I thank you all for the opportunity to be here and discuss

some of these important issues that we don't get to do during any

debate on resolutions or legislation. These are among the most

important issues we deal with.

I was down in New Orleans and in the gulf coast of Mississippi where

the incompetence of this administration was on display for everyone to

see. The same incompetence is on display with respect to the problems

we have created in Iraq. And I say ``created'' because I do believe

that in many ways this administration has created more problems in the

Middle East than they have solved.

I agree with the gentleman from Washington that a good part of this

has to do with the inadequate leadership at the Department of Defense,

but we should never forget that this policy is driven by the President

and the Vice President and there is a unanimity of thinking in this

administration about the Middle East, the conviction that we could

simply force our will on several hundred million people and bend them

to become something that we want them to become, regardless of their

own intentions.

But I wanted to speak for a minute tonight about how Congress, this

Republican Congress, has aided and abetted the administration by giving

up its constitutional role of exercising oversight over the executive

branch. It is absolutely stunning to me how both the House and the

Senate have done everything that they could to rubber stamp

administration policies in Iraq and cover up for them.

A few examples, going back to when Democrats controlled the Congress

in the 1980s, there was an Oversight Subcommittee on Armed Services,

and that oversight subcommittee discovered those $500 hammers and

$6,000 toilet seats and put an end to much of that kind of

overcharging. But when Republicans took over, they eliminated the

Oversight Subcommittee on Armed Services and billions of questionable

Halliburton contracts have gone unexamined, unexamined by either Armed

Services or by the Intelligence Committee or the Committee on

Government Reform.

The minority staff on the Committee on Government Reform has

identified over 200 specific misleading statements made by the

administration in the run-up to the Iraq war. Over on the Senate side,

remember they had Phase II, the Senate Intelligence Committee was going

to do a Phase II investigation. What they meant by that was instead of

beating up on the intelligence agencies like the CIA themselves, they

were going to look at the misuse of intelligence by the administration.

That was Phase II of their study.

It hasn't happened. Years have gone by, and the chairman of the

committee has said several times, ``We are going to get to that

later.'' But they are clearly not going to do it before any election.

In 2005, House Republicans voted down a resolution demanding an

investigation of Iraq intelligence. When you look at the House and you

look at the Senate, there is no question what this Republican Congress

has been doing. Rather than gather information, evidence, that could

clarify what has happened in the past and guide us to a better policy

in the future, it is all politics all the time and that means

protecting the President from being exposed, protecting the Vice

President from being exposed, protecting Donald Rumsfeld from being

exposed for having not spoken the truth.

So this entire Congress is complicit.

The Senate held a few hearings after Abu Ghraib, but no Senate

committee has conducted a comprehensive public probe of the alleged

abuses at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, Bagram or the secret CIA

facilities that the President just acknowledged yesterday.

In the House, the majorities on three House committees voted down

resolutions seeking documents about detainee abuse. Democrats have been

saying we need the information in order to

do a better job in the future, and Republicans have circled the wagons

around the administration and refused to basically allow oversight.

On Iraq reconstruction, you go back to 2003, Donald Rumsfeld's

Pentagon awarded a $7 billion sole-source contract to Halliburton for

reconstruction. And 3 years later, auditors identified more than $1

billion in questionable and unsupported costs under that contract. A

billion dollars in Washington is still real money. If Congress was

simply doing its constitutionally mandated function, we would be

holding hearings on that. But no, the Republicans are not prepared to

investigate Halliburton. Vice President Cheney was once the CEO of

Halliburton, and this is ground we dare not go into, apparently, and

yet we have to, to fulfill our constitutional responsibility.

That is what we are basically saying here. This Republican Congress

has failed the country. The administration has failed the country. And

when Democrats control this chamber again, whether you have a

Republican President or a Democratic President, we are going to make

sure that this Congress acts like the Congress contemplated in the

Constitution and do our jobs.