Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this important

statement of the people's House, congratulating the interim government

of Iraq for its forthcoming assumption of sovereign authority and

congratulating the United States Armed Forces and coalition forces for

their sacrifice. I commend the gentleman from California (Mr. Lantos)

and our chairman, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Hyde), for their

usual and extraordinary and timely leadership on this issue.

When I sat in Baghdad in the coalition provisional headquarters on

March 1, we sat with Ambassador Bremer across from the hall where was

debated the interim Constitution of Iraq. Within 24 hours, these words

would enter into the history forever of a free Iraqi people in the

preamble of Iraq's transitional administrative law: ``The people of

Iraq, striving to reclaim their freedom, which was usurped by the

previous tyrannical regime, rejecting violence and coercion in all its

forms, and particularly when used as instruments of governance, have

determined that they shall hereafter remain a free people governed

under the rule of law.''

The preamble of a new Constitution for a free and democratic Iraq.

When just 2 years ago we think of the Iraq that existed on the world

scene, Saddam Hussein was still imprisoning, torturing, and killing

tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis; financially supporting and

encouraging terrorism; illegally profiting from the U.N.'s Oil-For-Food

program, denying millions of Iraqis needed medicines and food; and

flouting and ignoring 16 different U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Thanks to the leadership of President George W. Bush and the

sacrifice of U.S. and coalition forces, those days are over. And on

this June 30 that we commemorate in this resolution, the United States

will disengage and those words of that preamble will begin to become

the reality of a new free and democratic Iraq.

And know this, Mr. Speaker. The people of Iraq are grateful. As we

stood in the midst of 30 or 40 men and women in Basra the day before we

were in Baghdad, I will never forget as people approached me one after

the other, tears in their eyes, taking me by the hand and saying,

please, when you go home to America, tell the people you serve that we

will never forget what the United States has done for our people in

Iraq.

The people I met in Iraq have an undying gratitude that will begin to

express itself most eloquently in the advance of freedom and democracy

for themselves and their posterity. I support this resolution. I

embrace all that it celebrates, and I thank the chairman and the

ranking member for their leadership in bringing it forward at this

time.