Mr. Speaker, millions of Americans

throughout this country share my growing concern about the alarming

language being used to demean anyone raising questions about American

policy in Iraq. But we have been there before.

We have endured the excesses and the shame of the Palmer Raids, of

McCarthyism, of J. Edgar Hoover, and Nixon's Enemies List. It is a sad,

but historical, fact that in these times of national crisis and stress,

some resort to challenging not merely the ideas of our fellow citizens,

but their character, their integrity, and even their patriotism.

Some would prefer that we ignore such blasphemy, that we treat such

exaggerated rhetoric with the indifference it deserves. I respectfully

disagree. I believe that we have learned a sad lesson from history of

this and other countries that ignoring vicious political slurs

encourages further abuse and undermines free speech and open debate.

We have substantial disagreements about the wisdom of our course in

Iraq. Those who disagree with our policies include highly decorated

veterans, intelligence experts, some of our closest allies and millions

of our constituents, a growing number every day.

And yet, when a widely respected Member of the House, an honored

veteran who has been a staunch supporter of the defense community

through 30 years of congressional service, offered a somber analysis

about the misdirection of our Iraqi effort, he was denounced by other

Members as conducting ``a calculated and a craven political stunt.''

Now, the author of that statement has a tendency towards loose

language and personal invective, and most people do not take his words

too seriously. I do, because he is the majority leader.

He was speaking about our distinguished colleague, the gentleman from

Pennsylvania (Mr. Murtha.) He called him ``craven.'' The gentleman from

Pennsylvania (Mr. Murtha), craven?

Craven is a strong word. It means gutless. It means spineless. It

means cowardly, weak, fearful. It is a word that should never be used

by a Member of Congress to describe another, and could never be used to

describe the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Murtha).

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Murtha) joined the Marine Corps

during the Korean War. He volunteered to serve in Vietnam, while those

who accuse him managed to avoid military service. He is the first

combat Vietnam veteran elected to Congress. He retired from the Marine

Corps Reserves in 1990 and has been awarded the Navy Distinguished

Service Medal and the USO's Spirit of Hope Award for his many services

to the men and women in the military.

To even suggest that his impassioned and difficult statement about

the course of the war in Iraq was a ``political stunt'' is to insult a

distinguished veteran and Congressman, and I denounce it in the

strongest terms.

But the voices of hysteria did not stop there.

Now we are told that those expressions of concern about the

misdirection of the Iraqi campaign demonstrated that ``the national

Democratic Party declared its surrender on the war on terror.''

Democrats were accused of giving ``aid and comfort to the enemy,''

according to another Republican Member who never served in combat.

Let every American understand the meaning of these words: It does not

matter who you are, if you have worn the uniform of your country, if

you have risked your life in combat; to those who use these words on

the floor of the House, it does not matter. Challenge the policies of

the Bush administration and House Republicans in Iraq, and you are

``giving aid comfort to the enemy.'' You are surrendering to terrorism.

In other words, you are a traitor. That is what these Republican

Members would suggest about Members of Congress.

Well, according to the latest poll, 60 percent of the American public

think the situation in Iraq is out of control. Have we become a Nation

of traitors in the eyes of the Republican leaders of this institution?

Mr. Speaker, this disgraceful, demeaning, and insulting rhetoric has

no place in the Congress, it has no place in America, and it should be

denounced by every Member of this House, regardless of party and

regardless of one's position on Iraq. The day we lose our ability to

voice our heartfelt views without having our patriotism demeaned is a

dangerous day for democracy.

Some may argue that these are just the voices of an extreme, though

powerful few. Some say it is just partisan politics. That is not the

case. We have been here before.

Two years ago, the patriotism of Senator Max Cleland was challenged,

a man who served in Vietnam and left three of his limbs there; a man

who served honorably as the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs and as a

United States Senator. Apparently he did not lose enough limbs to prove

his patriotism to those who attacked him, those who sought multiple

deferments in the same war that cost Max Cleland his limbs. Those

attacks cost him an election, too.

This year, the vicious attacks are leveled, as we knew that they

would be, against Senator John Kerry, who volunteered in Vietnam while

others used their connections and deferments to avoid service. Senator

Kerry earned three Purple Hearts, a Silver Star, and a Bronze Star, but

now his patriotism is also challenged. Evidently, Senator Kerry's

wounds were not deep enough for some of his critics.

And now, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Murtha) is the target

of this disgraceful, venal slander.

It is time to stop.

Americans deserve, and they want, an honest discussion on the issues,

not a vicious assault on the integrity and the patriotism of

distinguished men who carry their wounds of war.