If I can, because the reality is that long before

September 11, this White House, this President, this Vice President,

whose picture was on the November 2003 edition of Newsweek, had an

obsession with Iraq, and I would submit that the best evidence of that

obsession is revealed in a book by a noted journalist by the name of

Ron Suskind, who sat down with the former Secretary of Treasury, Paul

O'Neill, and did, if you will, an overview of Secretary O'Neill's

experience in the Bush-Cheney White House.

As Secretary O'Neill indicated, he was taken aback by the first

National Security Council meeting, and he attended those in his

capacity as the Secretary of Treasury, that was held one week after the

President was inaugurated, and it quickly turned to the issue of Iraq.

There were no threats emanating from Iraq. There were no statements

emanating from the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein relative to an

attack on the United States or any of our allies. In fact, if you

remember, the Secretary of State himself, Colin Powell, later on some

time in February described the Iraqi military in terms that turned out

to be absolutely accurate, they were forthright, they had been

significantly degraded, but one week after the President was sworn in

the dominating subject of the first National Security Council meeting

was Iraq.

Then subsequently, on February 27, Secretary of the Treasury Paul

O'Neill relates at another National Security Council meeting that the

Vice President, this gentleman here, Dick Cheney, had a map spread

across a conference table where there were discussions about

the divvying up of oil fields and concessions among private

corporations and Nations, presumably our allies. That was February 27

of 2001. So right from the beginning it was this obsession about Iraq.

Now I do not know and I am not going to suggest what the motivations

were, but it was about Iraq from the beginning. I have posed this

question to individuals in the administration. No one has ever denied

the accuracy of those anecdotes that were related by the former

Secretary of Treasury, a person whose integrity is beyond reproach, who

stated it clearly and unequivocally. So we had this proclivity, this

propensity, this obsession with Iraq.

Then, of course, 9/11 came, and the terrorism czar at that time,

Richard Clarke, made the statement that after listening to the

Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Under Secretary Wolfowitz he was

aghast because he interpreted their immediate response as an

opportunity to intervene militarily in Iraq, as opposed to really deal

with those who not only had visited probably the most horrific act in

our lifetime upon the United States, and clearly, what we have seen is

a diversion of attention from those who were the proximate cause of a

national tragedy that occurred on September 11 of 2001. We diverted all

of our attention, most of our resources to Iraq, rather than dealing

with the genuine, accurate war on terror.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, when we can focus on Osama

bin Laden and al Qaeda, but as the President has done, to suggest that

the world is safer because of our intervention in Iraq is absolutely,

to quote a very prominent Republican conservative pundit, absurd. It is

just simply absurd.

Again, and that is a very dangerous scenario, not just

the observation by Senator McCain but the fact that as time moves on,

it becomes part of the regular order. Yeah, we lost seven Marines just

recently in Fallujah. It is on the front page. Over an extended period

of time it will end up on page 2 and then page 5 and page 7, and

because not many of us are sharing in the sacrifice tragically we

become immune to the real costs of this debacle in Iraq.

It is simply not just costing us hundreds of billions of dollars, but

it is costing us thousands of American lives and the impact on American

families. I know that my colleague and I, as we visit our districts,

meet constituents that have lost loved ones in Iraq, and that on a

personal level is most painful, but the danger is that we as a people

collectively put it in another place in our minds, in our experience.

You know, our policy in Iraq can only be described as a failure. We

failed. We went to Iraq based on false claims. We failed to find

weapons of mass destruction. We clearly demonstrated that there was no

evidence of any operational relationship between al Qaeda and Saddam

Hussein. That was confirmed by the 9/11 independent commission. The

administration failed to create broad international support for the

effort.

The truth is we are there alone now. Yes, the British are there, even

though a majority of the British people are opposed to the policy and

opposed to the war. But other than the British, yes, there are token

forces there, but we are carrying the brunt.

Of course.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue

to yield, I find it very interesting that the President and Dick

Cheney, who according to this headline in Newsweek sold the war to the

President and within the administration, keep referring to the vote on

the $87 billion as somehow demonstrating a lack of support by Senator

Kerry for our troops.

Does the gentleman remember during the course of that debate that the

President of the United States threatened to veto the $87 billion?

No, if we insisted that at some time in the future the

Iraqi government paid back to the United States taxpayer a portion, a

portion of that $87 billion. The White House insisted on a gift, a

giveaway, if you will, of American tax dollars, never to be repaid to

the American people.

The President did not want to make a loan; he wanted to

make a gift.

And the rest of the world, in terms of their dollars

representing their taxpayers, insisted on a loan. It is only the United

States of America that provided a gift, not a loan, but a gift, to the

interim Iraqi government to begin the process of reconstruction.

Now, again, I think we all share the view that there is a

responsibility on the part of the United States to assist. But why a

gift? Why a giveaway? And the President said that if we made it a loan,

he would veto it. So, clearly, the Republican majority here managed to

secure enough votes, both here and in the Senate, to make a gift rather

than insist on collateral.

Remember the Under Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, when he

promised the American people that the cost of the reconstruction of

Iraq would be paid for with Iraqi resources based on their huge oil

reserves? Does the gentleman remember that?

Yet, when the time came, that was a promise that this

Vice President and this President reneged on.

It is the American people that are building roads in Iraq, it is the

American people that are building affordable housing in Iraq, it is the

American people that are building hospitals in Iraq, it is the American

people that are building brand-new ports in Iraq, it is the American

people that are providing practically universal health care coverage in

Iraq, it is the American people that are funding jobs in Iraq; and they

are never going to get paid back.

How about doing that for the American people, President Bush and Vice

President Cheney?

It is interesting, and I think it is important that we

remind ourselves and others that, yes, we are members of the minority

party. We are Democrats. But this is, in many respects, and it is our

concerns I am referring to, they are bipartisan in nature.

I read something just recently where, again going back to the cost of

the war, that $87 billion that the President keeps referring to that he

insisted on

being a giveaway as opposed to a loan, Bob Barr, who served in this

House and who was probably one of the most conservative Members in this

institution, in this branch during his service here, observed that in

the midst of the war on terror and a $500 billion deficit, Bush

proposes sending space ships to Mars.

This really underscores also the folly of what we are doing in terms

of driving up our own deficits that will burden generations of

Americans and that are structural in nature, which means that something

catastrophic is waiting for us unless we address them. And, clearly, we

have not seen any response from this White House about addressing them.

But in addition to that, a recent September 10, 2004, article by Doug

Bandow, who is a senior Fellow at the Cato Institute and served as a

special assistant to President Reagan and was a visiting Fellow at the

Heritage Foundation, had this to say: ``Bush's foreign policy record is

as bad as his domestic scorecard. The administration correctly targeted

the Taliban in Afghanistan, but quickly neglected that nation, which is

in danger of falling into chaos. The Taliban is resurgent, violence has

flared, drug production has burgeoned, and elections have been

postponed.

``Iraq, already in chaos, is no conservative triumph. The endeavor in

social engineering on a grand scale, a war of choice launched on

erroneous grounds, has turned into a disastrously expensive neocolonial

burden. Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction, contrary to

administration claims, and no operational relationship with al Qaeda,

contrary to administration insinuations. U.S. officials bungled the

operation, misjudging everything from the financial cost to the troop

requirement. Sadly, the Iraq debacle has undercut the fight against

terrorism.''

Let me repeat that: ``Sadly, the Iraq debacle has undercut the fight

against terrorism.''

Just recently, by the way, the Institute for Strategic Studies, again

a conservative think tank, in a recent study warned that the Iraq

operation has spurred recruiting by smaller terrorist groups around the

world.

Now, we talked earlier about Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. Well, the

reality is that it is like the parable in the New Testament about the

fishes and the loaves: they are everywhere. The incidence of terrorism

in this world has increased dramatically. We saw what happened recently

and again tragically in Russia.

To learn from them.

Mr. Speaker, we have been joined by the gentleman from

Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie), and welcome back to Iraq watch. We noted the

gentleman's absence last week. And I see the gentleman from Washington

(Mr. Inslee) has also joined us, but I want to get back to what I think

is important, and that is the bipartisan nature of the criticism of

this administration. It would be misleading to those watching us

tonight to think this is a partisan diatribe. It is not that. It is a

genuine concern about the direction of this country.

And it is echoed by others. Let me give three quotes. Crossfire host

Tucker Carlson said recently, and I think many Americans have observed

him on PBS and Crossfire. He said, ``I think it is a total nightmare

and disaster. I am ashamed that I went against my own instincts in

supporting it.''

William Buckley, an icon within the conservative movement said,

``With the benefit of minute hindsight, Saddam Hussein was not the kind

of extraterritorial menace that was assumed by the administration 1

year ago. If I knew then what I know now about what kind of situation

we would be in, I would have opposed the war.''

I think it is important, too, to quote what I thought was a very

courageous statement by a friend of ours, a former colleague who is

highly regarded on both sides of the aisle. He was the vice chairman of

the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and was a leading

member of the House Committee on International Relations, and we know

him well, is Doug Bereuter.

He sent a letter to his constituents announcing his retirement from

Congress. He began by saying, it was a mistake to launch the invasion

of Iraq. He said, ``As a result, our country's reputation around the

world has never been lower and our alliances are weakened. Now we are

immersed in a dangerous, costly mess, and there is no easy and quick

way to end our responsibilities in Iraq without creating bigger future

problems in the region and in general in the Islamic world.''

I respect that. More and more we know that our colleagues on both

sides of the aisle are expressing their concern.

Mr. Speaker, what the gentleman said was summed up just

recently by a senior American diplomat in Baghdad. Obviously he

insisted on anonymity but this is what he said about actually what is

happening in Baghdad and Iraq today. ``This idea of a functioning

democracy here is crazy. We thought there would be a reprieve after

sovereignty, but all hell is breaking loose.'' This is without doubt a

debacle. This is the chaos the gentleman referred to. And the sad part

of it is despite opposition to the invasion of Iraq, if there had been

a coordinated plan, if there had been a relationship between the

Department of State and Pentagon rather than just simply the domination

of those within the Department of Defense and excluding those that had

experience similarly elsewhere in the world, maybe we would not have

this problem. But we had Wolfowitz, we had Doug Feith, we had Secretary

Rumsfeld who, according to Richard Clarke and others, pushed out the

Department of State, would not allow them in at the table to discuss

the post major combat phase.

See, this Vice President has to link the war on terror

and the war in Iraq. Even though there is no linkage. That has been

confirmed not by partisans here on the floor but by the independent

September 11 Commission. Because, if you cannot link the war on terror

to the invasion of Iraq, then why did we go into Iraq? For political

purposes, you have to create, you have to morph what occurs and what is

occurring in Iraq into the overall war on terror, because this is the

premise that was used by Dick Cheney when he sold the war.

But he is probably one of the most skillful political

minds in the country and just recently he made the statement, if you

vote for the other candidate you will die. That is basically what he

said. A vote for Kerry is a vote for terrorists. Nobody accepts that.

But that is the need to make the link, because he was wrong, he cannot

admit he was wrong. Do you remember David Kay, who they sent out to

learn and to find out where the weapons of mass destruction were, came

in front of a Senate committee and said, we were all wrong. This

individual, this Vice President, must have blanched because it did not

suit his world view, his political agenda.