Mr. Speaker, this is an extension of oversight and accountability

related to United States reconstruction funds and efforts in Iraq by

extending the termination date of the Office of Special Inspector

General for Iraq Reconstruction. Mr. Speaker, let me just say to my

colleagues that to some degree this is what I categorize, in my humble

experience as a Representative and a Member of this body, as one of

those thin-air issues. This was an issue which was created out of thin

air by a press corps which I guess was under a direction to come up

with some issues immediately before the last election.

This goes to the expiration of the Inspector General for the

reconstruction money being spent in Iraq. And the initial formulation

was that after 80 percent of that reconstruction money had been spent,

that the time for the Inspector General before he handed it off, handed

off his duties back to the Department of Defense Inspector General who

oversees such funds also, would extend 10 months after 80 percent of

that money had been spent.

Now, as we were putting the defense bill together, and you had a

story that came out of one of the Nation's newspapers, I think it was

the New York Times, that said that somehow somebody had inserted a

provision in this defense bill that they said, that at the last minute

and in the dark of night, that would somehow cut off the Inspector

General and his oversight responsibilities.

And let me just say, Mr. Speaker, that is not the case, and I have

now learned why we have signature sheets on each provision of the

defense bill as it is put together where you have a sign-off by the

Democrats and Republicans on each and every provision.

In August, a month before we finished the defense bill, hardly the

last minute, we inserted what I call a handoff provision, and it simply

said, instead of saying 10 months after 80 percent is spent, and since

in November we had spent already about 75 percent, we almost hit the

threshold, we figured that that meant that 10 months after that was

around October 31 of next year. So we put a date certain, that is,

October 31, in the bill as the handoff date from the Inspector General,

the Special Inspector General, to the Department of Defense IG. So we

wanted to have a date certain.

At that time, and this was done in a very ministerial fashion,

representatives from the Democrat side and the Republican side in the

conference for the other body and for ourselves, four signatures, count

them, four, were attendant to this particular provision. So it wasn't

done in the dark of night and it wasn't done at the last minute; it was

done in the total open after careful review by all parties, and it

simply gave us a date certain for the time that we thought was about

the time that would be 10 months after 80 percent of the funds were

spent.

Now, after a flurry in the press, we got a Member from the other body

who said, ``I knew nothing about this.'' We highly suggest that that

Member read the bill as it was being put together. She said, ``My staff

may have known but I didn't.'' Perhaps the staff of that particular

Member and she should communicate so that she knows what they are

signing. But this is a very ministerial thing. There was no motivation

to try to extend or try to cut off the IG; it was simply assigning a

date certain for the handoff from the Special IG to the DOD IG.

Now, you may ask, well, in that case, why are you supporting this?

Well, I am supporting it for a couple reasons. One, I don't care if we

extend the Inspector General, the Special Inspector General, although I

will object if we end up keeping that team in place after all the money

has been spent and there is nothing for them to do, although that may

give rise to another New York Times story. But I think it is fine; if

they want to have another date certain and if they want to include

additional reconstruction money, which this provision does, that is

additional 2006 money that goes to reconstruction, that is fine also.

So Mr. Speaker, this is one of those thin-air issues that needs to be

put to rest.