Mr. Speaker, Scooter Libby was arraigned this morning,

and the Bush administration defenders continue to insist that the

administration of the CIA leak was ``much ado about nothing.''

They say that the crime of perjury and obstruction of justice are

mere technicalities, nothing to worry our heads over. Ha.

Let us leave aside the obvious hypocrisy. We all know that there was

quite a hue and cry over perjury in this town 7 years ago when the

President's party was on the outside of the White House looking in.

Dare I say, the underlying issue at that time was just a little more

frivolous than the matters of life, death and war that are at the heart

of the current episode.

More importantly, of course, Scooter Libby's lies matter. Libby's

lies are exactly what is keeping us from knowing the truth about the

original crime, the outing of a covert CIA operative as part of a

campaign to scare the Nation into a war based on the lie that Saddam

Hussein was poised to use nuclear weapons on the United States.

Columnist E.J. Dionne makes the important and distressing point: the

Scooter Libby cover-up was successful.

You see, 1 year and 1 day ago, the President was reelected by a

narrow margin. Why does that matter? Because Libby is stonewalling. His

tall tale about having learned about Valerie Plame's status from

gossiping reporters was all about gumming up the investigation just

long enough so that the clock would run out on the last campaign

season. It was all about ensuring that Americans went to the polls last

year with very limited knowledge of this scandal.

As we analyze the legal maneuvers and intrigue, as we try to read

between the lines of Scooter Libby's bizarre letters to Judy Miller,

let us not lose sight of the big picture. Right now, there are some

140,000 loyal, patriotic, courageous Americans who have been separated

from their families and are prepared to die, all because the neo-con's

cabal had it in for Saddam Hussein. Over 2,000 of their fellow soldiers

have already made the ultimate sacrifice, and I have no doubt that

those men and women would be alive today if not for the trumped-up

intelligence and the campaign of deceit.

I had the privilege of talking with our soldiers when I was in Iraq a

month ago, and you could not ask for a finer, more committed group of

young people. I came away from those conversations full of pride but

also profound sadness, because the men and women on the front lines

have dutifully entrusted their lives to cynics and ideologues like

Scooter Libby. They deserve so much better. They deserve civilian

superiors who are at least as honorable as they are.

Even as we never forget the lies that got us into this war, I am even

more concerned about how we are going to get out. There are ways to do

this while still keeping Iraq secure, while helping build its

democratic institutions and its economic infrastructure. I held a

hearing earlier this fall where we discussed such ideas in detail.

We can appeal to the U.N. and to NATO to establish an interim

security force in Iraq. We can launch a diplomatic offensive, helping

establish an international peace commission that can coordinate peace

talks between Iraq's various factions and oversee the post-war

reconciliation process.

But the President does not want to be part of this conversation. All

he has to offer is the same old rhetoric about staying the course and

completing the mission. But how do you win a war against an enemy that

grows more resilient with each passing day because your occupation

appears to be occupiers of their land? One military commander put it

best: He said that ``for every insurgent I kill, I create three more.''

Enough is enough, Mr. Speaker. The current Iraq policy is a bloody,

destructive, dead end. We have paid way too high a price already. It is

time to honor our troops. It is time to bring them home.