A few minutes after that, a plane struck the Pentagon. We never were able to give the American people the conditions of the military bases.

I have been to Afghanistan, and I have been to Iraq. But nobody has been to Iraq more than my good friend Congressman REYES. And I would like for him to give us an assessment. He is a veteran. He has been to Iraq more than any other Member. My friends, let us be honest with the American people and tell the American people what we need to do.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, tonight we start what I hope is the first of a series of honest discussions with the American people, something we have been unable to do up to now.

There are a number of issues, a number of problems with where we find ourselves as a Nation tonight. One of the biggest problems is we have not shared the sacrifice.

As we speak here tonight, 2,498 of our Nation's finest have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan; 18,000 have been wounded with over 8,500 unable to return back to duty.

Do we honor and revere and love our troops? Absolutely. Do we respect and honor the sacrifices that their families have made and are making? Absolutely. Are we concerned about those that are yet to fall, those that are yet to come back with wounds? Absolutely.

Part of the debate that we want to have on this particular issue is to make sure that we do not debate other auxiliary things except Iraq. Iraq is the area, ground zero, for the kinds of issues that we are dealing with, the kinds of things that my colleagues have spoken about tonight. The kinds of things we have failed to do as a Congress in exercising our oversight responsibilities.

I have been to Iraq six times, to Afghanistan 12. I have visited with our troops. I have seen them. I have shared the environment that they share. As a veteran who served 13 months in Vietnam, which seems like in a different era, I can relate to the kinds of things that are going on in the theater of combat. But the one thing that has been missing for us, in my opinion, has been the ability of this Congress to hold the administration accountable, to do the oversight that is necessary and so vitally important. That is the debate that we want to have on this very important topic.

So with that, my good friend and colleague, a member of the Armed Services Committee, Congressman UDALL, will now speak.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I know the hour draws near, and we have to conclude the day's business. And I want to join my colleagues from across the country who serve with me on the Armed Services Committee to make the point that this is just the beginning of this discussion. We have not had time tonight to talk about recruiting and retention and the developments that have occurred in those areas. We have not talked about equipment and the need to replenish the equipment that not only the active duty force is using and leaving behind but the National Guard as well.

I know my colleague Mr. COOPER from Tennessee hears, as I do, from returning soldiers and marines about all the equipment that is not coming home that would be available in my part of the country to fight fires and respond to natural disasters, to help on our border in the southern regions. Just recently I had a chance to visit with the Marine Corps leadership; and if I am not mistaken, the number that they shared with me that is necessary to replenish all the equipment that the Marine Corps is leaving behind is on the order of $5 billion, a very significant number.

So I know we want to leave a little bit of time for Mr. SPRATT and Mr. SKELTON to conclude, but I hope that this discussion will continue, particularly that we can focus on the real changes we face when it comes to retention and recruiting; and I know my good friend Mr. SKELTON is well aware of this in the part of our country in the Midwest.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Victory in Iraq is of primary importance. But it is really up to the Iraqi Government, the Iraqi security forces, and the Iraqi people. We are and we have been doing and, of course, we will continue to be of great assistance. The primary importance is that the Iraqis assume more and more of their own security and of their own destiny.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT).

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. SKELTON for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, the mission in Iraq has been plagued from the start by poor intelligence, by poor planning for the post-war, and by disdain for the advice from our allies and even our officials. Ignoring the Army's Chief of Staff, the Secretary of Defense deployed too few troops, failing to foresee the insurgency that followed the war. Many of those deployed were not properly equipped with body armor or armored vehicles, forced to improvise in the field. The troops were assigned duty that they were not trained for. But let me add here they have performed magnificently. They rose to the challenge. They showed they still have that GI genius for field expedience. They improvised.

But the lack of planning and the lack of preparation has cost us dearly; 2,514 Americans have paid the ultimate price: they have died. 17,774 have been seriously wounded.

Since this is the end of the debate, let me go to the bottom line. First of all, let me say the most important cost we have incurred is for the precious lives that were lost, 2,514; 1,774 who were wounded. But the costs also are considerable. They are not a determinant, obviously. We have troops in the field and are unstinting in our support of them. But when the costs run into hundreds of billions of dollars, they have to be considered.

Here is what the cost of the first Persian gulf war was: $61 billion. Of that our allies chipped in in kind $10.6 billion, in cash $48 billion. The total cost to the United States out of pocket was $2.1 billion. That is what happens when you form a real coalition and have allies and do not go it alone.

Here is what happens when you go it alone. This has been the ascending cost of the war in Iraq, Iraqi Freedom: starting out at $51 billion, it rose to $77 billion in 2004, to $87 billion in 2005, and to $100.4 billion this year, the estimated cost. And here is what the cost per month is: $8.4 billion. That is what the current cost works out to. That is a burn rate in Pentagon jargon; $8.4 billion a month is the cost of the war currently.

Finally, adding all of that up, through the year 2006, you can see that the cost of Operation Iraqi Freedom has been $318.5 billion. The cost is not the determinant. We can afford whatever it takes to defend this country. We want to be, as I said, unstinting in support of our troops. But when the cost gets to be $318 billion, $8.4 billion a month, it has to be a consideration. And that is similarly what we are saying tonight.

The President spoke several weeks ago and said that probably his successor in 2010 would be the person who decides whether or not and when American troops would be redeployed. He did not even mention the cost of the current undertaking. It is not just a dollar cost. It is an opportunity cost. For every dollar consumed here is a loss of dollars otherwise that could be spent on modernization and on the transformation of our forces.

Last year when we passed the Defense Authorization Act for 2006, the House and Senate, and the President by signing the bill, enacted a provision that 2006 would be the year of transition, when Iraqi troops would begin to take primary responsibility.

This is simply what we are calling on the President to do, to begin moving us in that direction as we resolved we should have done last year, particularly in view of the cost.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Speaker for allowing us to speak tonight. This is a very, very important debate.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. MANZULLO (at the request of Mr. BOEHNER) for today and June 12 on account of wife's surgery.

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California (at the request of Mr. BOEHNER) for June 12 on account of a travel delay due to a mechanical malfunction.