Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share my comments

and concerns regarding H. Res. 861. While this resolution is purely

symbolic and does not have the force of law, I am voting for it, as I

agree with the majority of the sentiments it expresses. In 2003, I

voted for the use of force resolution, based upon what we later learned

was flawed intelligence about the existence of weapons of mass

destruction in Iraq. While I am glad that Saddam Hussein was removed

from power and has been captured, and I hope that the new Iraqi

government is successful, the U.S. must move toward a new policy in

Iraq.

As I stated in a letter to President Bush last month, the time has

come for the United States to give the Iraqis strong incentive to stand

on their own feet and take control of their own affairs. I acknowledge

this will be a challenge, as there is a persistent and strong

insurgency, which continues to kill Iraqis every day. Therefore, they

must speed up the process of training Iraqi security forces that are

willing and capable of defending their country. There are many former

members of the Iraqi Army who are still unemployed. The United States

and the administration need to send a clear message to the Iraqis that

we will not have a permanent military presence in Iraq. Taking this

step will motivate Iraqis to take charge of their own affairs and

create incentives for involvement from regional players and the

international community.

Additionally, we need to begin private discussions with the leaders

in Iraq regarding a timeframe for redeployment of our troops. To date,

more than 2,500 U.S. soldiers have been killed and 19,000 wounded in

Iraq. Extended and multiple deployments have eroded U.S. ground forces

and overall military strength. A Pentagon-commissioned study recently

concluded that the Army cannot maintain its current pace of operations

in Iraq without doing permanent damage to the quality of the force.

More than three years of continuous deployment of U.S. troops in Iraq

has contributed to serious problems with military recruitment, forcing

the Army to lower the standards for recruits, led to military equipment

shortages that hamper the ability of ground forces to do their jobs in

Iraq, and undermine the ability of the U.S. National Guard to deal with

problems at home.

While I agree with concerns that publicly announcing a timetable for

withdrawal would put our troops at risk, I'm concerned that political

parties and new governments are very much like some people. If you

undertake to do something for a person, some individuals will stand

back and let you continue--and never step up to the plate to do for

themselves.

We have saved the Iraqi people from Sadaam Hussein, but we cannot

save the Iraqi people from the Iraqi people--if they are not able and

willing to fashion a political solution and bring the Iraqi people

together. We must encourage the new Iraqi government and give them

strong incentive to assume responsibility and stand on their own.

Our fighting men and women have served bravely. We must commit

ourselves to an outcome in Iraq that honors their sacrifices.