Mr. Speaker, the U.S. House of Representatives is sinking

to a new low today. What is happening on the floor is not intended to

be an open and honest debate on our policy in Iraq. It is about the

politics of personal destruction--a swift-boat attack by Congressional

Republicans on a 37-year veteran of the Marine Corps for giving his

honest assessment about the situation in Iraq.

Republicans will try to claim--falsely--that this is about an idea,

not a person--but everyone here in this room--whether or not they will

admit it--knows the truth of what is going on today. This is about

changing the subject and dodging responsibility. House Republicans are

exposed and embarrassed by the Senate's recent vote to demand

benchmarks from the White House. The President refuses to level with

the American people on Iraq, or present his ideas, and apparently House

Republicans are of the same mind. They would rather tear someone down.

Our troops--putting their lives on the line--deserve better from this

country. Today is clearly not about these brave men and women. It is

about political attacks.

Jack Murtha is one of the most respected members of the U.S. Congress

on U.S. military policy--an expertise he has built from his first-hand

knowledge of military and defense issues. He is a 37-year veteran of

the Marine Corps, who retired at the rank of colonel in 1990. He is one

of the most respected members of the U.S. Congress on the U.S.

military, on a bipartisan basis. To question Jack Murtha's commitment--

his patriotism to this nation--or our troops is ludicrous. No one has

been as devoted as Jack to our men and women in the military--he's made

weekly visits to Walter Reed, visits to Iraq and has poured over the

Defense Department's own assessments of the situation on the ground in

Iraq.

I will vote against the GOP's characterization of Congressman

Murtha's opinions on Iraq, because I cannot support personal, political

attacks and I believe that we should have a free and open debate on

this issue.