Madam Speaker, ``this is a dangerously wrong-headed

strategy that will drive America deeper into an unwinnable swamp at a

great cost. And if it's carried out it represents the most dangerous

foreign policy blunder in this country since Vietnam.''

This assessment the Bush escalation policy was made by the Republican

Senator from Nebraska, Chuck Hagel--a decorated Vietnam veteran who

originally supported the invasion of Iraq.

And I concur with his observation. But his conclusion should come as

no surprise. After all, this administration's Iraq policy has been a

series of mistakes and bad choices from the beginning.

The Bush/Cheney team was obsessed with Iraq. In fact, according to

former Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill, their very first

National Security Council meeting focused on Saddam and Iraq. Just days

after President Bush was inaugurated. And a map, noting Iraqi oilfields

and potential bidders for oil contracts, was presented for review. That

was in February 2001. Months before 9/11.

We all remember that awful day in September 2001. When America was

attacked by al Qaeda. Not Iraq. But by al Qaeda. Nevertheless, almost

immediately, plans for attacking Iraq were initiated. With the Vice

President as its most vigorous advocate. Secretary Powell is reported

to have observed that the Vice President had ``the fever''--war fever.

Former counterterrorism czar Dick Clarke has described how, even as

the smoke was still rising from 9/11, the administration began looking

for ways to use it to attack Iraq.

The American people were told that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons

of mass destruction. That he was a clear and imminent threat. That he

was an ally of al Qaeda. That if we did not invade Iraq, there could be

mushroom clouds over American cities.

None of that was true. To the contrary, there was plenty evidence

that the secular Baathists of Saddam Hussein's regime and the religious

fanatics of Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda were rivals. In fact bin Laden

had publicly condemned Saddam as an apostate who had corrupted Islam

and repressed Muslims. There was little evidence that Saddam's regime

possessed nuclear or biological weapons, or--even if it did--that it

would share such materials with an uncontrollable group of apocalyptic

terrorists like al Qaeda.

But the administration did not listen to those who knew what they

were talking about. Professionals like Greg Thielmann, the Director of

the strategic, proliferation and military issues office in the State

Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. He told me personally

that in his professional opinion, after years of studying the issue,

Saddam did not have a nuclear weapons program.

Instead, the administration relied on the likes of Ahmed Chalabi. An

embezzler who had been convicted in Jordan of bank fraud. Who is

alleged to have provided Iran with information about U.S. troop

movements. And who is presumably still under investigation by the FBI.

Chalabi provided so-called ``defectors'' from Iraq who--surprise,

surprise--said exactly what the Administration wanted to hear. The most

notorious was codenamed ``Curveball''--how appropriate--and was the

source of the now-discredited claim about a mobile bioweapons program.

The German intelligence agency warned that the man did not live in Iraq

and described him as an ``out of control'' and mentally unstable

alcoholic. It later turned out that he was the brother of one of

Chalabi's top aides. But he was one of the primary sources for

Secretary Powell's statement at the United Nations that convinced many

to support the war.

Furthermore, in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, the

administration told the American people that it would be easy. That we

would be greeted as liberators. That Iraq would pay for its own

reconstruction. And that peace and democracy would flourish.

None of that was true. The American people were sold a bill of goods.

But those of us who raised doubts were ignored. Some even questioned

our patriotism.

But the responsibility for this mess is not the President's alone. It

is shared by the preceding two Congresses, which abdicated their

constitutional responsibility to oversee and review the conduct of the

war and the occupation. We will never know if serious oversight and

insisting on answers over the past 4 years would have made a

difference.

But we do know that thousands of Americans and Iraqis have died.

Billions of American and Iraqi taxpayer dollars have been wasted. The

Middle East is on the verge of a war that could devastate the region

and the global economy. And terrorist groups are multiplying because of

Iraq. Some confuse the war on Iraq with the war on terror. But that

could not be further from reality.

The fact is that the war in Iraq has severely damaged our efforts to

fight al Qaeda and terrorism. That's not just my judgment: that's the

consensus judgment of U.S. intelligence agencies. In April 2006, they

prepared a National Intelligence Estimate. It represents the consensus

judgment of the entire U.S. intelligence community. Here's what it

said:

Meanwhile, the war in Iraq has done nothing to stop al Qaeda and its

affiliates from launching attacks around the world. I refer you to a

Dear Colleague letter sent by two of our Republican colleagues which

clearly describes that reality. It includes a list of attacks that

plainly demonstrates that terrorism is global in nature. While we are

stuck in the sands of Iraq, radical Islamists are launching major

assaults everywhere. Because this Administration, as a result of its

bungled misadventure in Iraq, has hurt our efforts against terrorism.

Remember, we were attacked on September 11, not by Iraq, but by al

Qaeda. Which was based in Afghanistan. And we responded, with worldwide

support, by going to war against al Qaeda and liberating Afghanistan

from al Qaeda's allies, the Taliban. But then what happened? The

administration took its eye off the ball. And invaded Iraq. It's as if

we had responded to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor by invading

Mexico. Even though we had not yet defeated al Qaeda, the

administration pulled intelligence and Special Forces assets from

Afghanistan in order to prepare for the invasion of Iraq. Now we are in

danger of losing Afghanistan to al Qaeda and their Taliban allies.

Enough. As Senator Hagel said, this is ``Alice in Wonderland . . . it

is folly.'' And the American people know it. It's time to get back to

fighting the terrorists. It's time to concentrate on victory in the war

on terror.

Oppose the escalation. Support the resolution.