that if you are a contractor wearing the flag of the United

States of America, engaged with the United States military, you must

have an impeccable record; and if by chance you have been charged with

human rights violations in the last 5 years or beyond, then I would

argue that you have no place in having a contract in the United States

Government, but particularly in areas of conflict; and I would have

offered that amendment had it been received and accepted.

Let me also say that there are two other crises that I think are

extremely important. The first one goes back to military personnel.

That has to do, Mr. Speaker, with mental health; and I would have

offered an amendment on mental health as well as additional resources

for the Sudan.

Let me close by saying that all of this would have warranted a better

bill, and maybe we would have had a chance to address the needs of

women in America, which I would have spoken about or will endeavor to

speak about at some other time. In any event, I will submit many of my

comments for the Record.