Mr. Speaker, today we debate an issue whose importance

reaches farther than the citizens that live within the boundaries of

our individual congressional districts--it touches citizens all over

the world.

Frankly, it is easy for us in this legislative body to praise or

criticize our efforts in Iraq. It is easy for us to come to this floor

and talk about the violence in Iraq and the difficulties in forming a

free, safe and secure government, then return to our offices and send

out press releases.

It is easy because none of us have had to serve in a government that

is breathing free air for the first time. None of us have had to form a

government under intense international pressure to include members of

all viewpoints to avoid sectarian violence. None of us have had to hold

elections under the threat of terrorism and destruction. We have not

lived under the oppression of a tyrant, nor have we had to fear that

speaking our minds could lead to our execution or the execution of our

family.

And now that the light of freedom is shining into the darkness that

was Iraq, many criticize the Iraqi people for needing time for their

eyes to adjust to the light. When did we become this arrogant? At what

point did seeing over 70 percent of Iraqi citizens risk their lives to

participate in electing a free and democratic government not be good

enough for us?

It would be uninformed to characterize our nation's early history as

a smooth transition. Sectarian division, violence, and human rights

abuses were prevalent in the early United States. I would submit that

our adversaries aren't ignorant of this. They understand that the work

of forming a stable democracy cannot be accomplished in three and one

half years. They are smart enough to recognize the monumental successes

that have been achieved by the Iraqi people and our extraordinary men

and women in uniform in the face of immense challenges. And they are

determined to use the most horrific tactics to stop the spread of

freedom.

Their opposition is a strategy of oppression and we must stand united

to make sure it does not succeed. I would hope that every so often, the

debate on this floor can be about more than temporary politics. I would

hope that every once in a while, we can ask ourselves the hard

questions and come together to find good answers to the problems not

only in this country, but the problems facing the world.

We have risen to the challenge before. On June 9, 1944, shortly after

the beginning of the D-Day invasion, the following appeared in the

Washington Post: ``There is a noise of wrangling on Capitol Hill which

has a discordant, ugly sound today. There is a jostling among us for

preferences which is incongruous in comparison with the unity among

those safeguarding us oversees. Like them, we need to remember now how

much unites us, and again draw together.''

These words are just as relevant and commanding today as they were 62

years ago. The question we must answer is still the same as it was

then: do all men and women deserve to be free? If our answer is yes,

then what is our responsibility toward that goal? I was taught that to

whom much is given, much is expected. In this nation we have been given

a great gift of freedom. Will we now fail to remember what unites us

and deny our hand of assistance to those that seek the same gift we are

so fortunate to enjoy?