Mr. Speaker, the blessings of this Nation

are that we are a Republic, a constitutional Republic, that the

Founding Fathers were wise enough to establish three distinct branches

of government. I take that distinction and that constitutional mandate

very seriously and believe that the congressional legislative branch

has a responsibility of oversight over the executive as the judiciary

remains as an independent component.

The administration of this government, the executive, engaged in a

debate in the fall of 2002 that suggested to the American people that

we were about to be attacked by Iraq. It was a vigorous debate. There

was great, if you will, challenge to the administration's facts; and

they waged a very public, if you will, campaign to convince the

American people and to convince the United States Congress that we were

about to be imminently attacked. It was a serious campaign, Mr.

Speaker; it was a serious moment in our history. Members of this

Congress took that debate very seriously.

I recall very vividly great emotion on the floor of the House, great

indecision, indecisiveness, great concern and conflictedness about

whether we should go to war, whether or not the words of the President

mentioned and the Axis of Evil that was then ultimately mentioned in

the winter of 2003 was actually factual; but the administration was

convinced. They have pushed the intelligence community to the point of

representing to all of us that this information was factual.

Let me share with my colleagues words from the administration:

``Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons

of mass destruction,'' Vice President Dick Cheney, August 26, 2002.

``Right now, Iraq is expanding and improving facilities that were

used for production of biological weapons,'' President Bush, September

12, 2002.

``The Iraqi regime possesses and produces chemical and biological

weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons,'' Bush, October 7, 2002.

``We have also discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a

growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that will be used

to disburse chemical and biological weapons across broad areas. We are

concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using the UAVs for missions

targeting the United States,'' Bush, October 7, 2002.

``We know for a fact that there are weapons there,'' White House

Spokesman, Ari Fleisher, January 9, 2003.

``The evidence indicates that Iraq is reconsidering its nuclear

weapons program. Saddam Hussein has held numerous meetings with the

Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls his nuclear mujahadeen, his

nuclear holy warriors. Satellite photographs reveal that Iraq is

rebuilding facilities at sites that have been part of its nuclear

program in the past,'' Bush, October 7, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, I will be offering in the next couple of days the

Protect America's National Security Act of 2004, the PANS Act of 2004.

That is to demand congressional hearings by the Select Committee on

Homeland Security, Committee on the Judiciary, the Committee on Armed

Services, and Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, absolutely

demanding that an inquiry be made on the question of the level of

intelligence that was utilized to convince this Congress, both the

House and the Senate, of the decision to go to war.

I am against the bipartisan commission that has been offered by the

President. Why? Because the President will be making the appointments

regardless of the fact of whether they will be Democrats and

Republicans. The President, the administration, the executive will be

setting the time of the start and the completion of its work. I am

concerned that any report and any investigation on the question of the

type of intelligence that was given at the time of the decision made to

go to war be challenged and it be an oversight by the Congress of the

United States.

I refuse to allow this Congress to abdicate its responsibility under

the Constitution to give oversight of the question of whether or not

the intelligence given was both legitimate and substantial and the

basis on which it was made.

To the American public, you deserve an answer. To the American

public, you deserve that your congressional representatives engage in a

process to investigate where there is no time set, where there is no

end set, by the very executive that presented the intelligence.

In addition, we should hurry this report. This report should be done

within a 6-month period because it is time sensitive. Why is it time

sensitive, Mr. Speaker? Because intelligence is a basic infrastructure

of security of America. It determines how we secure our borders, it

determines aviation security, it determines the difference or the

different levels of alert that we propose day after day after day.

It is crucial that the Congress rises to the level of oversight. It

is interesting that we wish to push this very important work off to a

civilian, if you will, commission which the very entity that we are

investigating will be the one that will select both the participants

and the procedures. Congress needs to use its subpoena powers and its

investigatory powers in order to ensure that the American people have

the truth.

I ask my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, to join me in co-sponsoring the

Protect America's National Security Act of 2004, which will ask for the

general numbers of the CIA budget so that we will know, as was

suggested by a former Reagan administration official.

I would like to thank my colleagues for taking the time to speak out

tonight about this issue that is critical to the long-term survival of

our Nation. I do not mean to use hyperbole. However, I truly believe

that so much rides on our foreign intelligence gathering system. Our

foreign policy, our trade policies, how we run our borders, what level

of alert we are at, how we should live our day-to-day lives--it all is

based on our understanding of what is happening in the world around us.

If we are continually making decisions based on false assumptions and

wrong interpretations, we could face a future full of 9/11s and

unnecessary wars like the one still raging in Iraq today.

In the run-up to war, top Administration officials, and the President

himself, were making statements daily about the deadly weapons that

Saddam Hussein was pointing at the American people. We heard that they

had stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons. We heard they were

trying to buy materials for nuclear weapons; they had mobile weapons

labs, and programs to develop more. One by one, these claims have been

refuted. Last week, we heard Dr. David Kay, our own chief weapons

inspector for the past year, testify that those claims were false.

However, we went to war based mostly on those claims. The war that

has taken the lives of more than 500 brave U.S. soldiers, killed tens

of thousands of Iraqis, cost us hundreds of billions of dollars, and

diminished our standing in the world community. We have to find

out how this tragedy occurred, and make sure it doesn't happen again.

The American people are calling for answers, and we need them urgently.

On Friday, the President declared that he wants answers too. I commend

him for that, but I am concerned that no matter how well-intentioned he

is--the truth will not come out of his Administration.

I am worried that a commission hand-picked by the executive branch,

with an agenda and schedule crafted by the executive branch, will be

incapable of producing an objective and useful assessment of executive

branch failures. It is a fundamental human trait that groups tend to

close ranks to shield themselves from scrutiny when they know they have

made mistakes. That is why the framers of the Constitution built a

system of checks and balances into our great government. The President

has the power to veto any law Congress passes, and in return, Congress

has a strict duty of oversight over the executive branch and the

Agencies.

It would be a gross dereliction of our duties, if Congress sits idly

by and assumes that the Administration will take care of this problem.

In fact, we have already seen that the President's Commission is

getting off on the wrong foot. We are getting reports that it is too

broad in scope, and may not yield any answers until next year. That is

unacceptable. Our national security depends on reliable intelligence

information. Furthermore, the President has stated that we are in a

global ``War on Terror.'' we have soldiers on the ground around the

world fighting that war. They, their families, and the American people,

deserve to know what they are fighting for, and what dangers they may

face. We simply don't have months or years to waste before we get

around to fixing our intelligence-gathering system. We may be

vulnerable now, so we cannot rest until we address this problem.

Congressional leadership should immediately launch a series of full

and comprehensive hearings, including Homeland Security, Judiciary,

Armed Services, and Intel Committees from both the House and Senate.

Within six months, we need to report back to the American people how

the Administration could have been so far off the mark on Iraqi

weapons. We must learn from that mistake first. After that, we can move

on to broader issues.

None of us knows what a real investigation will yield. It will take

hard work to fully understand the function of our intelligence

gathering agencies, since they are largely secret from the American

people, and most Members of Congress. Even simple questions like, ``Are

we putting enough money into Intel?'' is tough to answer since the CIA

budget is top secret. I think we need to take a look at that policy.

Funding of special programs should obviously be guarded. However, I

think maybe the American people should have a general idea of how much

we are spending on intelligence gathering, in total. Only then can they

decide if they are getting their money's worth.

But more important then the financing is the functionality. Do we

have adequate manpower? Do we have reliable data? Are we interpreting

that data properly? Have we compromised our analysis by poisoning it

with politics and partisanship?

The American people deserve answers. This isn't about politics; it is

about prudence.