Mr. Speaker, in the last press conference, the

President was asked if he had made any mistakes and what lessons had he

learned. And what the President said was, I wish you had given me this

written question ahead of time so I could plan for it. I am sure

historians will look back and say, gosh, he could have done it better

this way or that way. I am just not sure something will pop into my

head here in the midst of this press conference with all the pressure

of trying to come up with an answer, but it has not yet.

So kind of as a public service, a number of us are coming down to the

floor to offer, for the President's consideration, a list of some

mistakes that he might want to call up so he does not have to fumble

around for an answer at the next press conference, if he has another

public press conference.

One of the things that actually is surprising to me that this mistake

happened at all, given what we know now, is the long lead-up to the war

in Iraq, that they actually had been planning, and bases were being

built, and air space to land was being constructed, was a failure to

provide the troops with the protection they needed when they were put

into harm's way. It surprises me that that mistake was made.

In some cases mistakes have been somewhat corrected, we think; so it

would not even hurt the President to mention the fact that as recently

as last October, a quarter of our troops in Iraq were lacking in the

ceramic-plated body armor that would deflect the bullets that were

coming their way. We are told that that has been corrected, although as

recently as just a few weeks ago, families are still buying those at

about $1,500 a crack for their soldiers just to make sure that they are

well equipped. But we know that still the Humvees do not have the

proper armor, some of them still do not have the proper armor. A

helicopter was shot down that did not have the missile detector that

helicopters are supposed to have in order to be fully equipped.

I met the aunt of one of the soldiers who died in that last Sunday.

She would think that that was a mistake that the President made and

something he might want to mention.

He could have talked about a mistake making soldiers pay for their

travel home when they would come on rest and recreation, R&R. In order

to get to their homes once they were landed in the U.S., they were

paying their own way. That, I understand, has been corrected.

Or we just heard yesterday from the 333rd Military Police Unit in

Freeport that was supposed to be coming home this week, that in fact

they got redeployed; but all their equipment, their personal foot

lockers, had been sent home, and now the families, at their own

expense, are shipping the equipment back to their soldiers. They are

having to buy all new uniforms. It seems that was a mistake in

planning, according to some of the families. Maybe they could have

planned better. That is a mistake, and it could be corrected somewhat,

at least to reimburse the families that are having to ship back.

But it is not just those soldiers that are in harm's way, who are

losing their lives now, unfortunately, sadly, horribly, in record

numbers in the last little while; but it is the veterans. Again, it is

astonishing that this President would not make sure that at the very

least those who come home are well taken care of.

There was a mistake, and it has been corrected. He could cite that.

Our wounded soldiers were being charged for food at the hospitals when

they came home. Incredible. Now that has been fixed; they are not being

charged for that food. But many were languishing with inadequate care

in Army barracks when they came home.

Then, right now, this minute, 30,000 veterans are waiting 6 months or

longer for appointments at VA hospitals, new increases are proposed in

the cost of veterans health care for up to 1 million veterans, and

long-term care funding has been slashed. It is really incredible.

What the veterans organizations are saying is that actually the

amount of money allocated to veterans is millions of dollars short of

what it needs to be. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. Edwards) actually

has a proposal that would add $2.5 billion for veterans health care.

The President could acknowledge that it is a mistake to mistreat our

veterans, and he could support the bill of the gentleman from Texas

(Mr. Edwards) to restore that money.

He could do something about the fact that he has been refusing to end

the survivor benefit penalty. There are a lot of things, a lot of

mistakes. We think the President ought to acknowledge some of them and

fix them up.