Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. Lantos for yielding me this time

to express what I think just about every speaker has said; that part of

this resolution I support, and every Member of this body supports

congratulating the Iraqis on the election. It was a critical step in

developing democratic institutions in that government in its capacity

to deal with its own problems. And we certainly all express our

appreciation to our soldiers and their families for the sacrifices that

they have made.

However, this resolution endorses the policy of this administration

which got us into the war in Iraq and has prolonged our presence

because of its current policy and unwillingness to change policy, and

that I cannot support.

So what should we be doing? I think Mr. Lantos is 100 percent right.

We should be having an open debate on this issue. Our soldiers deserve

that. The American people deserve that. We should be expressing that

our objective in Iraq is to make sure that the Iraqis are capable of

defending themselves.

In order to accomplish that, we should be engaging international

organizations that are better suited than we in helping to develop

democratic institutions in Iraq and in training Iraqi soldiers and

security forces so that 2006 can be a year for a substantial number of

our troops coming home.

It is our responsibility to ask our President to submit such a plan

to Congress and to the American people so that we can accomplish these

objectives. Unfortunately, this resolution does not do that, and I

regret another missed opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, we can all agree with the parts of this

resolution that congratulate the Iraqis for holding a democratic

election and commend the sacrifices made by our United States Armed

Forces and their families. Unfortunately, this resolution also endorses

a failed policy that got us into this war, and has prolonged our

presence in Iraq. Therefore, I cannot support H. Res. 612.

It is our responsibility to speak out individually and collectively.

I will continue to communicate with the President and urge him to

change course in Iraq. In order to achieve the goal of the Iraqis

taking charge of their own security needs without the presence of U.S.

troops, we must engage international organizations to assume primary

responsibility for building democratic institutions including the

training of Iraqi security forces. We need a strategy that will permit

a substantial number of our troops to return home in 2006. The

President should submit a plan to Congress and the American people that

carries out these objectives.

As we pass yet another resolution that expresses support for our

troops and our desire to achieve ``victory'' in Iraq, I must remind my

colleagues that our soldiers have paid the heaviest price in Iraq.

Thousands are dead, and tens of thousands are wounded. The American

taxpayer has already invested hundreds of billions of dollars. Mr.

Speaker, our soldiers deserve better than the resolution we are

considering today with 1 hour of debate. The American people deserve

serious consideration of how we can safely bring our soldiers home.