Mr. Speaker, I did not support the resolution

authorizing the Iraq war, and I continue to believe it was a mistake,

and that we should redeploy our armed forces out of Iraq as quickly as

possible. Needless to say, I adamantly oppose the President's latest

proposal to escalate the war, the so-called ``surge.''

Now, part of my concern over the Iraq war is that it continues to

distract U.S. policy, both foreign and domestic, from more important

concerns. The threat of international terrorism is real, and it came

home to us vividly after 9/11, but the focal point of our war against

terrorism should be Afghanistan, not Iraq.

While our soldiers continue to die in Baghdad and we spend hundreds

of billions of dollars in Iraq, we are neglecting the situation in

Afghanistan and its environs, particularly Pakistan, where bin Laden,

al Qaeda and the Taliban grow stronger every day.

Mr. Speaker, last Saturday the New York Times did a front page story

on the NATO struggle in Afghanistan, which stressed how the Taliban

were coming back. The likelihood is there will be a new spring

offensive by the Taliban as early as February, next month. The article

went on to say that corrupt and ineffective leadership have turned

people against the central government and its U.S. allies, and that

U.S. reconstruction efforts are a failure.

Mr. Speaker, if there is any place where the United States should be

stepping up its efforts, both in terms of resources and manpower, and

where we would have international support, again, in terms of other

countries' troops as well as other countries' resources and money, it

would certainly be Afghanistan. The U.S. was directly attacked from

there by bin Laden and al Qaeda operatives, and they were of course

harbored by the Taliban.

So you might ask, Mr. Speaker, why does President Bush get on

national TV last week and stress the need for a surge in Baghdad and

reconstruction dollars for Iraq, and not prioritize Afghanistan

instead?

In addition, President Bush continues to appease the military

dictatorship in Pakistan, which effectively encourages and provides

safe harbor in its frontier territories to the Taliban.

President Bush talks about democracy in Iraq, but what about

democracy in Pakistan, which is much more likely to achieve democracy

if the U.S. did not prop up the Musharraf dictatorship.

The media, Mr. Speaker, has reported many times that al Qaeda and the

Taliban operate freely out of Pakistan where they maintain training

camps and receive the support of Pakistan's ISI, the equivalent of the

American CIA.

Last fall, the Pakistan government entered into an agreement with the

Taliban. In return for not conducting raids into Afghanistan, they were

guaranteed effective control of certain frontier regions of Pakistan.

However, the incursions by the Taliban into Afghanistan continue while

the Musharraf government left the Taliban alone in these areas of

Pakistan.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the U.S. has the opportunity for nation-

building in Afghanistan that will continue to elude us in Iraq.

Afghanistan's economy is increasingly dependent on drugs; in other

words, the opium crop which has expanded while the normal economy

falters. Afghanistan needs a major infusion of resources from the

United States and its allies to prevent a Taliban resurgence.

I simply ask, Mr. Speaker, as we debate President Bush's surge in

Baghdad over the next few weeks, think about the alternative in

Afghanistan. Let's not forget where the real U.S. and global threat of

terrorism both started and continues this day.