Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from

California (Mr. Dreier), the chairman of our committee, for yielding me

the customary 30 minutes, and I yield myself 7 1/2 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, last night and this morning, like all my colleagues, I

watched the news reports about the parliamentary elections in Iraq.

This is a proud day for the Iraqi people, and it is fitting that this

Congress, this House of Representatives, recognize the courage of the

Iraqi people, their desire to take control of their own destiny, and

how much they have suffered to achieve this taste of democracy.

As has been stated by so many analysts in the news media, one of the

most important outcomes of this election was the significant

participation for the first time of Iraqi Sunnis in this election, many

of whom, according to news reports, were encouraged to vote, escorted

to the polls or guarded at the polls by armed Iraqi insurgents.

Everyone in the House of Representatives is proud of the Iraqi

people. Everyone in this House respects the efforts made by our

uniformed men and women to help the Iraqi people get to this historic

moment.

This House could have sent a strong unified message to the Iraqi

people, our troops in Iraq, and to the international community in

support of our troops and in support of the brave Iraqi people. But,

Mr. Speaker, once again, as it has so often done in the past, this

Republican leadership has chosen to include controversial language in

this resolution, knowing that it will provoke sharp and divisive debate

over Iraq.

Rather than choosing to send a united message to the world, the

Republican leadership has cynically and deliberately decided to

highlight our divisions rather than our unity.

Late last night, the ranking member of the House International

Relations Committee, one of the most respected leaders in this House on

human rights, Congressman Tom Lantos, came before the Rules Committee

with a resolution that focused on congratulating the people of Iraq for

three successful elections conducted in Iraq this year. The resolution

further praises our troops

for their contributions to peace and stability in Iraq. And, Mr.

Speaker, he was rejected out of hand.

Shame on the majority to treat one of the most respected Members of

this body in such a fashion. Shame. Mr. Speaker, there are many points

of view in this House about how the U.S. should proceed in Iraq. Even

among the majority, there are differing points of view. I for one

believe these successful Iraqi elections provide an opportunity for the

United States to change course in Iraq and begin bringing U.S. forces

home. As we pass the 1,000th day of the war in Iraq, I believe we must

begin the transition to putting the Iraqis in charge.

After 3 years of war, the United States claims, for better or for

worse, the elimination of Saddam Hussein from power, and that the

United States has furthered the Iraqi political process, culminating in

the passage of a Constitution and now the first democratic election and

Iraq's first constitutional government.

At this point, plans for a full transfer of sovereignty to Iraqis

demands a change in course, one that puts Iraqis in charge. Iraq can't

move forward with 160,000 U.S. troops, the largest U.S. Embassy in the

world, and with Iraqi public opinion behind a timetable for withdrawal.

Mr. Speaker, many years ago Vermont Senator George Aiken said of the

disastrous Vietnam war that the United States should declare victory

and go home. Well, the elections in Iraq and the other milestones

constitute a sufficient reason for the United States to declare that it

has done all it can in Iraq, and it is time to reverse the Bush

administration's policies.

President Bush's unwillingness to announce a plan to remove U.S.

troops within a clear time frame and his refusal to renounce the use of

permanent U.S. military bases there undermines his rhetoric about Iraqi

democracy and will undermine the legitimacy of the new Iraqi

Government. Our occupation of Iraq complicates the transition to

democracy. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had it right,

Mr. Speaker, when she said last month that the United States can

support democracy, but we cannot impose democracy. And it is a deadly

combination when democracy is equated with occupation.

While the President continues to give speeches on the war, the

American people have become disenchanted with the administration's Iraq

policies and its failure to disclose a plan for withdrawal. Let us be

clear, Mr. Speaker. The President has a credibility gap when it comes

to Iraq. According to a December 8 New York Times/CBS poll, 59 percent

of Americans disapprove of the way President Bush is handling the war

in Iraq, and 70 percent do not believe that he has developed a clear

plan to get American troops out of Iraq.

We have lost more than 2,100 soldiers dead and over 15,000 wounded,

overstretched our military, placed our homeland and those of our allies

at greater risk, and still this President persists in a useless quest

for, quote, victory.

But excuse me, Mr. Speaker, just what is ``victory''? Who defines it?

Who decides when ``victory'' has been achieved in Iraq? Is it the Iraqi

people themselves? Is it President Bush, who has already declared

``mission accomplished''? Is it next year? Or the year after that? Or 5

years or 10 years down the road? Is it when we have lost 3,000 troops

in Iraq? Or 5,000? Or 10-? How many more American troops do we have to

sacrifice? How many more Iraqi lives must be sacrificed before we

decide that ``victory'' has been achieved?

While most Iraqis are confident in yesterday's parliamentary

elections, two-thirds are opposed to the presence of U.S. troops,

according to a poll released on December 12 by ABC News and Time

Magazine. According to news reports, many of the Sunnis turned out in

such large numbers yesterday because they see it as a means to end the

U.S. occupation of their country. Arab voices through the Cairo process

are helping change the dynamic in a positive way and are filling a role

that the U.S. no longer needs to play.

The President must work with the United Nations and Iraq's Arab

neighbors to develop an interim arrangement as American troops depart.

The best way to preserve the gains made so far is to commit to long-

term financing for reconstruction, working with the new Iraqi

Government to set a timetable for withdrawal, and to arrange for an

over-the-horizon troop presence.

The Bush administration and the Republican leadership of this House

should be spending less time on spin and speeches and more time on

preparing for bringing American troops home. The way out of Iraq begins

by genuine respect for the will of the Iraqi people and their desire

for U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq. The President can begin to

demonstrate this respect by putting an end to the attempted

manipulation of Iraqi public opinion with fake news written by Pentagon

contractors, the unambiguous announcement that the U.S. will not

maintain permanent military bases there, and the immediate initiation

of a coherent plan for the withdrawal of our forces there. This will

not only give the vast majority of the Iraqi people what they want, but

the new Iraqi Government its strongest chance for success.

Unlike what is stated in this resolution, there is nothing

``artificial'' about this approach. Congress, too, has a responsibility

to take action where the Bush administration falters. Today we should

praise the Iraqi people, but tomorrow this Congress should move to

must-pass legislation to force beginning to bring our forces home.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, before I yield 1 minute to the gentleman

from California (Mr. Lantos) to respond to what the chairman of the

Rules Committee had said, let me make clear, nobody is talking about

waving a white flag here. What we are talking about is trying to figure

out a way to make a bad situation less bad. The polls have shown

clearly that the majority of the Iraqi people want us out of Iraq. When

a majority wants something, they usually get what they want, because

that is what a democracy is about.

We don't know a lot about democracy in this House because we are

routinely shut out of being able to have debates and votes on important

issues. But the bottom line is that those of us who are advocating that

the President set some sort of a timetable are doing so because we

think that that is a way to strengthen the situation, to give the new

government over there a chance to succeed. I don't believe it can

succeed if it is viewed as a puppet of the United States. I don't

believe it can succeed with a huge U.S. occupation over there. I don't

believe it can succeed with the largest U.S. Embassy in the world over

there. I don't believe it can succeed if those are the conditions.

And so having said that, let me yield 1 minute to the gentleman from

California (Mr. Lantos).

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 2 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, to suggest that the Rules Committee respects a

deliberative process in this House or that it is somehow democratic or

receptive to alternative ideas, I think demonstrates to me that the

chairman has pretty low standards when it comes to being inclusive.

The bottom line is, on important issues, on important matters like

this one, we are routinely shut out. I mean, the chairman may be on

board with what the President is doing in Iraq, but there are many of

us who have great concerns. And the fact of the matter is, the section

that is controversial in this bill deserves debate, not in the context

of this resolution, but we should be on this floor debating this for a

period of time and let everybody have their chance to present their

viewpoint on what our policy should be in Iraq.

We should be debating Iraq almost every day. I mean, we are at war.

We have lost 2,100 American servicemen and women; 15,000 are wounded.

We have spent hundreds of billions of dollars, and we do not like to

talk about it except in the context of these resolutions that kind of

get dropped on us and brought to the floor; and we are supposed to

praise our troops, which we all do.

We want to congratulate the democratic voting in Iraq, which we all

do. But then tucked into this is a provision which some of us find

objectionable.

This administration has a credibility gap, in my opinion, when it

comes to Iraq. We have been misled too often, and it is time to demand

the truth. It is not acceptable to embrace an open-ended U.S. policy

toward Iraq that suggests that we put all our faith in the President.

He has been wrong on everything. There were no weapons of mass

destruction. There was no tie to al Qaeda. There was no imminent threat

to the United States from Iraq, and he rushed us into war. He said we

would be greeted as liberators. Here we are approaching the third year.

We are not greeted as liberators. We are stuck in a mess.

Mr. Speaker, I will also point out to the chairman of the Rules

Committee that if you read the front page of today's Washington Post it

says, ``Iraqi Vote Draws Big Turnout of Sunnis.'' Underneath,

subheadline, ``Anti-U.S. Sentiment is Motivator for Many.''

A majority of the people in Iraq want us to begin the process of

withdrawal; and what you are asking us to do is to embrace a resolution

that says we will be there for as long as the President wants us, and

that is unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 1/2 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, the resolution we are debating today is an H. Res.

resolution. Basically, this is just a sense of the Congress. It is

largely symbolic.

One of the complaints that many of us on this side of the aisle, and

I know some of the people on the Republican side have as well, is that

we kind of skirt around the real issue, which is what the policy is.

Staying as long as it is going to take, that is not a policy. That is a

sound bite.

The President does not know where we are going in Iraq. He has given

speeches that have been heavy on rhetoric, but not particularly big on

specifics.

If we want to do something helpful here, bring a binding bill to the

floor here that sets out our policy, and let us have it out. Let us

have the debate. Let us talk about what our policy should be in Iraq.

Let us come back next week or let us come back for a week in January

and have this debate. Let us discuss what, in fact, our policy should

be in Iraq. We are not doing that. This is all symbolic.

Notwithstanding the fact that we have 160,000 troops over there, that

over 2,100 Americans have died over there, and 15,000 Americans have

been wounded, tens of thousands of Iraqis have been killed, we have yet

to have a real policy debate on this House floor about what course we

should take in Iraq. That is what we want. That is what we are hoping

for. I do not think that is unreasonable.

To bring a largely symbolic resolution to the floor and tuck in it

this kind of policy statement, give us an hour during the debate on the

resolution to talk about everything, that is not the way we should be

doing business around here.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the remaining time, and I

will close for our side.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me remind the Members of this House,

the chairman of the Rules Committee talked about how generous the Rules

Committee is. This year, in the 109th Congress, we have had 43

restrictive rules, 22 closed rules, plus three additional closed rules

that were included in one rule, H. Res. 351, and we have had 11 open

rules as far as appropriations bills.

Let me also simply say my point was that on important matters we

usually have closed rules, as we did yesterday on the pension bill.

Mr. Speaker, I will be asking for a ``no'' vote on the previous

question so I could amend the rule and allow the House to consider

House Resolution 613 instead of House Resolution 612. House Resolution

613 was introduced last evening by International Relations Ranking

Member Lantos, the Democratic Leader Pelosi, Democratic Whip Steny

Hoyer and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. Hastings), which expresses

congratulations to the people of Iraq on three national elections

conducted in 2005.

This amendment was offered in the Rules Committee early this morning,

but unfortunately, it was rejected.

Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to insert the text of my

amendment and the text of House Resolution 613 immediately prior to the

vote on the previous question.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of how Members of this House

feel about the war in Iraq, I think all of us want to congratulate the

people of Iraq for holding these historic elections and for getting out

to vote despite the significant risks. We all want to congratulate our

troops, but quite frankly, there is language in this bill that some of

us consider inflammatory, that some of us strongly disagree with, and I

would urge my colleagues to vote ``no'' on the previous question so

that we can have a unified message and not a divisive message here in

the House.

Mr. Speaker, we have been in Iraq now for over 1,000 days, and I

believe we must begin the transition to putting the Iraqis in charge.

President Bush's unwillingness to announce a plan to remove U.S. troops

within a clear time frame and his refusal to renounce the use of

permanent U.S. military bases I think undermines his rhetoric and I

think endangers the chance for democracy to succeed. Our occupation in

Iraq complicates the transition to democracy.

People can disagree with me on this, but the fact of the matter is we

should be debating this issue of how we deal with Iraq not in an H.

Res. form, but in a binding resolution here on the House floor. We have

time to debate Merry Christmas resolutions here in the House, but we

never have the time to debate in a real way and in a meaningful way

this war in Iraq.

We have sent thousands of our servicemen and -women into harm's way

in Iraq. I would argue we rushed into this war. We have paid dearly for

what the politicians in Washington have decided to do. We owe our

troops better than just coming up and saying, stay the course. We owe

them more than saying we are going to stay there until victory is

achieved.

What is victory? I mean, nobody has defined what victory is. The

President says we will know when we get there. Well, that is not good

enough. That is not good enough for anybody in this House. That is not

good enough for our soldiers.

We owe these brave men and women more than just a pat on the back and

a congratulations. We owe them a real policy, and we owe the people of

Iraq who have sacrificed so much the right to determine their own

future. They want us to begin to extricate ourselves from Iraq. We

should do that, and I would hope that my colleagues will vote ``no'' on

the previous question so we can bring up a resolution that truly unites

this body and not divides it.