Mr. Speaker, today the leadership of this House has

failed both the American people and the people of Iraq.

Today our country had a tremendous opportunity to stand united and

join together in congratulating the Iraqi people on their elections for

the first full-term National Assembly. We had a chance to send a shared

message of gratitude to our troops and the families who have sacrificed

so much. Instead, the Republican leadership chose the politics of

division over unity of purpose. In a reprehensible act of blatant

partisanship, they squandered a special opportunity to send a strong

message and cynically exploited our troops for political gain.

Today, Congressman Lantos offered us an opportunity to stand together

by introducing a resolution that congratulates the people of Iraq on

the recent election and expresses our thanks to the men and women of

our Armed Forces who are serving there. That resolution would have

received a unanimous vote in this House. But the Republican leadership

did not want a unanimous vote in support of our troops and the people

of Iraq. They denied us the opportunity to cast a vote on the Lantos

resolution. The hypocrisy of their action should not be lost on the

American people. At a time when we all want to celebrate the right of

the Iraqi people to vote in Iraq, the Republican leadership denied this

House the right to vote on the unifying resolution offered by Mr.

Lantos. And the very people who tell us each day that our Nation should

speak with one voice on Iraq crafted a resolution that was deliberately

designed to splinter the Members of this House.

The American people can respect genuine differences of opinion on the

best way to move forward in Iraq. We should have a healthy debate about

the best way to bring our troops home. Questions of war and peace are

matters of conscience. When so many American and Iraqi lives hang in

the balance, each of us has a responsibility to exercise our best

judgment. What is so disappointing about the actions of the Republican

leadership today is that it chose to turn an opportunity for

bipartisanship into a political ploy. It demonstrated a smallness of

mind that placed politics over the national interest.

I have never before voted ``present'' on a resolution in the House. I

hope I do not feel compelled to do so again in the future. But there

are times we have an obligation to send a message that we reject the

politics of cynicism. The Republican resolution is less about achieving

victory in Iraq than victory at the polls in 2006. We must refuse to

participate in a political charade. There are few things in politics as

despicable as using our troops and the democratic aspirations of the

people of Iraq as pawns in a political game. Today's action by the

Republican leadership has brought shame upon this House. It is time to

put the national interest above political posturing.