Mr. Speaker, our military men and women are

doing a tremendous job in Iraq, as they work with Iraqis to secure

their country and combat the terrorists who want so desperately to

prevent freedom from taking root there. Our troops deserve to hear

messages of strong support and thanks from us--not calls for withdrawal

that merely give hope to the enemy. Given a chance, the Iraqi military

and political system will become strong enough to defend the Iraqi

people on its own. But pulling our troops out now would undermine this

goal and provide an opening for al Qaeda and its terrorist brethren.

I disagree wholeheartedly with those who claim our presence there is

counterproductive and those who argue that it would be best to bring

America's troops home before their mission is completed. Iraq and its

people have made great strides, most recently with their free vote on a

constitution. But all their progress and our troops' blood and sweat

will be for nothing if our forces withdrawal before Iraq's own forces

are ready to defend the country.

All of us want to see our soldiers come home, but it would be a huge

mistake to make their withdrawal based on an arbitrary date, rather

than conditions-based. So many of our servicemen and women have

sacrificed so much to ensure that Iraq does not become a haven for

terrorists, and we have to make sure that mission is accomplished and

that their sacrifice has not been in vain. Pulling our troops out now

is akin to surrender and would be a fateful blunder.