Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, today could have been a day to rejoice and to celebrate

In unity. Yesterday, the people of Iraq asserted their newly won rights,

won, it must be said, at a steep cost; and they inspired us all by

flocking to the polls at great risk to their lives. This was a peaceful

process, an affirmation of all that has been sacrificed in nearly 3

years of valiant struggle. We should be rejoicing, Mr. Speaker.

But it is a sad day, indeed, when the Iraqi people have to teach the

United States Congress a lesson in democracy. The majority leadership

in this body and in the Rules Committee that acts as its legislative

gatekeeper have used authoritarian tactics to bring before us the

resolution that we now debate. They have eliminated any real

opportunity for nearly half the Members of the House of Representatives

to effect the language of this measure, a measure deliberately

calculated to be divisive.

Mr. Speaker, look around at this people's House. It was not designed

to be an echo chamber. We are not here merely to recycle the

administration's rhetoric on Iraq. It is clear that there is a spectrum

of views on my side of the aisle on how to deal with the difficult

situation in Iraq in the weeks and months ahead. Why should the

majority try to force the issue, politicize the war effort and polarize

this body further?

This resolution came to us yesterday afternoon. We tried negotiating

in good faith and that went nowhere, so last night I introduced an

alternative resolution and asked the Rules Committee to make it in

order.

My resolution congratulates the Iraqi people on three democratic

national elections this year; it encourages all Americans to support

the Iraqi people; and commends and congratulates our troops and those

of our allies and the Iraqi forces protecting their people at election

time. The Democratic leader, Ms. Pelosi, and the Democratic whip, Mr.

Hoyer, joined me in advocating this measure.

Mr. Speaker, that is the resolution which should have come before us

today. It is a measure that would have won the unanimous support of

this body, or nearly so, and would have sent a message of support to

the Iraqi people, to our troops, and to the whole world.

But the leadership of this body has approached this entire important

matter in a rigid, unbending, and authoritarian fashion. Theirs was a

take-it-or-leave-it proposal, not a comma to be changed; and that

approach is inappropriate in a democratic legislative body where some

of us have been attempting so hard to operate in a bipartisan fashion.

Mr. Speaker, along with several of my Democratic colleagues, I was

hosted by the President at the White House 2 days ago. The President

said he wanted to explore a bipartisan approach on Iraq. Unfortunately,

my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have not gotten that

message. Instead, they have made a mockery of it.

The election in Iraq yesterday was truly inspiring. It fills me with

hope that Iraq can indeed emerge as a stable, pluralistic, and

democratic society. This resolution could have been considerably

improved, had there been a process of bipartisan consultation. We could

have sent a united and strong message to our troops, to the Iraqi

people, and to the global audience.

But whatever my thoughts on the substance of the measure, I

profoundly reject the arrogant and undemocratic process that produced

it, and for this reason I shall vote ``present'' on this measure.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

I will use the balance of my time, Mr. Speaker, to read

the resolution which was disallowed by the Republican leadership, a

resolution congratulating the people of Iraq on three national

elections conducted in Iraq in 2005.

Whereas the people of Iraq have consistently and courageously

demonstrated their commitment to democracy by participating in three

elections in 2005;

Whereas on January 30, 2005, the people of Iraq participated in an

election for a transitional national assembly;

Whereas Iraqi society participated in the approval of a new Iraqi

constitution through a referendum held on October 15, 2005;

Whereas reports indicate that the people of Iraq voted in

unprecedented and overwhelming numbers in the most recent election,

held on December 15, 2005, yesterday, for a new national parliament

that will serve in accordance with the Iraqi constitution for a 4-year

term and that represents the first fully sovereign elected democratic

assembly in the history of Iraq;

Whereas this remarkable level of participation by the people of Iraq

in the face of dire threats to their very lives has won the admiration

of the world;

Whereas the Iraqi elections could not have been conducted without the

courage and dedication of the members of the United States Armed Forces

and the armed forces of other nations in Iraq, including the members of

the security forces of Iraq;

Whereas the December 15, 2005, election in Iraq inspires confidence

that a robust pluralistic democracy that will bring stability to Iraqi

society is emerging:

Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the House of Representatives

congratulates the people of Iraq on three national elections conducted

in Iraq in 2005; encourages all Americans to express support for the

people of Iraq in their efforts to achieve a free, open, and democratic

society; and expresses its thanks and admiration to the members of the

United States Armed Forces and the armed forces of other nations in

Iraq, including the members of the security forces of Iraq, whose

heroism permitted the Iraqi people to vote safely.

This is the resolution that would have received unanimous approval by

this body. Instead, we had an ugly, divisive, and unnecessary debate.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.