Mr. Speaker, it is getting to the point where I am

almost afraid to pick up the newspaper every morning because day after

day, there is more grim news out of Iraq and the Middle East. More

revelations about the scandalous mismanagement of this war and its

aftermath. More evidence that the current administration is

jeopardizing our national security.

There has been a lot of rhetoric here on Capitol Hill about who

supposedly does and does not support the troops. I personally believe

we should call a moratorium on ``support the troops'' demagoguery until

the conditions at Walter Reed Hospital finally reach the level that our

veterans deserve.

It is positively disgraceful, Mr. Speaker. After risking life and

limb for our country, our soldiers are sent to a moldy, rodent-infested

facility where they receive inadequate care. And today, we read that

Walter Reed officials were aware of problems and heard complaints, but

largely ignored them.

The squalid living conditions of Walter Reed are just one symptom of

a completely ineffective and unaccountable bureaucracy. According to

the Washington Post, nonEnglish speaking families have a difficult time

getting the information and services they need. One mother of a soldier

said, ``If they could have Spanish-speaking recruits to convince my son

to go into the Army, why can't they have Spanish-speaking translators

when he is injured?'' Her point is telling. It appears that our

government is very eager to sign you up, but much less enthusiastic

about communicating with you once you have been shot down.

Meanwhile, conditions in the Middle East are rapidly deteriorating.

The most disturbing recent news is that the Taliban and al Qaeda,

remember, they are the ones who bear direct responsibility for 9/11,

these folks are on the rebound and they are stepping up the violence in

Afghanistan. They are so emboldened that they launched a suicide bomb

attack right outside the Air Force base where the Vice President was

staying during his recent trip to the region.

Curiously, that same Vice President seems to think it is those of us

who want to end the Iraq occupation that are validating the al Qaeda

strategy. That was the line he used in attacking our Speaker last week.

Well, I think the Vice President isn't in a position to throw stones,

Mr. Speaker. First of all, al Qaeda didn't have anything to do in Iraq

until the administration launched its pre-emptive strike nearly 4 years

ago. Furthermore, it was this administration that had bin Laden sounded

at Tora Bora and let him get away. And it is this administration that

has taken its eye off the ball in Afghanistan, diverting resources from

a nation-building project to pursue the ideological fantasy of

conquering Iraq.

The new director of national intelligence, Mike McConnell, told the

Senate Armed Services Committee this week: ``Long-term prospects for

eliminating the Taliban threat appear dim, so long as the sanctuary

remains in Pakistan, and there are no encouraging signs that Pakistan

is eliminating it.''

And whose fault is that, Mr. Speaker? Not the Speaker of the House.

Unbelievably, when the White House spokesman was asked about the

Pakistani Government's failure to cooperate, he answered: ``We're often

asked to give our report cards on other heads of state. I'm not going

to play.''

We have sure come a long way from the tough talk of 2001. Remember

how we were told that those who harbored terrorists would be treated

just as harshly as the terrorists themselves?

Journalist Spencer Ackerman assesses the Afghanistan situation this

way: ``After two wars, we're in some sense right back where we were

before 9/11 itself: unable to invade the territory where al Qaeda

possesses a stronghold and groping for alternatives, while the

intelligence community puts out warnings about the urgency of the

threat. Except this time,'' he continues, ``our entire national

security apparatus is overtaxed from the strains of two wars, wars that

were supposed

to significantly diminish, if not remove, the very threat that's

regaining strength.

Mr. Speaker, we must not lose our nerve. It is the responsibility of

this body, carrying a mandate from the American people, to correct the

grievous mistakes and reverse the disastrous course of this

administration.

We must devote ourselves to democracy-building, reconstruction and

humanitarian assistance in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must bring our

troops home from Iraq. And once they're home, we must treat them with

the dignity and respect they've earned.