Mr. Speaker, we come tonight again, the group that is

styled the Iraq Watch, or a group of my colleagues and myself who are

committed to continue to bring accountability to this administration's

policies in Iraq, to fulfill Congress' oversight responsibility to not

allow administration mistakes in Iraq to go unheeded and have no

accountability for them; and we are here tonight, and I expect the

gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt) and others will join me in

this discussion.

We have been doing this now for several months; and tonight, as on

many nights, I have great sadness walking over here to speak this

evening. Just as I was leaving my apartment, I saw on the news that we

have lost two more great American warriors in the service of their

country in Iraq, and I do not know who these gallant Americans were. I

do not know where they are from. I do not know what happened to end

their lives in Iraq, but I do know this: those two proud and honorable

Americans deserved a President of the United States who told the truth

to the American people before he started this war that resulted in the

tragedy of these two people losing their lives.

I know that this Congress has a solemn obligation to hold this

administration accountable if, in fact, it is true that this

administration did not tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but

the truth to the American people before this war started; and tonight,

if we seem a bit angry about this situation, it is because on our minds

and on our hearts are the death of these two American soldiers and

those who have gone before and those who will come after.

Our duty, as we see it tonight, is to discuss the manifold failure of

this administration to, one, tell the truth in Iraq; and, two, to

pursue a policy that would reduce the danger to our service personnel

serving in Iraq, and our discussion will proceed on those lines.

Now, let me start, if I can, on this fundamental question: Did the

President of the United States of America fully level with the American

people before he started this war? That is the question. If the answer

is no, we think that is one of the greatest assaults to democracy that

could possibly happen.

There are many things that can go wrong in a democracy, but I would

assert that the most serious affront to democratic principles of a

representative government is for the elected leadership to start a war

based on false information. Nothing, nothing can be a more serious

breach of the solemn obligations when one takes the oath of office than

to start a war based on falsehood, and we are here tonight to answer

the question of whether or not that occurred.

So let me start at the beginning of the Iraq war. The President of

the United States asserted that America should start this war in Iraq

based on two fundamental pillars, and his entire rationale for this war

was based on these two pillars. He was successful in convincing a large

majority of the American people that those two pillars were both

factual, and those two pillars were these two:

Number one, the President asserted that Iraq possessed wholesale

amounts of weapons of mass destruction which presented a threat to the

United States of America and our personal and our family's security. He

told the American people that time after time after time. This

statement was false. This fundamental pillar of this war was false.

This President told us and stood right behind me and told the

American people that we had information, the British had information

that, in fact, Iraq had obtained yellow cake to extract uranium from it

to build a nuclear weapon. That statement was false; and most

importantly, the White House knew it was false. The White House had

been told it was false. The White House had sent an emissary to Africa

to check the accuracy of this statement, and Ambassador Joe Wilson who

served proudly, who the first President Bush described as a hero during

the first Persian Gulf War, came back and told the White House this

statement was false. Two soldiers died today in Iraq based on a

falsehood that was given to the American people that the White House

knew was false. This pillar did not stand.

The President of the United States told us that Iraq had drones that

could fly across the Atlantic, apparently, and spray Americans with

biological and chemical weapons, and this scared the living pants off

people in America who heard this, as it should have, and as the White

House knew that it would. Unfortunately, now that reports are peeled

away, we have found out that even our own Air Force told the White

House this statement was false; that they were kind of balsam wood

things meant to take pictures of troop movements and the like.

So the first pillar upon which the President of the United States

sent soldiers to their death was false. So let us examine the second

pillar, if I can, for a moment, and then I will yield to the gentleman

from Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt).

The second pillar upon which the President's scaffolding of falsehood

was built was a clear assertion that led to a significant majority,

seven out of 10 Americans, to believe that Iraq was associated, was

behind the attack on this country of September 11, and the President

was successful, again, in creating this impression. He was successful

in convincing seven out of 10 Americans that Saddam Hussein was behind

these heinous, vile, indeed evil, attacks on America of 9/11. But it

was not true. It was not true.

Now, we know it was not true because a bipartisan commission has come

back and stated categorically there is no credible evidence; and I want

to read the quote to make sure I get it right: ``We have no credible

evidence that Iraq and al Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the

United States.''

Yet, seven out of 10 Americans were convinced by this White House

that Saddam Hussein was behind these attacks on America. Where did

Americans get that misimpression? Did they get it from Dan Rather? Did

they get it from the New York Times? Did they get it from the Shopping

Channel? No. They got it from the President of the United States, who

led these people to

believe that Iraq was behind this attack and that these folks were in

an alliance with Iraq who attacked us.

Let us look at what the President said. The President is saying,

well, no, I did not really mean to say that. Golly gee, I did not mean

to suggest or lead anybody to believe that Saddam was evil enough to

have attacked us actually or that he was an ally. I just sort of

suggested they talked to one another at some period of time. Well, look

at what the President said in fact.

In fact, the President, while he was on the deck of the aircraft

carrier Abraham Lincoln, declaring the mission accomplished, several

hundred dead Americans ago, he said the defeated Hussein was ``an ally

of al Qaeda.'' An ally of al Qaeda. Is the President now to have us

believe that he said that Saddam was an ally of al Qaeda, but he did

not mean to suggest they actually helped each other? Is that what he

expects us to believe? That is very difficult to swallow.

The Secretary of State Colin Powell told the United Nations that al

Qaeda was operating inside of Iraq, inside of Iraq. It turns out we

find out ``inside of Iraq'' means they were in the Kurdish-controlled

area that was inside our no fly zone. Now, are we supposed to know

that?

And yet the President of the United States just left out

that little fact that they were in the part of Iraq that Saddam did not

control when he discussed this issue.

Now, this omission has led many people to be very concerned, even

those who have supported President Bush. I note this editorial in the

Dallas Morning News of June 22, 2004. This is a newspaper that

supported President Bush's election. In fact, they noted that in this

editorial, and they have listened to the administration's response to

the 9/11 Commission. They have listened to this sort of excuse-making

that has come out of the White House to try to excuse this. But look

what the Dallas Morning News, a newspaper that has supported President

Bush, said.

It said, ``U.S. troops have found no Iraqi weapons of mass

destruction, and the 9/11 panel says there was no working partnership

between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. President Bush presented both WMD

and the al Qaeda-Hussein link as reasons for striking Iraq before it

attacks us.

``The President has a credibility gap here, and he needs to address

it right away. Vice President Dick Cheney tried but failed miserably.

He said, in effect, `we know more than you and you better trust us.' ''

And then, I might have to subscribe to the Dallas Morning News,

because I think in the next paragraph they hit the nail on the head.

``The country did just that when we went to the war in Iraq, but things

aren't working as promised. The administration needs to respond with

specifics, not like members of a secret society with keys to the

kingdom.''

But the unfortunate truth is there really is nothing the

administration can now say to excuse the fact that they gave us false

information to start the war.

Let me note just one other quote. Vice President Cheney, who is now

saying we did not really intend to imply that there was a working

relationship between al Qaeda and Iraq, we did not mean to say that,

but what did Vice President Cheney say before the war started? He said

on Meet the Press that by attacking Iraq, ``We will have struck a major

blow right at the heart of the base, if you will, the geographic base

of the terrorists who had us under assault now for years, but most

especially on 9/11.''

Now, obviously the vice president was trying to create an impression

that we were going to be striking back at the people who struck us on

September 11. That is the obvious implication of his language. I do not

think he was simply trying to point out that Iraq is in the Middle

East. I do not think it was a geographic lesson he was trying to give

us. He was trying to build support for a war that was based on two huge

falsehoods, one falsehood about weapons of mass destruction and another

about this alleged working relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda.

Now, there are connections between Iraq and al Qaeda. They both have

``Q'' in their names, but the 9/11 Commission concluded there was no

working relationship between these two groups.

Let me mention one thing, and I will yield to the gentleman from

Ohio. In fact, what the 9/11 Commission, again, a bipartisan

commission, chaired by the former New Jersey governor, Republican

governor, bipartisan group, what they concluded was that years back,

back in 1994, Osama bin Laden had, in fact, asked Iraq for help but had

been rejected.

Now, that may be a contact, but it is not a basis for a war, and it

is most unfortunate now that even today this White House will not come

clean about their manifest falsehoods that they gave us. And until they

do, we will be here blowing the whistle on these falsehoods.

Let me suggest, and the gentleman brings up a very

important point, it has been called a stop loss order, but it really is

a start the draft order. This is a silent draft. These people are being

drafted into service they did not sign up for. They signed up for a

definite term and they are now being drafted. They happen to be in Iraq

right now, but we are already seeing the implications of the policy as

the gentleman has addressed. It comes back and again the Dallas Morning

News called it the Iraq Trust Gap, this is the President and his neocon

colleagues who were telling us that this war would be simple, we would

be welcomed with rose petals, our people would be home in a reasonable

period of time, it would not stress our military, we only needed

100,000 troops, there would not be massive looting after we had this

amount, there would not be casualties after a period of time, the

mission was accomplished back in May 2003.

All of these things are appropriately creating a trust gap not only

for the President, but for the United States.

I have got to add just one more thing before I go to the

gentleman from Massachusetts. Another thing the administration did in

not finding Osama bin Laden, in not cutting off the head of al Qaeda, I

got a letter today, because I was trying to investigate, I asked the

Department of Treasury, is it true that the administration 2 days after

September 11, allowed a chartered jet airplane to fly around America

picking up Osama bin Laden's relatives and flying them out of the

country before they were fully interrogated and debriefed about the

potential relationship with Osama and al Qaeda and over 100 Saudi

citizens where now we know the attack emanated from? They answered,

yes, that is true. Our administration, when no one else could fly in

America, people were stranded here, had to drive across America to get

home from Washington, D.C., but while you had to drive home from

Washington, D.C., the President of the United States, the

administration, told all the Saudi Arabians, we will let you fly,

without even talking to the CIA or the Department of Treasury to find

out if they were associated with this.

They said, indeed, that was true. I asked them, why is that? They

frankly could not give me an answer. That is just one problem we have

got.

I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to attempt to answer

the question why we are in Iraq rather than Iran, and the answer is

because we have an administration who is willing to follow their

ideology rather than the evidence. They are willing to say things as

long as it is consistent with their ideological beliefs even if it is

inconsistent with the facts as given to them by our intelligence

agents.

Let me give an example. The Vice President now for 2 years has just

kept spouting this statement that the reason we should invade Iraq is

because there was a meeting, one of the reasons, because there was a

meeting between Mohammed Atta and an Iraqi intelligence person in

Prague.

Mr. Speaker, so he has been saying this over and over

again in city and town and ``Meet the Press'' and who knows where else.

And what did the bipartisan commission conclude about this key of his

whole argument that Saddam Hussein had a working alliance with al

Qaeda? They concluded: ``We have examined the allegation that Atta met

with an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague on April 9. Based on the

evidence available, including investigations by Czech and U.S.

authorities, plus detainee reporting, we do not believe that such a

meeting'' occurred.

So despite the best intelligence of the United States of America, the

Vice President is willing to continue to spout something that is false,

according to our best intelligence, in order to back up this

ideological fixation of invading Iraq. That is why we are in this war,

because we have an administration willing to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure the good gentleman from

Hawaii can share some wisdom.

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, let me make a

suggestion. There might be a reason the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr.

Abercrombie) might have trouble understanding Mr. Wolfowitz.

Or accepting his explanation, is I suspect the gentleman

from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie) does not share Mr. Wolfowitz's belief

that it does not matter that this war was started, based and started on

a falsehood. I suspect the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie)

agrees with me that when you look in the eyes of a young widow, as I

have, who lost their husband as a result of this multitude of

falsehoods by this administration, it matters a whole heck of a lot.

And this administration is now trying to demean and belittle the fact

that they started a war based on falsehood, and they think that

Americans are just going to forget it, and somehow we are supposed to

forget the incompetence, the rank incompetence, the multitude of

tactical, logistical, strategic mistakes they made time after time, of

total ignorance about the cultural situation in Iraq, about the looting

we knew was going to happen, and somehow we are supposed to forgive and

forget that.

Reclaiming my time, I may note that the people who are

responsible for the mistake of not putting enough troops in Iraq to

quell the looting that was sure to occur, the people who made the

mistakes about assessing the threat level posed by Iraq, the people who

did not provide body armor to our soldiers when they went to war

without adequate flak jackets, the people who sent our soldiers into

the streets of Baghdad in canvas-lined Humvees instead of armored

personnel carriers, who ignored the fact that we were going to need to

protect our soldiers against these improvised explosive devices, the

people who have made all of these mistakes are still the people in

charge of our policy in Iraq. Not one person in the civilian hierarchy

of the Bush administration who is responsible for these massive foul-

ups that have cost hundreds of lives has lost their job or a day's

vacation as a result of these foul-ups.

Of course, I am referring to the Secretary of Defense,

who is the primary architect for this, and Mr. Wolfowitz, who is an

architect of this. These are the decision makers that should be held

accountable for these foul-ups. I hope the gentleman from Ohio (Mr.

Strickland) agrees with me.

Reclaiming my time, there is an element of this

expenditure that is grossly wrong, and that is the most polite sense I

can say it. The General Accounting Office, the nonpartisan group that

basically looks at the financial system of the country, concludes that

the United States misspent, meaning this administration, misspent at

least $1 billion in Iraq in the Iraq war to date, and that was as of

June 16. They made reference to multiple cases of the Halliburton

Corporation misspending millions of dollars of taxpayer money.

Let me give you one very small example of how Halliburton Corporation

misspent taxpayer money. Halliburton, of course, is the company that

got a sole source provider bid; a company that the vice president just

recently has been CEO of, they did not send it out to bid to any other

corporations, gave a special deal to Halliburton, and look what

Halliburton did with your money.

Before the war, a Kuwaiti firm had the contract to provide meals to

troops at four bases in Kuwait. Just before the fighting started, and

this is from the General Accounting Office, not some leftist group

saying this, just before the fighting started, the Pentagon turned the

job over to Halliburton subsidiary KBR, Kellogg Brown and Root. As part

of the switch, the costs went up from $3 a meal to $5 a meal, for the

cost, from $3 to $5.

So, here is just one small example that happened thousands of times

where the American taxpayers got gouged $1 billion, much of which went

to the Halliburton company on a sole source contract.

If this does not smell like a mackerel in the moonlight, I do not

know what does.

Well, yes. In fact, we have spent millions of dollars of

taxpayers' money looking for that, but they apparently do not exist.

Now, let me suggest one thing that the President of the United States

could have done to help his fellow Americans when we made a decision

whether or not to go to war. He could have leveled with the American

people. He could have told the American people that to the best of our

knowledge there is no credible evidence that Saddam Hussein was

responsible for the heinous, evil attack on America of September 11. He

has talked to the American people probably six times a day for the last

2 years, and this President has never said that. This is wrong. We

intend to maintain accountability for this administration.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for joining me tonight for

the Iraq Watch, which will continue on other nights.