I would just say to my friend from Washington State,

why is this important? And the American people may be asking why we

stand here and talk about the decisions in the past that led to this

war, and I would just simply say it is important, because we have lost

somewhere in the vicinity of 850 precious American lives. We have well

over 4,000 precious American soldiers who have been terribly wounded.

Many of them have lost their arms and their legs and their sight, and

they have been damaged for the rest of their lives. That is why it is

important.

And it is important, because the same people, the same people who

took us into this war based, as was said, on false assumptions and

false premises are the same people who are still in charge and who are

making decisions for what is happening right now and want to be in

power to make decisions about what happens next year and the year after

that and the year after that. That is why it is important for the

American people to understand what has happened, because we need a

change of leadership.

Before I yield to my friend from Massachusetts, just let me say this.

There may be people who observe this debate and feel somehow

disconnected from this war. They may have no one fighting in Iraq that

they love or are related to or even know, but if they have got

children, if there are parents watching who have 13, 14, 15, 17-year-

old sons and daughters, they ought to pay attention to this debate,

because we have stretched our military so thin, and that is why we are

extending the months of service for our National Guardspersons and our

Reserve persons.

We do not have the capacity, in my judgment, to really respond to

something if it happens in Iran, or in North

Korea. What are we going to do? I will tell you what we are going to do

if this administration gets another term. We are going to have to

impose a military draft. If we impose a military draft, the next time

there are not going to be the exceptions that many of us had available

to us in years past. There will not be exceptions for educational

studies, I do not believe, something that I took advantage of and that

Vice President Dick Cheney took advantage of.

So the parents in this country need to be watching this debate. If

they have got children and they do not want their sons and daughters to

be subject to a military draft, then they ought to be involved and

engaged in what is happening in the United States of America today,

because our military is stretched thin. We do need more troops in Iraq,

as General Shinseki warned us many, many months ago, before he was

pushed aside and mocked, and quite frankly, made fun of and ridiculed

by the Vice President and others in this administration.

That is why I have constituents, we all have constituents, who have

been pulled from their communities, separated from their families, sent

to Iraq, expecting to be there for a limited, set period of months. And

now what are they being told? They are being told, we have got a stop

loss policy in place. You cannot even leave to return home or to leave

the service when your contractual obligation is up, because we simply

do not have a sufficient number of men and women in our Armed Forces.

That is the sad truth that we face as we debate this tonight.

I want to read another paragraph or two from the

Dallas Morning News. This is no left-wing newspaper. This is the Dallas

Morning News, a major newspaper in the President's home State. They

said at the beginning of their editorial:

What happened is this, that the American people and this Congress

were given information that was false and we were encouraged to believe

something that was not true. There is no evidence that Saddam Hussein,

as bad as he was, as evil and despicable as he was, had anything to do

with the attack upon the United States of America. And the American

people needed to know that before our sons and daughters were sent to

war in Iraq. It is true that Osama bin Laden was responsible. It is

true the Taliban were responsible. That is why every Member of this

Chamber, save one, supported our decision to go to war in Afghanistan.

We supported the overthrow of the Taliban. Many of us have been

calling for months for an increased effort to find, apprehend or kill

Osama bin Laden. He was the one who orchestrated the attack upon this

country, and tonight he is roaming free somewhere on the face of this

earth planning the next attack. Can we imagine that if we had taken the

resources and put the effort into finding Osama bin Laden that we have

invested in Iraq, do any of us believe that we would not have found

this man and have put him out of business?

I think it is beyond question that if we had put the resources into

finding Osama bin Laden and fighting al Qaeda, we would not be worrying

tonight about what that man may be planning in terms of the next attack

upon our Nation. But we did not do that. We diverted resources to Iraq

and consequently the real enemy, the real threat to our country, is

roaming free this very night.

Mr. Speaker, former Governor Kean, the Chair of the

9/11 Commission, a Republican, a highly respected Republican ex-

Governor, has said, and he said it over the weekend, I heard him, that

there were many more reasons to believe there was a connection between

al Qaeda and Iran.

Mr. Speaker, that is a question that needs to be

explored. And, quite frankly, now we know that Iran apparently is going

to pursue their nuclear capabilities. And what are we going to do about

it? What are we going to do about it? With 135,000 troops bogged down

in Iraq, how can we pose a credible threat to Iran to try to get them

not to pursue nuclear capabilities?

I think we have overextended ourselves, we are exhausting our troops,

and we are putting ourselves in great jeopardy as a Nation. And our

national

security is in jeopardy, I believe, because we have overextended

ourselves; we have miscalculated in Iraq. And we will find ourselves

hard pressed to meet a threat anywhere else on Earth if we were in need

of a significant number of troops anywhere else. And I think that is a

serious problem that this entire Chamber should be addressing.

Mr. Speaker, let me say this, if I may. Some people

think if you repeat something often enough even if it is not true,

people will come to believe that it is true.

The big lie theory. And the fact is that this is

being repeated over and over and over in the face of evidence of this

bipartisan commission that it is simply not true. Why would a member of

this administration continue to say something to the American people

that is not true?

Mr. Speaker, would the gentleman let me say a word

about Mr. Wolfowitz, since he brought up his name? He is, in fact, one

of the architects of this war, as we know. He is the Deputy Secretary

of Defense. And I was appalled a few weeks ago when he was asked how

many American soldiers we had lost in Iraq, and this man who pursued

this war and who is the Deputy Secretary of Defense did not know. He

implied that there may be about 500 who had been killed. At that time

there had been 721. Every morning when Mr. Wolfowitz wakes up, he ought

to be thinking about the soldiers who have been lost over there. And I

am sorry I interrupted my friend.

If the gentleman will yield, I think the reason they

have not lost their jobs is because these decisions were made at the

very highest levels of this administration. I do not think we can blame

the lowly bureaucrats. I think the people in the highest positions of

decision making in this administration are responsible. So, are they

going to fire themselves? Probably not.

Yes, I agree.

Now, if I can just make an observation: I think the American people

would accept from this administration, from the President, a statement

that things have not gone just the way they hoped they would go; that

perhaps mistakes have been made.

What I think the American people will not accept is a continuation of

a failed policy that grows out of an unwillingness or an inability to

accept responsibility for mistakes, to admit those mistakes, and to

change course.

Quite frankly, I believe it takes strength and courage to admit a

mistake. What I see from this administration is a stubbornness and an

arrogance that is unwilling to admit even one mistake.

My friend mentions sending our troops into Iraq without body armor.

The war started in March of 2003. It was March 2004, March of this

year, before all of our troops were provided with body armor. I ask,

how many troops were unnecessarily wounded and how many lost their

lives simply because of the incompetence of those at the Pentagon who

sent them into battle without this protection?

Right tonight, as the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie), the

gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt), my friend the gentleman

from Washington (Mr. Inslee) and myself stand here in this Chamber,

there are soldiers driving around in Baghdad and in other cities in

Iraq who are using Humvees that are not armored Humvees, and many of

them are being injured by driving over roadside bombs, and, because

those Humvees are not armored, they are being seriously wounded and in

some cases losing their lives. Somebody ought to be held accountable

for that.

If we are going to send our troops into battle, the very least we can

do as a government is to make sure that everything we can do to give

them adequate equipment and proper protection is done. For us not to do

that is shameful.

If the gentleman will yield further, can I say

something? I know our time is coming to an end, but the gentleman from

Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt) talked about building roads and bridges

and hospitals and schools in Iraq, neglecting our own domestic needs.

If I can quickly share an example of how this administration seems to

prefer Iraqis over Americans.

As we all have heard, Secretary Rumsfeld wants to compensate the

Iraqi prisoners who were abused in the Abu Ghraib prison. I do not have

any problem with that. But I do have a problem with this: Seventeen

American POWs that were tortured in that same prison, they were

tortured with electricity, they were threatened with castration, they

were threatened with suicide, their bones were broken, they went to

court and sued Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime and a court gave

them compensation. This administration appealed that decision, fought

the American POWs, and a newspaper in my region read like this. They

said it was the United States of America and Saddam Hussein versus

American POWs, and the United States and Saddam Hussein won.

What is good for the goose is good for the gander. If Secretary

Rumsfeld wants to compensate the Iraqi prisoners, the American ex-POWs

deserve equal compensation.