Mr. Speaker, it was approximately a year ago, in fact I

think it was better than a year ago now, that myself, a number of my

colleagues, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Hoeffel), the

gentleman from Washington (Mr. Inslee), the gentleman from Ohio (Mr.

Strickland), and, of course, the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr.

Abercrombie) took to the floor to express our concerns about what was

transpiring in the Middle East, with a special focus on Iraq. We have

done that on a rather regular basis over the course of the past year,

and we have come to call this hour the ``Iraq Watch,'' where we have a

discussion among ourselves for the benefit of those that are viewing

our conversation through C-SPAN.

At the very beginning, we expressed our concern that American

credibility was at stake, as well, of course, as providing an

opportunity to observe the competence of this White House in terms of

its conduct of the war in Iraq. And, tragically, unfortunately, many of

our concerns have materialized.

I think every American remembers rather clearly the multiple

statements, not just from the President and the Vice President, but

from every single official representing the administration, whether

from the Department of Defense, the Department of State, clearly from

the White House, wherein they articulated the rationale for the

military intervention in Iraq based on two particular concerns. One, of

course, was expressed by the President and others when he continued to

state that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and

that a nuclear weapons program was underway and that at any time we

could be faced with the vision of a mushroom cloud somewhere in the

world, specifically in the United States.

Well, I think there is a consensus among the American people and

among Members of this institution, as well as a number of members of

the administration that that particular basis for the military

intervention in Iraq, the concern about weapons of mass destruction,

did not materialize, and that the intelligence was faulty.

It was the former United Nations' inspector, David Kay, who received

plaudits and kudos and respect, and deservedly so, from Members on both

sides of the aisle, when he was designated by this administration to

travel to Iraq and to develop a cadre of experts to assist him in the

discovery of where those weapons of mass destruction were located.

I am sure many Americans remember the Secretary of Defense, Donald

Rumsfeld, indicating that we knew where those weapons were; that they

were around the Tikrit area and outside of Baghdad. Well, of course,

again, that intelligence did not produce the location, and the

statement of Mr. Kay later was that Saddam Hussein did not have weapons

of mass destruction. In fact, he did not have a nuclear weapons

program.

In testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, he

made a statement that was emblazoned on the front page of Newsweek

Magazine, which has been repeated again and again, and that statement

was: ``We were all wrong.'' ``We were all wrong.'' There was also a

statement from a newspaper published in Great Britain that I think is

worth repeating, and it is a statement made by David Kay. ``The former

chief inspector warned yesterday that the United States is in grave

danger of destroying its credibility at home and abroad if it doesn't

own up to the mistakes it's made in Iraq.''

And while there has been some acknowledgment that the weapons of mass

destruction that purportedly existed in Iraq are not there, there never

has been a definitive statement coming from the White House that would

support the conclusion reached by Mr. Kay.

In fact, the Vice President, Mr. Cheney, stated that the weapons of

mass destruction might still be found in Iraq; and Mr. Kay's response

was, ``What worries me about Cheney's statement is I think people will

hold out for a hail Mary pass, delay the inevitable, looking back at

what went wrong and believe we have enough evidence now to say that the

intelligence process and the policy process,'' I repeat that, ``the

policy process that used that information did not work at the level of

effectiveness that we require in the age that we live in.''

Well, I think all Americans, or most Americans, know that there are

no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Of course the other most prominent rationale for the military

intervention in Iraq was a purported relationship between Saddam

Hussein and the terrorist organization that we all know so well, al

Qaeda.

In fact, in a letter sent to the Speaker of the House and the

President of the Senate just prior to the invasion of Iraq and signed

by the President, the President puts forth in what I would submit is

rather clear and unequivocal terms that, ``I determine,'' this is

President Bush, ``that reliance on the United States of further

diplomatic and other peaceful means alone will neither adequately

protect the national security of the United States against the

continuing threat posed by Iraq nor likely lead to enforcement of all

relevant National Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq, and

acting pursuant to the Constitution and the public law,'' which this

Congress passed authorizing that military intervention, ``is consistent

with the United States and other countries continuing to take the

necessary actions against international terrorists and terrorist

organizations, including those nations,'' the clear implication being

the nation of Iraq, ``organizations or persons who planned, authorized,

committed or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11,

2001, the date of our national tragedy.''

Well, recently a report was issued by the so-called 9/11 Commission,

which was the subject of much debate and discussion over the course of

this past weekend. I think it is important to explore in some detail

that report and have a conversation about those allegations that were

used by this White House as a rationale for the invasion of Iraq.

Let me read from the pertinent section of the report. The report

reviews the activities of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, and now I am

quoting from the report: ``A small group of al Qaeda operatives

subsequently traveled to Iran and Hezbollah camps in Lebanon for

training in explosives, intelligence, and security. Bin Laden

reportedly showed particular interest in Hezbollah's truck bombing

tactics in Lebanon in 1983 that killed 241 United States Marines. We

have seen strong, by indirect, evidence that his organization did in

fact play some,'' as yet unknown, ``role in the Kobar attack.''

Let me repeat that again for emphasis. Osama bin Laden went to Iran,

went to Iran and Hezbollah camps in Lebanon, in Lebanon.

Now, again reading from the report, ``bin Laden also explored

possible cooperation with Iraq during his time in Sudan,'' in Sudan,

``despite his opposition to Hussein's secular regime.'' Bin Laden in

fact at one time sponsored anti-Saddam Islamists in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Sudanese to protect their own ties with Iraq reportedly persuaded

bin Laden to cease the support and arrange for contacts between Iraq

and al Qaeda. A senior Iraqi intelligence officer reportedly made three

visits to Sudan, finally meeting bin Laden in 1994. This is some 3

years after the first gulf war. Bin Laden is said to have requested

space to establish training camps as well as assistance in procuring

weapons but Iraq apparently never responded. There have been reports

that contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda also occurred after bin Laden

had returned to Afghanistan, but they do not appear to have resulted in

a collaborative relationship. Two senior bin Laden associates have

adamantly denied that any ties existed between al Qaeda and Iraq. We

have no credible evidence that Iraq and al Qaeda cooperated on attacks

against the United States.

Those two senior Iraqi operatives were captured. One was captured

last July. He was a al Anni who reportedly had a meeting with Muhammed

Atta in the Czech Republic, in Prague, back in April 2001. Much has

been made of that particular encounter. Both the CIA and the FBI

concluded that that meeting never occurred. Yet we continue to hear it,

particularly from the Vice President. He cannot let go, it would

appear.

Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to hearing his

response. I would be happy to engage.

We are dear friends.

I look forward to that. If I am not here in the

Chamber, that does not mean that I am not

watching it on C-SPAN. But I can assure the gentleman we will be back

here tomorrow night to respond to his response and correct any

unintentional mistakes that he makes in the course of his response.

With that, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

We can make it a 2-hour conversation. I think that

would be informative and hopefully educational.

Mr. Speaker, again, I think it is absolutely critical

to understand that there is no one that is unhappy with the removal of

Saddam Hussein from power. But the question that we are posing here

tonight is the allegation that there was a collaborative relationship

between al Qaeda and the Saddam Hussein Iraqi regime. And what we are

talking about is the credibility of the White House, the President,

and, therefore, the United States.

As I said earlier, we discovered what happened when it came to the

issue of weapons of mass destruction, and here we are again, even after

the report by the 9-11 Commission, even after a statement by David Kay,

not only relating to the issue of weapons of mass destruction, but the

relationship between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to this continuing

conversation this evening. Again, the report refers to contacts that

were made back in 1994. If we talk about contacts, it was the Bush

administration, the Bush One administration, that had contacts with

Saddam Hussein that dated back from 1982 when he was removed from the

terrorist list, when there was an embassy installed in Baghdad, when we

provided him with intelligence, when we provided him with the

ingredients for weapons of mass destruction, when we transferred to

him, when we transferred to him, dual-use technologies.

I have a chart behind me that would establish without any doubt

whatsoever, it is a CRS report, that in the 1980s, we had multiple

contacts, and we should not be surprised that in 1990, it was

discovered that he had a nuclear weapons program because it was the

then-Bush administration and its predecessor that provided the

components to do exactly that. The contacts that the gentleman from

Indiana refers to occurred in 1994, and it was as a result of a request

from the government of Sudan, where Osama bin Laden was living. The

Iraqi official that visited Saddam Hussein heard what he had to say,

returned to Iraq, and there was no further contact.

Mr. Speaker, if I could, because I want to respond to

my friend from Indiana, because I know that he holds in high regard

David Kay, who was selected by the administration to go to Iraq and

review the various assertions and the concerns that they had about

weapons of mass destruction as well as a relationship between Saddam

Hussein and al Qaeda, and this is a statement that appeared today in

fact in The Boston Globe and it quotes David Kay: ``'At various times

al Qaeda people came through Baghdad and in some cases resided there,'

said David Kay, former head of the CIA's Iraq survey group, which

searched for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and links to terrorism,

'but we simply did not find any evidence of extensive links with al

Qaeda or, for that matter, any real links at all.' ''

He was referencing the statement by the Vice President. Again,

``Cheney's speech is evidence-free,'' Kay said. ``It is an assertion,

but does not say why we should believe this now.''

Mr. Speaker, I yield to my friend, the gentleman from Pennsylvania

(Mr. Hoeffel).

If I may reclaim my time, the reality is that this

administration, a week after the inauguration, according to a very fine

Republican by the name of Paul O'Neill, former Secretary of the

Treasury, had an extensive discussion about Iraq at the first meeting

of the National Security Council and why it should be targeted.

I have a long list of quotes from administration officials and others

that were there that can provide firsthand evidence. What I found

particularly disturbing, however, according to Paul O'Neill, a good,

fine, conservative Republican who was the CEO of a fine American

corporation called Alcoa, was that on February 27, months before 9/11,

at a National Security Council meeting, there was a map laid out; and

there was a discussion among the principals about how the oil fields in

Iraq would be divvied up between nations and between various

corporations. I commend to my friend, and I know he must have a copy of

that book, it is called ``The Price of Loyalty.''

On page 96, I will not bore him and those who are watching us here

tonight with reading it, but I believe somebody owes the American

people and this Congress, Republicans and Democrats, an explanation of

why months before

9/11, months before 9/11, months before there was any discussion about

weapons of mass destruction or links, if you will, between al Qaeda and

Saddam Hussein, we are talking about war.

I would remind my friend from Indian of the 11th

amendment.

That Republicans do not criticize Republicans. I will

have to defend Paul O'Neill.

Again, because we have a good discussion going here

tonight, I think it is important for all those that are watching,

because we will chew right into our friend's time too, I think it is

important here tonight that the American people understand that this is

good discourse. This is the kind of debate that this institution needs.

Despite the fact that we have disparate views and profound

disagreements, the reality is that we do have mutual respect, and in

the case of the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. Burton) we have affection.

I am not going to repeat the praise I gave to the

gentleman from Indiana (Mr. Burton). Only once he gets the kudos.

While the gentleman might disagree with Paul O'Neill, the former

Secretary of the Treasury who was appointed, obviously, by this

President, I wonder if he disagrees with an observation or an anecdote

that was related by Bob Woodward just recently in the book that is on,

I understand, the President's Web site, where, again, I am quoting from

the book. I do not want in any way to infer that this is coming from me

or any of my Democratic colleagues.

But in response to this desire for war against Iraq, Bob Woodward

writes, ``Powell thought that Cheney had the fever. The Vice President

and Wolfowitz kept looking for the connection between Hussein and

September 11th. It was a separate little government that was out there.

Wolfowitz, Libby, Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith and Feith's

gestapo office, as Powell privately called it. Cheney now had an

unhealthy fixation. Nearly every conversation or reference came back to

al Qaeda and trying to nail down the connection with Iraq. He would

often have an obscure piece of intelligence. Powell thought that

Cheney,'' Powell not, not O'Neill, ``took intelligence and converted

uncertainty and ambiguity into fact. A conversation would suggest

something might be happening, and Cheney would convert that into a we

know. Powell,'' not O'Neill, ``Powell concluded we didn't know and no

one knew.''

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie).

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I think it is

important to note that. Again, I am not sure about whether it was an

aspirin factory, but I think what is really important is the point that

the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie) just made about oversight.

It is clear that there are no weapons of mass destruction. It is

clear that the kind of relationship that has been suggested by the

administration, particularly the Vice President and the President, does

not exist. It is, I dare say, hurting our credibility.

We come to this as Americans. You know that, I know that, and we all

know that. And this information comes from a variety of sources,

whether it be from Bob Woodward, who describes a conversation that

Secretary Powell has, or whether it is Paul O'Neill.

In the case of Richard Clarke, the terrorist chief, in the aftermath

of 9/11, he writes in his book he expected the administration to focus

its military response on Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. He says he was

surprised that the talk quickly turned to Iraq. ``Rumsfeld was saying

that we needed to bomb Iraq,'' Clark said, ``and we all said no, no. Al

Qaeda is in Afghanistan. We need to bomb Afghanistan. And Rumsfeld

said, there aren't any good targets in Afghanistan, and there are a lot

of good targets in Iraq.

``Well, there are a lot of good targets in lots of places, but Iraq

had nothing to do with 9/11. Initially I thought when he said there are

not enough targets in Afghanistan, I thought he was joking. They wanted

to believe there was a connection, but the CIA was sitting at that

particular meeting, and the FBI was sitting there, and I was sitting

there, and we looked at the issue for years, and we reached a

conclusion that there was no connection.''

The point is, let it go. To follow the admonition of David Kay, it is

time to acknowledge our mistakes as a Nation and to begin to restore

some of our credibility internationally.

I yield to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. Inslee).

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, if one reviews the 9/

11 report, they are very clear that there were more connections, more

connections between Lebanon, between Iran and al-Qaeda than there ever

were between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda, in fact, Osama bin

Laden, in 1990 right after the invasion of Kuwait, went to Saudi Arabia

and met with Prince Sultan, who was the defense minister and said that

we have to do something about that secularist. Let us join forces and

destroy Saddam Hussein. He considered Saddam Hussein as an apostate, a

corrupter of Islam.

The point is, and again, another report that came out today, Chairman

Kean, again suggests that the connections between Pakistan, between

Iran and Hezbollah, far exceeded the connections between Saddam Hussein

and al-Qaeda. There was no collaborative relationship. We continued to

hear about al-Qaeda bases in Iraq. They were in northern Iraq under the

protection of the no-fly zone.

Mr. Speaker, I know we have very limited time left. But

I think before we go we should wish a happy birthday to our friend and

colleague from Indiana (Mr. Burton), because it is his 45th birthday

today, is that correct?

29th birthday today, I think this has been a very good

discussion. We really do welcome this conversation with my colleague.

He knows we have respect.

I hope we do, too. I would issue a challenge to my

friend because he and I have traveled together and it is an experience,

and it is a very positive experience, but there are people that are in

the custody of the executive branch, those so-called senior

intelligence Iraqi agents, that continually deny any knowledge

whatsoever of Iraq or meeting the gentleman that allegedly met with

Mohammed Atta in Prague in the Czech Republic, is in our custody.

Let us challenge together the executive branch and my colleague,

myself, and anyone else who wishes to join us, go together and exercise

the oversight responsibility and function of this Congress and

interview Mr. Al-Ani and make that decision ourselves and come back and

report to the American people.