Mr. Speaker, I strongly object to the

procedures under which this resolution is being debated. I voted

against those procedures because the House should have been able to

have a full and free debate and to consider possible changes in the

resolution.

For example, Representative Lantos proposed that we congratulate the

Iraqi people on three national elections conducted in Iraq this year,

encourage all Americans to express support for the people of Iraq, and

express thanks to the members of the U.S. armed forces whose heroism

permitted the Iraqi people to vote safely in yesterday's elections.

That would have been something all Members of the House could support,

if the Republican leadership had permitted that to be considered.

Still, I will vote for the resolution that is now before us, for

several reasons.

First, the resolution calls yesterday's parliamentary elections a

``crucial victory for the Iraqi people and Iraq's new democracy.'' I

couldn't agree more.

Reports are still coming in and we won't know the results for some

time, but it's clear that the day was a success in terms of high

turnout and low levels of violence. To the extent that increased Sunni

participation means a greater political role for Sunnis in the new

parliament, we could see weakened support for the insurgency. And the

Iraqi people should be commended for their courage in coming out to

vote--not once, but three times this year.

The resolution then goes on to call for a commitment to victory in

Iraq, although it doesn't define ``victory.'' I strongly suspect this

language was added, not so much to send a positive message to our

soldiers or the Iraqi people so much as it was designed to bolster

President Bush's recent speeches in Iraq where the word ``victory''

looms large.

Unlike American success in World War II, ``victory'' in Iraq cannot

be measured by military success alone. This was achieved when our

troops toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. What we can hope for in

Iraq is that a responsible withdrawal of American forces can be linked

to measurable benchmarks of political stability. This means that Iraqi

security forces must be capable of providing for the safety of Iraqis.

It means that Iraq's cities and infrastructure are rebuilt and its

citizens have access to electricity and clean water. A successful

withdrawal strategy means that America will no longer bear the brunt of

the burden--that the U.N., other international organizations, our

allies, and countries in the region will step up to assist with the

nation-building mission in Iraq.

A successful outcome in Iraq is essential because failure in this

part of the world could lead to wider war, greater terrorism and a

disaster for our national security. To be frank, it is not so much

``victory'' that ought to concern us so much as a need to avoid

``failure.''

Unfortunately, whether we can avoid a failure in Iraq is a question

that is not completely in our hands because only the Iraqis themselves

can find the will necessary to live

alongside each other and to make the compromises necessary to build a

functioning government based on an inclusive constitution.

For the record, I opposed the Iraq war resolution, but I have

resisted supporting an artificial deadline for withdrawing troops. I

believe we need a plan that is designed to bring our troops home and

make clear to the Islamic world that we harbor no ambitions for

permanent bases, Iraqi oil revenues or any military occupation. But how

we withdraw is as important as when we withdraw. This means giving the

Iraqis time to form a permanent government and establish the means for

international support. We must exercise deep care in the way our

country withdraws because leaving a failed state in Iraq will deeply

endanger our country.

We were led into war as a divided nation and today we are even more

divided. That's why I led a letter last month to Defense Authorization

conferees with my colleagues Rep. Tom Osborne (R-NE), Rep. Ellen

Tauscher (D-CA), and Rep. Joe Schwarz (R-MI) urging conferees to

include language passed overwhelmingly in the Senate urging President

Bush to outline his strategy for withdrawal from Iraq and to provide

Members of Congress with quarterly reports on the progress of American

operations in Iraq. We wrote this letter because we believe that a

successful withdrawal from Iraq can only be helped if Congress and the

Bush Administration work to bring unity at home.

It is in our national interest to show the greatest amount of unity

possible to the American people, to the international community, and to

the Iraqi people, who so bravely made their way to polling stations all

over Iraq yesterday.

Sending a message of encouragement to the Iraqi people to build

stable institutions based on democratic principles is important at this

critical time. it is for this fundamental reason that I vote today in

support of this resolution.