Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues in

offering strong support for H. Res. 60, commending the free election

held in Iraq last Sunday, January 30, 2005. This historic event marked

progress, hope, and enthusiasm for the future of democracy in the Arab

region.

Iraq held free elections for the first time in about 50 years.

Millions of voters cast their ballots, and the death toll for the day

was 45--lower than usual since the United States occupied the region.

I applaud this administration for the successful free elections held

on Sunday under its auspices. An election with a turnout of nearly 60

percent is very encouraging for the Arab region. However, the fact

remains that American troops have remained in occupation for 2 years,

and the death toll continues to rise; therefore, we must proceed with

caution. The positive momentum that has come from a successful election

must be used as an opportunity to stop the bloodshed and the

expenditure of tax dollars on this effort. I hope that the

administration will use the positive momentum of this achievement as an

opportunity to devise an exit plan for our troops.

Now that the election has taken place, the next step of restoring

independence in Iraq is crucial and must be taken now. Along with 25

other original cosponsors, I joined Representative Lynn Woolsey to

introduce H. Con. Res. 35, a measure to bring the troops home. It

proposes to do this in a four-step process: (1) Development and

implementation of a strategy to withdraw American troops from the

region; (2) development and implementation of a reconstruction plan for

the Iraqi civil and economic infrastructure; (3) creation of an

international peacekeeping force composed of Iraqi leadership,

neighbors in the Arab region, the United Nations, and the Arab League

to keep Iraq secure; and (4) restoration of Iraqi officials as overseer

of its internal affairs. This legislation will help restore

independence in Iraq and will bring our troops home safe.

Since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, 1,423 members of

the United States military have died which includes 1,084 dead as a

result of hostile action and 333 of non-hostile causes. Since May 1,

2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq

had ended, 1,269 U.S. military members have died. More than 89 percent

of United States casualties in Iraq have come after this announcement.

The message as to our exit plan must be made clear to the Iraqi people,

the American people, and to our troops.

Mr. Speaker, I support H. Res. 60, and I urge my colleagues to join

me in the spirit of preserving democracy, in the spirit of instilling

international trust and self-sufficiency, and in the spirit of keeping

the American troops safe.