Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, Mr. Larson, for

his leadership on this.

And, Mr. Delahunt, thank you.

Let me just begin where you left off, Mr. Delahunt, with Afghanistan,

because I think it is very important that we go back to that terrible

day of September 11, 2001, and remember where the attack came from. It

came from Afghanistan, organized by Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, and

they were given sanctuary by the Taliban. And the world was with us

when we decided to respond to the terrible attacks. The United Nations

General Assembly voted unanimously to support our effort. NATO, for the

first time in the history of the alliance, invoked the provisions of

the article that said an attack against one is an attack on all.

And so it seems to me that the number one priority here should be to

finish the business and complete the mission. We remember that fateful

picture of President Bush on the aircraft carrier back in May, 2003,

talking about ``Mission Accomplished'' with the great banner. Well, the

mission is not accomplished. The people responsible for the attacks of

September 11, 2001, are still somewhere along the border between

Afghanistan and Pakistan. And that is why I think many of us were very

surprised just last week to learn that the Central Intelligence Agency,

the CIA, has closed down, closed down, the unit that was first

established many years ago with the specific purpose of tracking down

and hunting down Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

And let me just say this: I know a lot of us had to be scratching our

heads when we saw that, because the American people know well that we

have not completed that mission, and I think it is important that they

know that the individual who first started that unit, a former member

of the CIA, Michael Scheuer, was also very surprised and perplexed. He

is the one that was the head of what was called Alec Station, this unit

dedicated to tracking down Osama bin Laden. And he is now retired from

the CIA, but here is what he said, It reflected a view within the

agency, the CIA, that Mr. bin Laden was no longer the threat that he

once was. And Mr. Scheuer said, and I think most of us would agree,

that that view was mistaken, that Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda remain a

very virulent threat.

Here is what Mr. Scheuer had to say: ``This will clearly denigrate

our operations against al Qaeda. These days at the agency, bin Laden

and al Qaeda appear to be treated merely as first among equals.'' First

among equals.

These are the individuals, this is the organization that was

responsible for the attacks on this country of September 11. They have

disbanded the unit dedicated to tracking him down, and they have gotten

themselves bogged down in a mess in Iraq. We have not finished the job

in Afghanistan. We need to finish the job.

We are sending the absolutely wrong signal, in my view, by reducing

the number of forces committed to the southern part of Afghanistan,

whereas Mr. Delahunt pointed out we have seen a great resurgence in

activity of the Taliban along that southern area. That is the very area

where the head of the Taliban, who is still also at large, made his

base.

So I think that it is important that we remember why we are engaged

in this great national effort and the fact we have not accomplished our

mission, and in fact, at the agency, they are disbanding one of the

units that was established for that express purpose.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, I think

Mr. Rubin is right on point on that very important issue, and I do

think it is important to listen to what many of the experts in this

area say.

The President claims that he keeps listening to the experts with

respect to the decision made in Iraq and elsewhere. The interesting

thing is many generals and other experts have said that Rumsfeld and

others, the Secretary of Defense, in fact, ignored their advice.

But if you just go back to last March when the President took a visit

to south Asia, he made a couple of stops. He stopped in Afghanistan, he

stopped in India, he stopped in Pakistan. One of the great ironies is

that the very day he made a stop over in Afghanistan, General Maples,

who is the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, was testifying

before the United States Congress. In fact he was testifying over in

front of the Senate and talking about the danger of the resurgent

Taliban in Afghanistan.

Now, the President at that time was probably as close as he will ever

get to Osama bin Laden. He was in Kabul, Afghanistan, going over to

India and Pakistan; and yet, at the same time he has been talking about

reducing in effect our commitment to Afghanistan in terms of our

military presence, and this country has not yet made its financial

commitments as well, but that very day General Maples was here

testifying that, in fact, the continued presence of the active Taliban

and al Qaeda resistance in Afghanistan was heating up and that the

Taliban was coming back. He quoted many statistics. This was back in

the spring. Since then things have only got worse.

Mr. Delahunt pointed to the USA Today article, the headline. There

have been, unfortunately, many headlines in recent times about the

resurgent Taliban.

We need to do better. This is where it all began September 11, and we

need to remember the lessons of the past in Afghanistan. When the

Soviets withdrew their forces from Afghanistan, the United States

decided to say, well, we no longer have an interest there. We packed up

our bags and left when the Soviets left, and what we left behind was a

vacuum, a power vacuum; and it was that power vacuum that was exploited

by the Taliban that then gave safe haven to al Qaeda, and it was al

Qaeda then that launched the attacks of September 11.

So we would be making a gross mistake, not once but now twice, if we

do not complete the mission in Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman. I just wanted to

point out that, as others have said, the diversion of resources from

Afghanistan to Iraq is now clearly coming back to haunt us because we

have not fulfilled the commitment that we made with respect to

Afghanistan.

The other effect it has had, as the gentleman from Maine pointed out

in his remarks just a minute ago, this was a decision that was really

both discussed before September 11, but in the very moments after

September 11, there was discussion of going after Saddam Hussein in

Iraq, even though there was absolutely no evidence, and the President

has admitted to this day that there was no evidence of any linkage

between Saddam Hussein and Iraq and the terrible attacks of September

11.

The result of what we did was taking a situation where the world and

international community that had rallied around us, it had passed

resolutions at the United Nations and through NATO, and the world had

joined us in this effort, and we lost that support. It evaporated, and

it is not like we want to win some kind of popularity contest or to win

a popularity contest, but we have recognized that we need the

cooperation of other nations in terms of intelligence-gathering, in

terms of support if we all want to be successful in combating

terrorism.

The fact of the matter is, by going into Iraq, taking the lid off

Pandora's box, unleashing historical forces that existed in Iraq

between the Sunni and the Shiia and inflaming the Islamic world, we

have certainly helped multiply the force of al Qaeda, both the

organization itself, as well as the copycat organizations that have

sprung up as a result. They sprung up when the Islamic world saw the

United States making a war of choice and going into Iraq, when it

became clear to the world that the twin pillars of our argument, the

claim that there were weapons of mass destruction and the claim that

there was a link between September 11 and al Qaeda was cooperating with

Saddam Hussein, the twin pillars of our argument proved to be false.

And the world looked at us, and we made those claims before the

United Nations. Secretary Powell, with great show of, you know,

different charts and graphs and things that he displayed to the world,

and the world looked at it and found out it was all untrue. And that

fact helped fuel this resentment against the United States, which makes

it more difficult for us to gain the cooperation of others in trying to

fight terrorism around the world.

And so I think that we come here tonight saying the mission has not

been accomplished. Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden remain where they are,

and last week we learned that the CIA is dismantling the one unit that

was dedicated to tracking down Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.