Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman

for the opportunity to be here this evening.

When our troops go into battle, they are blessed to have a chairman

who will fight for their body armor, who will fight for the resources

they need to prevail in every fight in this war on terrorism, and the

gentleman from California (Mr. Hunter) has done that, bar none. You

have made it your mission. You have sons that are serving in Iraq.

Thank you for the service that you give.

Madam Speaker, I think that is what is

so important tonight, that all of us here, and I think most of us that

are here to speak tonight, have been to Iraq. I have been twice, and I

am struck, as I am sure you are struck, by the dedication of our

soldiers. Let us face it, it is a difficult mission.

The sacrifice that is involved, a number of Americans have lost their

lives or have come home injured. There is a sacrifice for their

families. There is no question about that. But when I have gone there,

the dedication, the sense of purpose and progress that our troops are

making is noteworthy. It is something that I wish most Americans could

see, because when we look at the television and see it on the nightly

news, you do not get the full balance of the picture of the progress

that is being made.

Yes, as I said before, it is a very difficult situation. There is a

significant sacrifice that has to be made, but there is progress being

made. The progress is our exit strategy. When our troops have

successfully completed the mission, all of us, on a bipartisan basis,

will be able to welcome them home to their loved ones and say job well

done.

Let us look at that progress. I had the opportunity to go in November

2003 and in April 2005, and the difference was night and day. In 2003

there was hardly any Iraqi security forces. The Iraqi security forces

now total about 200,000 and are growing every day. Their training is

improving. Their ability to operate independent of our forces is

growing.

Yes, we have to continue to improve upon the command and control

structure and to make sure that they have all of the training and

armament that they need, but we are making tremendous progress; and we

are seeing it in the field as they are able to operate on their own and

take the battle to the terrorists who are killing innocent women and

children and Iraqi civilians indiscriminately. And the Iraqi security

forces, a year from now or perhaps in that time frame, they will be

fully trained, armed and equipped; and that is certainly significant,

significant progress.

When I was in Iraq in April, we had an opportunity to meet with a

number of Iraqi women leaders, and they told me, and these are Iraqi

people, they told me they are doing a much better job protecting their

country and their citizens. Yes, there is still work that needs to be

done, but hearing that from Iraqi people was very noteworthy.

The other thing that is so important and we saw an example once again

of progress is the steady march in Iraq toward democracy. The

Constitution has now been ratified. It was a very democratic debate.

The Sunnis in particular, many of them were opposed to it; but they

went to the ballot box; and for the vast majority, it was a peaceful

day. People voted. The majority of the Iraqi people, I believe it was

nearly 80 percent, voted for the Constitution.

What that means now, in December, there will be another round of

voting for a permanent parliament that will have to go about the

business of continuing the reconstruction. But as democracy takes hold,

more than anything else that, in combination with the Iraqi security

forces, will be what enables our troops to be able to know that they

have done a good job, they will be more ancillary. They will first be

able to withdraw to certain secure bases and then be able to come home

with a job well done. That is the strategy that is in place. It is

working. The number of Iraqi security forces is increasing every day.

Their performance is improving, and democracy is gaining traction every

day.

With those two forces continuing, our troops will be able to come

home. We will welcome them home to a job well done. Once again, it is

an honor and pleasure to be here and to work with the gentleman on this

important mission.