Thank you, Mr. Hunter. You are a great man

yourself.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the American men and women in

uniform and their families. I did spend 29 years in the Air Force, and

I served in Korea and Vietnam and spent 7 years as a POW in Vietnam and

more than half of that in solitary confinement. I know what it is like

to be far from home, serving your country, risking your life, hearing

that America doesn't care about you as happened in Vietnam.

Your Congress does not care about you. Your Congress just cut off all

the funding for your war. They are packing up, going home, and leaving

you here.

When I was a POW, I was scared to death when our Congress talked

about pulling the plug that I would be left there forever. I know what

it does to morale, I know what it does to the mission, and so help me

God, I will never, ever let our Nation make that mistake again.

Our men and women in uniform need our full support. They need to know

that when they are in Iraq driving from Camp Blue Diamond to Camp

Victory that the Congress is behind them, to

give them the best armored trucks they can drive, the best weapons they

can fire, and the best ammunition they can use. They need to have full

faith that a few nay-sayers in Washington will not cut and run and

leave them high and dry. They need to know these things because that is

mandatory for mission success and troop morale.

America, and the Congress, must stand behind our men and women in

uniform because they stand up for us every minute of every day.

Any talk, even so much as a murmur, of leaving now just emboldens the

enemy and weakens the resolve of our troops in the field. That is

dangerous. If you do not believe me, check out al Jazeera. The

withdrawal story is on the front page. We cannot do that to our fellow

Americans over there.

Mr. Speaker, we are making great progress in Iraq. Remember in

January how we saw pictures from Iraq of that first election. For

weeks, the media predicted gloom and doom. Remember that? What did we

see? We watched people as they waited in line for hours, defying death

threats just to cast their vote for democracy.

Remember the picture of the woman in the black hair cover flashing

her purple finger in the ``V'' after voting in the first Iraqi

elections? It was a breakthrough for democracy, and it was just the

beginning.

Remember the recent vote on the referendum when people came out in

droves to make their voices heard? You would not have known about it

because there was so little mention of it in our press, but the people

got out there and they voted and they showed their support for

democracy, a new government, hope, and a future.

These people are thirsting for something more. They are risking their

lives in the name of a new government, and we must stay the course if

we want to foster a stable Iraq and create hope for millions in the

Middle East.

Our work is paying off, not just at the ballot box. Remember when we

were waking up that Sunday morning in shock as we caught Saddam Hussein

cowering in a rathole? He is gone. And you know what? At least 46 of

Hussein's 55 most-wanted regime members are either dead or

incarcerated. Nationwide, thousands and thousands of police officers

have been hired, and nearly 200,000 Iraqi soldiers are trained and

serving their country. It is going to take time, but our guys on the

ground are working with other nations to make inroads to create

leadership and inspire democracy in a country that has only known hate,

fear, and death from a ruler.

However, sadly, some here want to embolden the enemy by saying we

just cut and run. That is just irresponsible and unconscionable.

I have to ask, what would Iraq be like if the United States pulled

out, allowing dangerous people like the head of al Qaeda, Zarqawi, to

run the country? What would that mean for the region, the world? Al

Qaeda rules with death, fear, terror, and blood. Al Qaeda takes

innocent people hostage, and then beheads them, and then brags about it

on the Internet. Al Qaeda has no respect for human life. They prey on

innocent people to do their dirty work, because they know we do not

target schools and hospitals and mosques; yet those are the exact

places they run for cover.

Al Qaeda will kidnap loved ones, especially very young children, of

people trying to build democracy, to scare them out of helping the

country. They are taking kids hostage because parents want a new life

and a better life for their children.

Mr. Speaker, I ask, What part of al Qaeda

do you want operating here in America? Al Qaeda is a worldwide

organization and a worldwide threat. I do not want any part of this.

Americans do not want, need, or deserve al Qaeda. Our troops are over

in Iraq fighting not just for our freedom and protection, but the

freedom of the world.

We must fight the bad guys over there, not over here. We must support

our troops to the hilt so they do not go to bed at night covered in

talcum-powder-thin white sand wondering, Does America really support

me?

In case people have forgotten, this is the same thing that happened

in Vietnam. Peaceniks and people in Congress, and America, started

saying bad things about what was going on in Vietnam, and it did a

terrible thing to troop morale.

I just pray that our troops and their families can block this noise

out and know that we will all fight like mad to make sure our troops

have everything they need for as long as they need it to win the global

war on terrorism.

Withdrawal is not an option. To our men and women in uniform, I

simply say, God bless you. I salute you. All of America salutes our

troops.