Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 557,

``relating to the liberation of the Iraqi people and the valiant

service of the United States Armed Forces and Coalition forces.'' First

and foremost, I believe that it is important to take this time to honor

the men and women of our armed forces who have sacrificed under

difficult and dangerous conditions to make our military efforts

successful in Iraq. It is also important to recognize the sacrifices of

the families of our troops, friends, and those who employ the members

of our Guard and Reserve forces deployed overseas. Our appreciation

goes out to these individuals for their support during these

challenging times.

Last October I had the opportunity to visit with our military men and

women in Iraq and survey the operations of the U.S. reconstruction

mission to Iraq. I have never been more proud to be an American than

when I witnessed our troops fulfilling their mission in difficult and

dangerous circumstances. While we still have a long way to go in Iraq,

I saw many signs of progress in helping meet the basic needs of the

Iraqi people.

From Wisconsin alone there are over 1,460 members of the Air and Army

National Guard who are serving on active duty. This includes military

units activated from the Third Congressional District, which I

represent. Wisconsin's 229th Army National Guard Engineer Company from

Prairie Du Chien and Platteville, and 652nd Army Reserves Engineer

Company from Ellsworth are currently serving in Iraq.

We welcomed the members of Wisconsin's 829th Army National Guard

Engineer Detachment from Richland Center back home recently. We also

welcomed back members of Wisconsin's 1158th Army National Guard

Transportation Detachment from Black River Falls and Tomah, serving in

Fort Irwin, CA. In addition, the 128th Infantry Battalion headquartered

in Eau Claire was recently alerted for possible mobilization. The

people of western Wisconsin are proud of their service and the service

of all men and women of our armed forces during this important time in

our Nation's history. I also want to recognize the incredible work of

the people at Fort McCoy and Volk Field in western Wisconsin. They are

working countless hours to get our troops ready.

As the day pass, we must not forget those who have died in the

mission to liberate the people of Iraq. Over 540 American soldiers have

died while serving in Iraq. 2LT Jeremy Wolfe, MAJ Christopher Splinter,

and PFC Bert Hoyer from the Third District in Wisconsin, each paid the

ultimate sacrifice to give the people of Iraq the greatest gift of

all--their freedom. These young men exemplify all that is good and

decent about America. Their loss is tragic; their sacrifices should not

be forgotten.

I do, however, have reservations about certain language in this

resolution, in particular, the references to the world being safer with

the removal of Saddam Hussein. That subject is highly debatable. While

I agree that the Iraqi people are better off free from the tyrannical

rule of Saddam Hussein, the most critical threat to international

security is still at large and still very active. To this day, it is al

Qaeda, who remains the number one security threat and we must combat

that international threat with an international coalition.

It is al Qaeda that was directly responsible for the attacks on

September 11 and it is al Qaeda that is reconstituting itself as a

truly global terrorist threat. As we know now, Saddam Hussein's regime,

as ruthless as it was, did not possess an imminent threat against its

own neighbors, let alone against the United States. We still need a

thorough investigation of our intelligence failures so future

miscalculations, that change world opinion against us, are not

repeated.

As our military effort continues, I, and other Members of Congress

will work to ensure that our service men and women have all the

resources necessary to fulfill this continuing mission. My thoughts and

prayers are with those serving our country, as well as their families.

America is firmly behind our troops and we are all hoping to see them

home safe, secure and soon.

May God continue to bless these United States of America.