Mr. Speaker, before the gentlelady leaves, I want to thank

her for I think just a very moving and important message about what

Israelis are faced with. I just thank her for that message.

Mr. Speaker, I would like specifically to talk about Iraq and to say

that in the 12 visits I have had to Iraq, when I ask Iraqis what their

biggest fear is, it almost always is this: ``That you will leave us.''

Then they might say, ``That you will leave us before we can grab hold

of democracy.''

Well, I have to say, frankly, that is one of my biggest fears. I am

not afraid that we will see the war in Iraq lost in Iraq. I am most

fearful that we will see the war in Iraq lost here at home.

It would seem a little surprising to say that I have seen significant

progress in Iraq, because people see the way we were in April 2003 and

they think it was so exciting, and they compare it to April 2003. But,

unfortunately, after April 2003 there was a significant decline in what

took place in Iraq.

First we allowed the looting. And to Iraqis, they would ask me when I

would go there, why did you allow people to trash our country? These

were not all Iraqis who were doing it. These were people who were

looting. And Americans were just standing by and allowed this to

happen. And they believed, frankly, that we wanted it to happen,

because they believed that we could have prevented it had we wanted to.

And then we proceeded to disband their army, their border patrol and

their police and leave 24 million Iraqis totally and completely

defenseless in a country the size of California.

And then what did we do? We said to 150,000 coalition forces,

primarily Americans, some Brits, that you had to be the police, the

border patrol and the army in a country the size of California with 24

million people.

That was basically an impossible task. And so what I saw happen in

April 2003 is that things just kept getting worse. They were worse in

December 2003. And even worse by April 2004. But then, at that point,

we had started to reverse the slide. We reversed it by beginning to

train their police, their border patrol and their army.

And we began to see a change when we transferred power in June of

2004. And Iraqis started to take ownership. And so when I kept going

back every 3 to 4 months, I kept seeing progress. And then by 2005, I

was there for the elections when they took place in January of 2005. It

is just historic and moving, every time I think about it. Iraqis came

out and voted. The Sunnis did not, but the Shiias and the Kurds did.

They formed a government, and they created a constitutional

convention and invited Sunnis in. They did not participate in the

voting, so they were not represented, but they were invited in. And

they created a constitution. They voted on that constitution by

October.

And I was told by the UN that it would be one of the fairest

elections with the best participation, put our elections to shame, and

frankly it did. Mubarak of Egypt, the president, said they would not

accept their constitution. 79 percent ratified it. It was

extraordinary.

And now they had this constitution and a third election in just 11

months. And 76 percent of 100 percent of the eligible voters voted. Now

if you get 65 percent voting in our country, that is 65 percent of the

two-thirds that bother to register. So it was an amazing event.

They chose a government. But Jafari, the prime minister who was

selected by the Shiias was not liked by the Sunnis and the Kurds, and

the minority said no to the majority, and the majority said we rule.

And the minority side minority rights. And they went back and forth,

and for 3 months we had this standoff.

The minority was able to demonstrate minority rights, and the

majority was able to say we accept your minority rights. That is

maturity taking place.

Now you have a new prime minister, and this new prime minister is

reaching out to Sunnis, Shiias and Kurds. When I ask a Kurd if they are

a Kurd or a Shiia, or Shiia if they are Shiia or Sunni, they will say,

I am a Sunni, but

I am married to a Shiia, or I am a Shiia and my son is married to a

Sunni.

And if I ask a Kurd, they will say I am Kurd, but you do not seem to

understood. Kurds are Sunnis. We tend to divide them up more than they

do. My biggest fear is that in spite of the progress that is being

made, huge progress, in spite of the fact that Sunni radicals tried to

ignite the country in sectarian violence, you only saw that sectarian

violence in two places, Baghdad and Ramadi, and actually Basra.

They held off. This is an amazing thing that we are seeing take

place. The Iraqis deserve our staying the course with them. They did

not attack us, we attacked them. We disbanded their army, their police

and their border patrol. It is absolutely imperative, absolutely

imperative that we not leave before they have their police, their

border patrol, and their army to protect themselves.