Mr. Speaker, I rise today to stress the importance of

our country's role in the Global War on Terror and to observe the

heroic, enduring efforts of our men and women in uniform who are

working to secure freedom and democracy for the people of Iraq.

In January, I stood with the Eastern Washington families and

colleagues of nearly 100 airmen from Fairchild Air Force Base and said

goodbye as they were deployed to Iraq for 4 months. In April, I had the

opportunity to travel to Iraq and visit with these members of the 92nd

Air Refueling Wing and the 141st Air National Guard Medical Squadron.

And in May, I was privileged to welcome them back to Eastern Washington

with gratitude for their work on behalf of our Nation and in pursuit of

freedom and democracy in Iraq.

Troops based at Eastern Washington have long played a central role in

the Global War on Terror. In Iraq, they assisted in the rebuilding of

airfields and other crucial infrastructure projects. In April 2004, a

crew deployed from Fairchild delivered the one-billionth pound of jet

fuel in the Iraqi theater from a KC-135 to

an F-16CJ Fighting Falcon from the 555th Fighter Squadron.

Much deserved attention is given to the combat efforts of our troops

serving alongside Iraqi Defense Forces to protect the fragile but

promising unity government and the Iraqi people whom it represents. Yet

I would draw attention also to the remarkable accomplishments of

service men and women who are rapidly restoring the infrastructure--

roads, airports, and utilities--that is critical to Iraq sustaining

itself.

But even beyond the duty and mission charged to them, many of our

troops are volunteering to help out at orphanages and day cares in

Iraq. We should be encouraged by the commitment and compassion that

these soldiers show to the comprehensive task of restoration in Iraq.

Congress must continue to support the unity government of Iraq as it

rebuilds its country. Like the generations before them, fighting Nazis

and Communists, United States warfighters are today doing a duty for

which we can never repay them. I express my undying appreciation for

their commitment and their sacrifice.

One of the priorities in assisting the Iraqi people is establishing

an independent, self-sufficient Iraqi Security Force. Here our progress

has been astounding. Today, there are over 264,600 trained and equipped

members of the Iraqi Security Force. The ISF is conducting 84 percent

of company-level operations independently or along side coalition

forces. This will give Iraq the ability to defend itself and

participate as allies in the Global War on Terror.

On the urgency of the Global War on Terror, there is no debate. And

it would be irresponsible for this Congress to deny the fact that Iraq

is a front in that war or to abandon our efforts there.

The fierceness of the foreign-led insurgency that was drawn to Iraq

after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime is evidence that the

presence of democracy in Iraq and the United States aggressive pursuit

of the roots of terror abroad are deadly threats to al-Qaida and others

across the globe. We are fighting this tyrannical and ruthless enemy

precisely where we should be--thousands of miles away from American

families and American soil. To think that terrorists would confine

their attacks to Iraq's borders is to not recognize the reality of the

threats we face.

We must not abandon the people of Iraq. We must not neglect an

opportunity to strike lethal blows to the Islamic extremist network. We

must assist the Iraqi people in establishing a free, stable and secure

nation and not give up until then. The security of our country and our

families depend on it.