I thank the gentleman from American Samoa for yielding.

Madam Speaker, I rise to declare my absolute and unwavering

opposition to the President's plan to escalate this tragic and

unnecessary war.

Four years ago, I stood on the floor of this House to oppose the

original force authorization resolution. At the time, some of my

colleagues cautioned me that I was taking a risk by opposing the

President and failing to support the war against terrorism. But I took

that position because I believed then and still believe today that

great nations do not start wars as a matter of policy, they exercise

diplomacy and negotiation to avert threats and achieve security.

The evidence that the administration presented did not clearly

establish any imminent threat to our national security. I was convinced

that invading Iraq, without international support and without

unequivocal evidence that Iraq was involved in 9/11, would dangerously

drain our military strength, distract us from fighting the very real

terrorist threat, and ultimately weaken our credibility around the

world. Now we can see that the world in Iraq has emboldened our enemies

and provoked the scorn of our allies.

Madam Speaker, standing here 4 years later, I can only wish that my

assumptions were wrong, that invading Iraq was somehow vital to our

national security. We were told that there were weapons of mass

destruction, and now we know there were no WMDs. We were told that

Iraqi oil revenue would pay for this war, and now we know that that was

only a pipe dream that has cost American taxpayers over $400 billion.

We were told that our troops would be greeted as liberators, and now we

know that was only wishful thinking based on neocon fantasies and not

the facts.

Today, American troops are embroiled in a bloody quagmire that has

already resulted in over 26,000 American casualties. And now, just this

past week, the Defense Department Inspector General reported that

senior administration officials engaged in a deliberate misinformation

campaign about al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. Now we have learned that

officials in our government deliberately distributed altered

intelligence assessments. Such a misinformation campaign is

unconscionable and a greater threat to our national security than any

act of terrorism.

We are all familiar with the historian's observation that great

nations are not conquered by outside forces until the nation has

destroyed itself from within. I implore my colleagues to heed the

lessons of history. Do not allow the politics of deception to distort

reality.

This administration is denying the facts. It has repeatedly misled

the Congress and the American people and undermined our Nation's

integrity throughout the world. Now the President is asking Congress to

register more support for a policy failure. Escalating the military

violence in Iraq by injecting 21,000 more U.S. troops into a civil war

reflects nothing more than this administration's obstinate refusal to

face present realities.

A vast majority of Americans want a responsible end to this war as

soon as possible. They want our troops redeployed, they want us to

alleviate the suffering of innocent Iraqis, and they want us to finally

tell the Iraqi people that they must be engaged in their country's

destiny. The future of Iraq must ultimately be determined by them, not

by us.

I want to conclude by quoting a good friend of mine and a fellow

colleague, the distinguished chairman of the Armed Forces Committee,

Ike Skelton. In a recent statement he said, ``Only the Iraqis can

change the situation there and bring lasting security to their nation.

I remain convinced that a gradual and responsible redeployment of U.S.

forces is the best way to help the Iraqis take responsibility for their

security and to restore the full strength of our military.''

Sure, we had Democrats on this side supporting it. It

didn't make it right. It certainly didn't make it right. We were given

false information. This Congress and the country was given false

information.