Madam Speaker, the Iraqis voted today, and it is

estimated that approximately 10 million of 15 eligible voters did vote.

Women voted in record numbers. The Sunnis participated in large numbers

for the first time. The vote completes the political process in Iraq.

Last January, they elected an assembly to draft a constitution. In

August, the constitution was completed. In October, the constitution

was approved by a large margin, about 70 percent of the voters. Now a

new government is elected, and this was all done today with relatively

little violence as the Iraqis went to the polls.

There is some other news that I think is positive as well: School

attendance in Iraq is up by as much as 80 percent; 774 schools have

been built or renovated; 36,000 teachers have been trained; and 142

health care facilities have been built or are under construction.

Nearly all young Iraqis have been vaccinated for the first time.

Satellite dishes, newspapers, TV stations and small businesses are

developing and springing up, and 211,000 Iraqi troops have been trained

and equipped.

Still, there are many who say that there is no progress in Iraq, and

I would like to reflect on some comments from a young soldier from

Nebraska that I met in a recent trip to the Middle East who said this.

He said it is important that we finish the job there and not pull out

prematurely because, if we do leave early, three things will happen.

Number one, thousands of Iraqis will die, and we have promised them

we would not abandon them, and so we will break a promise.

Secondly, we will encourage more terrorism worldwide and in the U.S.

as well. It would inform the terrorists that terrorism does work.

And lastly, 2,000-plus soldiers would have died in vain. I think this

is an important point to consider. As I have talked to parents of

soldiers who have died, this is something that they do not want to have

happen. There was a letter distributed today by Congressman Jeff Miller

from Bud Clay, and it was written to President Bush upon the death of

his son, Staff Sergeant Daniel Clay in Iraq. This is what Mr. Clay

wrote to President Bush, and I quote, he said,

Included in the letter from Mr. Clay was a letter from his son, and

this letter was written if he should happen to be killed in combat, and

it was written to his family.

And this is what Daniel Clay said. He said, what we have done in Iraq

is worth any sacrifice. Why? Because it was our duty. That sounds

simple, but all of us have a duty. Duty is defined as a God-given task.

Without duty, life is worthless. It holds no type of fulfillment. The

simple fact that our bodies are built for work has to lead us to the

conclusion that God who made us put us together to do His work. And

then he goes on, finally he says, I know what honor is. It is not a

word to be thrown around. It has been an honor to protect and serve all

of you, meaning his family. I faced death with the secure knowledge

that you would not have to. This is as close to Christ-likeness as I

can be. That emulation is where all honor lives. I thank you for making

it worthwhile.