Mr. Speaker, every time you look, the rationale

for the Iraq war has shifted. It went from being about weapons of mass

destruction to removing Saddam Hussein to trying to build a democratic

Iraq.

We were told this war would be over in a matter of weeks, and that

the Iraqis would be able to finance it with oil sales. We were promised

it was not a mission of nation building.

But the reality is we're two years in and we've spent more than $200

billion dollars on this venture. And who is paying for all of this? The

American taxpayer.

The outstanding public debt as of October 3 is almost

$8,000,000,000,000 (eight trillion). With a population approaching 300

million, each U.S. citizen's share of this debt is about $27,000.

Big government conservatives are spending trillions and wasting

billions. Republicans are no longer the party of fiscal conservancy,

but the party of runaway spending and corruption.

The majority's oversight of the spending in Iraq has been simply

disgraceful. The time for accountability is long overdue. It is time to

stop handing the president blank checks.

Each week in Iraq, the deadly attacks continue, and more of our

troops are lost. Our death toll now is past 2,000 Americans.

These attacks remind us again of the urgent need to develop a more

effective strategy in Iraq--one I and my colleagues on this side of the

aisle suggested before we went to war, and one that was disregarded.

The reality in Iraq is that we are creating new terrorists and

severely damaging the public impression of the United States in the

Muslim world.

We should not be advocating an immediate withdrawal. But we need an

exit strategy addressing our goals in Iraq and proposing the

announcement of a timetable to draw down the majority of U.S. forces

during 2006.

Yet the president still refuses to level with Congress and the

American people about when such withdrawals may actually come to pass.

Our military leaders have repeatedly told us that there is no purely

military solution in Iraq, and that a political settlement is a

necessary element for success.

Meanwhile, the Administration continues urging the American people to

``stay the course.'' That's a bumper sticker slogan, not a strategy.

The dishonesty needs to stop. The American people deserve better.

Our troops have done everything we've asked of them in Iraq. They

have acted heroically. They have done their job.

We must have a timetable for withdrawal of U.S. forces--or at the

very least a plan for it--something the administration has

incredulously failed to do for over two years.

This means conveying that our troops will not be there forever. It

means the Iraqis must come together. Only Iraqi unity can stop the

insurgency, not a permanent U.S. military presence.

The administration has been sending the wrong message with repeated

statements that we will stay in Iraq as long as we are needed.

We should not mislead the Iraqis into thinking they have unlimited

time to reach a settlement. The longer they think that, the less likely

they will be to act.

The administration needs to speak honestly with the American people.

Exaggerating our progress in defeating the insurgency or in creating an

Iraqi army paints a dangerous picture. Repeated tours in Iraq and

Afghanistan have strained our forces and have hurt recruitment.

The American people are losing patience with the mounting casualties

and costs.

Democrats are asking the administration to do its job and to develop

a strategy for successful completion of the mission.

It's past time for a plan to ensure that our mission in Iraq is a

success and that our brave men and women in uniform can begin to come

home soon.

We must support initiatives that provide clear, concrete measures and

milestones that our troops need for defeating the insurgency, building

up Iraqi security forces, and handing over Iraq to the Iraqi people.

From increased gas prices to corruption in Ohio and Washington; from

record spending and record debt to jobs shipped overseas; and from

failing to supply body armor to our troops in Iraq to skyrocketing

healthcare costs, the Republican agenda has proved a failure.

And they've done nothing to remedy it.

The Republicans are running wild with our tax dollars and it's been a

mistake to let this administration continue a policy of incompetence

when it comes to Iraq.

It is past time for Republican leadership to answer for record

deficits and reckless spending, both in Iraq and in the U.S. It's time

for a plan to bring our troops home.

It's a message the American people understand, but Republicans aren't

willing to accept.