Mr. Speaker, I want to salute tonight the brave men and

women who are fighting in Iraq to bring democracy to the Middle East

and hopefully help turn around nations, particularly Arab nations, that

the U.N. has said when you add up the gross domestic product of all 22

Arab nations, their gross domestic product is smaller than Italy's.

This is a U.N. report that pointed out that in the last 10 years these

Arab nations collectively have had declining productivity and that they

have not brought forward any inventions or innovations to contribute to

world prosperity.

We are in Iraq to help the Iraqi people have a new beginning and

hopefully change the face of the Middle East.

I have been to Iraq 11 times, and I have had good visits and I have

had bad visits. I have had visits where I have had tremendous hope and

then the recognition that we have made some mistakes. In April, 2003,

there was tremendous hope. But then we proceeded, unfortunately, to

disband their army, their police, and their border patrol, and that

resulted in the requirement of American troops and British troops and

very few coalition forces to defend 24 million people in a country the

size of California.

So what I saw when I went back after April, 2003, when I went in

August and then in December and then early in the spring of the next

year, things were getting worse. But I began to see it turn around in

June of 2004 as we transferred power to the Iraqis. A significant

decision. It took it away from Defense and gave it to State Department,

and State Department had a better sense of how to help this government,

not how to fight the war.

The war is still being fought by our own troops. But as well, we

started to train their police, their border patrol, and their army, and

they have become very confident.

And what I then saw in 2005 were three elections in Iraq. I was there

for the first one. I remember asking if I could stick my finger in that

ink jar, and this Kuwaiti woman looked up at me and she said, No. She

said, You are not an Iraqi.

That gave me a chill because she did not say I was not a Kurd. She

was a Kurd. She said I was not an Iraqi.

And then what I saw was another election. I was there a week before,

after now creating a government that was elected, creating a

constitution and ratifying this constitution. This constitution was

ratified with 79 percent favoring it, and then they proceeded to elect

a government at the end of last year.

I can tell you why I know it was a success. The press did not talk

about it. Seventy-six percent voted of 100 percent. In other words, of

all adults, not the two-thirds that bothered to register, not 76

percent of two-thirds; 76 percent of all adults.

And now we have seen a very dicey moment. The Sunni insurgents are

playing their trump card. Not their last straw, not their final gasp.

They are playing their trump card, and they may succeed if the Shiias

give in to sectarian violence. And we are trying to make them

understand that they are the majority and they can run this country. Do

not allow the Sunni insurgents to get them to do what would be the

stupidist thing, to give in to the violence, to give in to a civil war,

and then fail.

We are going to leave Iraq when the Iraqis ask us to leave or if they

give up. If they give up to the sectarian violence, we will move our

troops away from harm's way and we will take them out. But they are so

close and they have done so much. I have met such brave Iraqi men and

women.

Quickly, one Iraqi man, Al-Alusi, after the election he lost his two

sons. His security had been taken away because he had gone to Israel,

and he came to visit me later in 2005, and I said, You cannot go back.

You are a marked man. You are a dead man walking.

He looked at me with some surprise and said, I have to go back. My

country needs me.

Which is to introduce one point I would love to make: When I ask

Iraqis what their biggest fear is, it is not the bombing. Their biggest

fear is that you will leave us, that you will give us a taste of

democracy and then you will leave us.

Let me just conclude by saying this: That very man who went back to

Iraq is now an elected member of the assembly. He is a very brave man,

and he is typical of the Iraqis who are grasping very hard to have a

democracy and to have a better future.