Mr. Speaker, I rise to commend the gentleman from

California (Mr. Lantos), our ranking Democrat on the International

Relations Committee, for his leadership to make our country safer, our

military stronger, and to bring stability to the region. While we may

not always agree on the approach to take, Mr. Lantos strove very hard

for a bipartisan resolution, and I want to just read from the

resolution that he would put forth in the spirit of congratulating the

people of Iraq.

He said: ``Resolved, That the House of Representatives congratulates

the people of Iraq on the three national elections conducted in Iraq in

2005.'' Imagine, in January, in October, and now in December, three

times courageously they went to the polls, and his resolution spells

that out.

His resolution would encourage ``all Americans to express support for

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

democratic society,'' and again, throughout his resolution he makes

that point.

And he expresses ``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.''

That is the spirit of the resolution that we should be voting on

today, one that brings us together, that is clear to the Iraqi people

that their courage is an example to the world.

But, sadly, this Congress is not an example of democracy to the world

when instead of using an occasion to unify, once again, the Republican

majority brings to the floor a resolution rejecting the good offers of

the gentleman from California (Mr. Lantos) to come together in a

bipartisan way and uses what should be a cause for celebration as

instead a means to denounce those who disagree, not very democratic,

and also to insist that if you want to congratulate the people of Iraq,

you must support the status quo.

More of the same in Iraq is not making the American people safer.

More of the same in Iraq is not making our military stronger. More of

the same in Iraq is not bringing stability to the region.

So I think you will see Democrats united in congratulating the people

of Iraq, commending our men and women in the armed services, and

supporting

that in a democracy we will have different views and that we will

respect them. I have said it before and I will say it again, Senator

Taft, who would become the Republican leader of the Senate during World

War II, he said disagreement in time of war is essential to a governing

democracy, and this was during World War II. Why do the Republicans

think that we cannot have disagreement in time of war?

So as we go into this holiday season, I know that we can come

together and say to our men and women in harm's way that we honor them

for their service; we are grateful to them for their patriotism, their

courage and the sacrifice they are willing to make for our country; and

in this holiday season, we strive for peace on Earth and goodwill

toward man, which would not be possible without our men and women in

the armed services.

That should be the spirit in which we go forward, not in the divisive

manner the Republicans have put forward. That is really quite sad, but

I hope that in the vote that we have today that the Iraqi people will

know that on both sides of the aisle we all see them as an example of

democracy and hope that they will not be discouraged by this

suppression of dissent in the United States.

Mr. Speaker, this marks the second time in a month that House

Republicans have gone to extreme lengths to avoid a fair and open

debate on the war in Iraq. Last month, after being stung by a

resolution introduced by Mr. Murtha calling for the redeployment of

U.S. forces in Iraq, Republicans brought to the floor a measure that

was an act of deception and an attempt to mischaracterize the Murtha

legislation.

Today, under the guise of commending the people of Iraq for

yesterday's election, the Republicans present a resolution that spends

more time trying to justify the continued presence of U.S. troops in

Iraq than congratulating the Iraqis.

If the majority wants to debate the President's Iraq policy then let

us do that. A war that is now more than 1,000 days old, has cost the

lives of more than 2,150 Americans, and has not made the American

people safer or the Middle East more secure, certainly merits debate in

this House. But let us do so in a way that does not insult the

intelligence of the American people or trivialize an issue of the

utmost importance.

We should debate the war in Iraq thoroughly, with full consideration

of the points of view of all Members. Sadly, the Republican leadership

did not permit that debate today.

Millions of Iraqis voted in Iraq's three national elections this

year, and all Americans should salute that fact. They should salute as

well the courage of the 160,000 American troops and the courage of the

thousands of soldiers from other nations and from Iraq itself, who made

the safe conduct of these elections possible. It should appropriately

be acknowledged that the elections are hopeful steps toward a more

stable Iraq.

Mr. Lantos brought a resolution to the Rules Committee, which would

have done those things, but the majority refused to allow it to be

considered. It can only be that the majority does not want to let

commending the Iraqis get in the way of a tightly controlled tribute to

the President's war policies. As we lecture the Iraqis about the need

to accommodate differing points of view, let us hope that they do not

devote too much attention to the example provided by this Republican

House.

The Lantos resolution provides well-deserved recognition to all of

the Iraqis who have taken part in their country's political development

this year. It recognizes the heroism of the soldiers who strive each

day to bring security to Iraq.

Commending them should be our focus today, but Mr. Lantos was not

allowed to offer his resolution. It would be unfortunate if the message

we sent to the Iraqi people and our troops was that scoring political

points is more important in this House than acknowledging their

achievements this year.