Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to H. Res. 612. I honor

and support our troops and request an open debate on Iraq on the House

floor.

Yesterday, millions of Iraqi citizens cast their ballots in national

elections to constitute the country's first full-term National Assembly

since the U.S. invasion. This achievement should be recognized, and I

would enthusiastically support a resolution that simply commends the

Iraqi people and U.S. troops for their commitment to the democratic

process under extraordinary circumstances.

Unfortunately, the Republican leadership, once again, refuses to

suspend politics at the water's edge. House Resolution 612 seeks to

make yesterday's elections a vindication of President Bush's misguided

Iraq policies and a basis for continued military engagement in a

country that overwhelmingly desires the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

Accordingly, I rise in opposition to H.R. 612, and I take this

opportunity to announce my support for H.J.Res. 73, Congressman John

Murtha's plan for the strategic redeployment of U.S. troops.

Those familiar with my record know that I have consistently opposed

the President's decision to invade Iraq. The war was always predicated

on the false premise that Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass

destruction. This Congress was negligent in not demanding more proof of

the President and then refusing to hold him accountable for his

exaggerated and unfounded claims.

His war strategy was equally flawed. He has failed to provide the

resources our men and women in uniform need to be successful, and

American lives have been lost as a result. In 2002 and 2003, Army Chief

of Staff General Shinseki warned that not enough boots on the ground

would lead to a power vacuum that our enemies would exploit.

Tragically, his premonitions--ignored by President Bush and his

political appointees--have been borne out.

To date, approximately 2,150 brave Americans and an estimated 30,000

Iraqis have been killed in Iraq, and there appears to be no immediate

end to the quagmire in Iraq.

As a Member of Congress, I have wrestled with whether this ``war of

choice'' has become a ``war of necessity,'' but I am persuaded by

developments in Iraq that the presence of U.S. troops is fueling the

insurgency, compromising the readiness of our military, undermining

respect for the U.S. abroad, and shortchanging domestic priorities,

including homeland security.

I, therefore, am announcing my support for H.J.Res. 73, introduced by

Representative Murtha, calling on President Bush to immediately

redeploy U.S. troops and diplomatically pursue security and stability

in Iraq. I am convinced that the withdrawal of U.S. troops will

undercut the insurgency, which relies on popular opposition to the U.S.

presence.

I remind my colleagues that, if experience has taught us anything, it

is that democracy cannot be forced upon a nation by gunpoint.