Mr Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Virginia

(Mrs. Drake) for recognizing me.

Mr. Speaker, I have had the great honor on two occasions since I have

been in Congress to go to Iraq and Afghanistan. I went early in

November of 2003 and then again back in March of this year. What a

difference those months have made. One of the things that I was

awestruck by was the amount of progress that has been made in the

country of Iraq since the beginning of the war when we overthrew Saddam

Hussein.

One of the things that I am puzzled by is that, when I go back to the

district and start talking about how things are going in Iraq, my

fellow Texans say, ``Randy, why do we not ever get to hear about that

when we watch the news?''

You know, that is a really good question. One of the things that I

think is

important for the American people to realize is the amount of progress

that we have made over there. In a very short period of time, we have

liberated Iraq from a terrible dictator, a killer, a murderer, and that

country is moving forward to install a democratic government. That is

happening. They have met every deadline that they have established for

themselves.

In December, they will have a very important democratic election to

elect their new parliament.

One of the other things that is going on that is so important is that

the Iraqi people are participating in a major portion of the defense of

their country. That is an important part of our strategy.

Our strategy is two-fold, to help the Iraqi people to learn to be

able to defend their country themselves and also to help them move in a

way to establish this democratic government.

I think it is a great tribute to our men and women that, just the

other day, 63 percent of the Iraqi people turned out to vote. I wish in

some of our elections 63 percent of Americans turned out.

You have to understand the conditions that these people turned out.

Sixty-three million people turned out to vote in conditions where it

was not snowing or raining, but they were risking their lives; and over

78 percent of those people so far have supported this new constitution.

On a recent trip back from Iraq we stopped in Amman, Jordan, where

about 120 or 130 Iraqi women had risked their lives and driven to

Amman, Jordan, to participate in a conference to learn how to

participate in this new democracy that they are about to inherent.

And one of the things was I was sitting at the table with some of

those women at lunch, and we were discussing different things about

their coming and risking their lives to come to that. And I asked them,

I said some people back home asked if the Iraqi people appreciate what

the Americans have done for them, and the allied forces.

This one lady, I will never forget, with tears streaming down her

eyes, she said, ``Mr. Congressman, you have to understand. We are

mothers. We are wives. We are sisters. We are aunts. And we understand

the huge price that mothers and sisters and wives and Americans have

paid for our freedom. And we shall never forget.''

And it is important that America not forget the tremendous

contribution that our young men and women are making. As I go around, I

always take an opportunity to thank the families, because, right along

with our men and women that are in harm's way, those families serve

right beside them. They are back home holding down the fort, making

sure the kids get to school, making sure the car gets fixed and the

house is in repair. We cannot forget them.

On Saturday, unfortunately, I had the opportunity to have to go to a

funeral in Dimmit, Texas, for Jacob Dones. J.J. he is called by his

friends. But you know what? It was an opportunity to go and be a part

to celebrate the life of a young hero.

As I travel back and forth to Iraq, one of the things that I am

awestruck about is the enthusiasm and the dedication and the commitment

that our young men and women have to the job that they are doing over

there; and I always ask them, is there a message that you want me to

take back home? And they say, ``Congressman, tell the folks back home

what a great job we are doing and how important it is that we finish

this job.''

To get back to Lubbock, Texas, and back into District 19 each week, I

travel and I stop at DFW airport. There are always young men and women

going and coming from the battlefield, and I always take an opportunity

to say thank you for your service.

And one of the things that they start, without me even asking them,

they say, ``Congressman, it is important that we finish this job.'' I

wish you could see the children that are going to school, boys and

girls that get to go to school now, and the fact that electricity is on

in parts of the country that in the past it was not and that water

systems are in place and that an economy is beginning to emerge in

Iraq.

So, as I close and thank the gentlewoman for this opportunity, I want

to say to our young men and women, thank you again. We pray for you. We

are glad you are doing the job you are doing. We are proud of you. And

to those families we say thank you, also.

So God bless them, and God bless America.

It is very humbling, and as we sat and participated

with those Iraqi women and talked about, you know, how they began to

participate in this democracy and whether it is at the local level or

at the state level or at the parliament, but the commitment and the

courage that they had already shown.

I think, as you have heard this story before if you have been to the

theater, about the fact that the insurgents are now targeting the Iraqi

people because they realize what is going on over there, that the Iraqi

people have a hunger for this new gift that we have given them. So they

are targeting these recruiting stations where some people were killed

maybe the day before, and the very next day there will be long lines of

young Iraqi men and women coming forth to serve.

It is very encouraging. I want the American people to know that they

can be very proud of their soldiers.

I want to thank Chairman Hunter for arranging this Special Order Hour

tonight as well as all of my colleagues who are taking the time tonight

to honor our troops and show support for the brave Iraqi people.

Two and a half years ago, the United States military and its allies

embarked on a difficult, yet noble mission: Rid the world of a

murderous, lying, and unpredictable dictator and, by doing so, allow

the people who had lived for so long under the shadow of

totalitarianism to experience the light of freedom.

Our troops and the Iraqi people have risen to each challenge in front

of them. Establishing a democracy takes persistence and dedication, and

the Iraqi people continue to prove that they are capable of this

tremendous task by meeting each deadline on the way to democracy.

Much progress has been made over the past 17 months on the political

front. In June of 2004, the Coalition Forces handed over control of the

country to Iraqis. A date of January 30, 2005, was set to hold

democratic elections for a transitional government.

Despite the threats of terrorists attacking voters at the ballot box,

millions of Iraqis turned out on January 30 for a historic democratic

election.

This newly elected government was tasked with drafting a constitution

and putting it up for a national referendum in October. Right on

schedule, on October 15, millions of citizens from Iraq's eighteen

provinces stood together to vote on a document that will guarantee and

protect their rights and serve as a blueprint for their nation's

future.

In this latest vote, 63 percent of Iraq's 15.5 million registered

voters once again defied the threat of terrorist attacks and voted. The

result: 78 percent of voters backed the constitution.

And the role of women in establishing this fledgling democracy should

not be overlooked. In April, I took a trip to the Middle East,

including Iraq. While on the trip I attended the Iraqi Women's

Democracy Initiative Training Conference held in Jordan. At this

conference, women came from all parts of Iraq. Many of the women tell

me they were threatened because of their desire to come to the meeting.

Several report that they were shot at. In total, about 130 women were

in attendance.

These women were thankful. I told them that the folks back home want

to know if the Iraqis appreciate what America has done.

They do, and they also realize the price that many Americans have paid.

They said that they are mothers and wives themselves, and they know

that mothers in America have lost sons, and wives have lost husbands.

The military has seen its share of successes as well. These successes

began with the swift removal of Saddam Hussein from power and his

ensuing capture, and have continued through the creation of Iraqi

security forces.

One by one, Iraqi Army battalions have stood up and joined the fight

to defend their homeland. By the end of October, a total of 206,500

Iraqi Security Forces have been trained and equipped.

Parts of the country that a few months ago were hotbeds of insurgency

are now controlled by Iraqi forces.

Our military is now fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with their Iraqi

counterparts to track down terrorists every day. Top al-Qaeda leaders

have been caught or killed. Stockpiles of weapons and ammunition are

being uncovered

Tough times--both politically and militarily--may still lie ahead for

this young democracy. The terrorists will undoubtedly attempt to thwart

the will of free people. And Iraqis will need to return to the polls in

December to elect a full-term parliament.

However, the Iraqi people have met their challenges and have overcome

obstacles at each step along the way. I am confident that as long as

Iraq and its allies continue to stand up against terrorism, I am

optimistic that more successes lie ahead.

The mainstream media has a habit of only reporting the bad news

coming out of Iraq. So it can be tough for some Americans to remain

optimistic about our efforts in Iraq. This would not be the case if

everyone had the chance to talk with many of the brave men and women

who are serving in Iraq.

Since the War began in 2003, I have visited Iraq twice. On each trip,

I have had the opportunity to talk with our troops on the ground.

Let there be no misunderstanding: our troops are proud of their

accomplishments. We should be too.

Because of our troops and the bravery and fortitude of the Iraqi

people, young Iraqi boys and girls are attending schools.

Electricity is being restored to all parts of the country, not just

the regions favored by a dictator. Iraqis are beginning to protect

Iraqis.

Men and women are participating in the democratic process.

And, most importantly, a ruthless dictator who terrorized his own

people and his neighbors, and who had shown a willingness to obtain and

use the worst weapons known to man, is no longer in power and will

stand trial for his crimes.

Let me end with this message to our troops and their families: We are

proud of you, we thank you, and the American people continue to stand

behind you.