Mr. Speaker, as I was waiting for our time to arrive

this evening listening to this previous hour, my colleagues on the

Democratic side of the aisle started out by telling us what the

President might say tomorrow night about Social Security for the 21st

century. Then for 60 minutes the Democrats proceeded to use their

typical scare tactics to frighten seniors just as they did last year

with the issue of the prescription drug benefit for our neediest

Medicare beneficiaries.

They have the prerogative to talk about anything they want to during

this Democratic leadership hour, and they make a decision or their

leaders decide whatever the theme du jour is going to be. After all, my

colleagues, remember, our 2006 congressional elections are just around

the corner. We have only got 639 days left. So let us be just as

partisan and negative as we can possibly be toward President Bush and

his Republican majority. That is their theme du jour. As I say, my

colleagues on the other side, the Democrats and their leaders, they had

a choice of topics tonight. They could have talked about anything they

wanted to on this eve of what will be one of the most historic State of

the Union addresses in the history of our country.

My fellow Members, for almost 2 years now, we have been in a shooting

war, fighting to rid the world of terrorism, and to bring liberty and

freedom to the long-suffering Iraqi people. These brave souls had an

opportunity this past Sunday, just 3 days ago, January 30, to vote for

the first time in their lives, indeed a vindication, a renewal of

spirit, a new beginning for a great and proud people of the Middle

East. I fully expect the President, and my colleagues were predicting

what he might say tomorrow night, I fully expect the President to talk

about this great, historic occasion.

And that, my colleagues, is what we the Republicans and our

leadership have decided to talk about tonight to the American people on

the eve of the State of the Union address, to talk about the historic

election that occurred in Iraq just 3 days ago. I think that is what is

important to the American people. It is important to the Iraqi people.

It is important to the world. And to delve down into pure, raw partisan

politics at a time like this again, as I say, my colleagues on the

other side of the aisle can do what they want to, but I think they

missed a golden opportunity to hear some joy and good news and

vindication, yes, of our efforts and the efforts of the Iraqi people

over the last couple of years.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the Members' attention to a couple

of charts that we have here tonight. The first one, from the Los

Angeles Times, Monday morning, January 31, look at it: ``Iraqi Turnout

Trumps Violence.'' Yes, there were some people killed, I think some 44.

At least half of them were Iraqi security people who were trying to

secure the polls and making sure the good men and women, some of them

disabled, struggling to get to the polling place in Iraq, could vote

and not be harmed. Look at that headline from the Los Angeles Times.

Here is another, The Washington Post, Monday, January 31: ``Iraqis

Defy Threats As Millions Vote.'' How many million? Eight million, 60

percent of the registered votes. In fact, that percentage is just as

high as we had in our recent Presidential elections in many parts of

this country, where we do not have to worry about getting to the

polling place. We have to worry about maybe missing a son or a

daughter's soccer match or being late for work, which of course we are

permitted to do that on Election Day; but we certainly do not have to

worry about the threat of violence or indeed losing our lives and here,

60 percent, millions, vote, 8 million people in Iraq. And expatriate

Iraqis around this world in 14 different countries had an opportunity

to vote on this historic occasion and in many places here in the United

States as well.

So this is what we want to talk about. This is what the Republican

leadership, this is what the rank-and-file Members want to talk about

tonight as we celebrate and we look forward and we are so happy and

grateful for the sacrifices that the Iraqi people have made for

themselves and that we have made on behalf of them, and we want to

commend this President for having the courage to stand strong in the

face of unyielding, terrible criticism of his efforts.

So tonight it gives me a lot of pleasure to manage this time on

behalf of the majority to talk about something that is really good and

positive for this great country and for our world, certainly for the

Middle East. I am so pleased that many of my colleagues on my side of

the aisle have joined me in this hour, and we will be hearing from a

number of them.

I want to start out by yielding to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr.

Kline), who serves with me on the House Committee on Armed Services, a

great Member of this body who just got back from Iraq, led a small

congressional delegation of members of the House Committee on Armed

Services to be over there to see, to understand what the people were

going through in the lead-up to these elections. At this point, I would

like to let him share with us exactly what he saw on the ground in Iraq

in the lead-up to these historic elections.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Minnesota, and I thank him

for being with us tonight.

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, so the congressman

actually had the opportunity with that delegation to visit not only

Iraq but also Afghanistan and to sort of compare what it looks like a

year later after free elections were held and what hopefully the Iraqi

people can anticipate for themselves. He might want to elaborate on

that for the Members.

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I would like to share

with our colleagues on both sides of the aisle the poster, exactly what

he was just depicting, and I think maybe we can get that up here

because this is poignant. This is something that we absolutely need to

make sure that each one of us focus in on. I am so glad that the

gentleman from Minnesota brought that up, and I think this is the

picture to which he is referring.

Let us come back.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I share the joy of

the gentleman from Minnesota; and I commend him, and I thank him for

being with us tonight, and I commend him for his service on the

Committee on Armed Services and for his service to our country. He is a

veteran, one of the 5 percent of the 435 Members of the Congress who

served our country in the military. People serve in other ways, but I

have a special place in my heart for people like the gentleman from

Minnesota.

For him to come tonight and talk about what he saw in Afghanistan a

year after elections, 30 percent of the voting in Afghanistan was by

women, and talk about that lack of infrastructure, and then to go on to

Iraq in the days leading up to the election itself and to see those

Iraqi security forces working hard to try to secure, to protect these

people who were having the first opportunity in their lives to vote.

Yes, there were terrorist attacks, as the gentleman points out. I

think there were some 68 or 69 attacks. But do my colleagues know what?

Forty-four people lost their lives and over half of them were the Iraqi

security forces themselves, the police, not the people standing in line

to vote.

I have been to Iraq, like the gentleman from Minnesota has, I am sure

on more than one occasion. He knows that these improvised explosive

devices and rocket-propelled grenades and these shoulder-mounted

missiles, when these terrorists strike, they do not intend to kill less

than one person per attack, and that is what happened on election day

in Iraq this last Sunday.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that I have a couple of Members on our

side of the aisle, a couple of additional Members who have joined me

and will be talking about this historic occasion as we look forward to

the President's address tomorrow night. One of my colleagues I would

like to yield time to now is a dear friend and a fellow colleague on

the House Committee on Armed Services, and that is the gentleman from

Utah (Mr. Bishop).

Well, I want to thank, Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from

Utah, my good friend, for joining us tonight and for bringing some

historical perspective. Absolutely, once a history teacher, always a

history teacher; but I would say tonight to my colleagues, we are

talking about a world-class history teacher, and he gave us a good

lesson in Romanian history. I am standing up here listening to my

colleague, and yes, I have long since forgotten they went through this

struggle less than 15 years ago, in talking about of course the French

Revolution and the fact that something historic happened on Sunday.

But there is a lot more work to be done, as the gentleman from Utah

so clearly pointed out. We are not through, and for us to listen to

naysayers as we had to listen throughout this entire recent

Presidential and congressional election cycle, about declare victory

and come home even if you have not won. Look for an exit strategy.

Bring the troops home. Give us a day. How many? What day? This is

totally wrong, and I really appreciate the gentleman bringing that to

our attention tonight.

We have been joined as well by my colleague, the gentlewoman from the

great State of Tennessee (Mrs. Blackburn), and she is a passionate

Member of this body and works very intently for the people of her State

and her district and for this great country. It is a privilege tonight

for me to recognize her and thank her for being with us.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Tennessee

(Mrs. Blackburn) and I sincerely appreciate her sharing that poignant

testimonial, that anecdote from the Iraqi woman voting in those

elections and what they wanted to share with the American people and to

say not a simple but an elaborate thank you, a deep, heartfelt thank

you. I really appreciate the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs.

Blackburn) sharing that with us, and I thank her for being with us this

evening.

It is truly amazing that our friends on the other side of the aisle

spent one hour, the previous hour, of course, the determination of what

they talk about just as our subject matter is made by our leadership.

And their leadership decided, well, this was the great opportunity to

attack the President on Social Security for the 21st century. They

spent an entire hour and not one word, not a single word about this

historic election, free elections in the Middle East for the first time

in hundreds or maybe thousands of years. And certainly none of these

people that had that opportunity, some of them literally stepping over

pools of blood to get to that ink, to put on their finger that

indelible ink, as my colleagues pointed out, that will not wash off,

will not go away.

It was a way to make sure that people voted once and only once and

everything was secure. These people, not only were their lives at stake

before they got to the polling place and while they were waiting in

line, queuing up sometimes waiting hour after hour in the hot sun, in

dust, in misery, waiting to vote, but then they dipped that finger in

that indelible ink, knowing that for at least 2 days, maybe longer,

there was no way they could get that off their finger. So they are

putting their lives at risk even after the fact, but they did not care

because they are brave, courageous, wonderful people, and I am

extremely proud of them.

I am disappointed that our friends on the other side of the aisle

went 60 minutes without not one comment. They do not have to praise

President Bush or the Republican majority or this leadership, but to

not spend one word talking about what the Iraqi people did 3 days ago

is just beyond any imagination.

Mr. Speaker, as I stand here tonight and manage this time, and we do

have one additional speaker before we get into conclusion and I do want

to hear from the gentleman from Texas, but I just want to say, share

with my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, some of the thoughts that I have had

since this historic happening this past Sunday.

We all represent maybe 630 or so thousand people in our districts

across this great country; 435 of us who are Members of this body, this

House of Representatives. And we have all suffered and our people have

suffered, mainly our young soldiers men and women who have been in

harm's way, Marines, soldiers, sailors, airmen, some 1,600 maybe, close

to 1,600 now, who were killed in action and others that we have gone

and we have seen. Sometimes we visit them in theater, dying with them,

or talking to them or maybe been out to Bethesda to see them struggling

to recover from their injuries, proud that they have served this

country and served it well.

And I cannot help but think about three soldiers in my district, the

11th of Georgia, West Georgia, and its 17 counties. There have been

more injured, but there are three that lost their lives in this

conflict. I have been thinking about them for the last couple of days,

as I am sure my colleagues on both sides of the aisle have reflected on

the families, the loved ones from the funerals that they have attended

over the last year and a half as we have paid this great sacrifice on

behalf of the Iraqi people and freedom in this great world that we live

in as the President talked about in his inaugural address just the

other day.

And I want to mention them. I want to mention them because I do not

want to ever forget them. I do not want us to ever forget them. I want

to think about them. I want to think about their faces. I want to think

about the face of Command Sergeant Major Eric Cooke, whose uncle lives

up in Calhoun, Georgia, in Gordon County just on the outskirts of my

district, who, after serving almost 30 years this country in conflict,

in battles in several venues, gave his life on Christmas Eve 2003, two

days after I visited with him in theater.

He went on a mission in a Humvee, and he took the shrapnel that

probably was intended for somebody else, and he gave his life for this

great country.

I want to think about specialist Justin Johnston from Rome, Georgia,

Floyd County, 19 years old when he joined the Army, barely 21 years old

when he lost his life on Easter Sunday last year. And I think about

Janet and Joe, his parents, his brother Josh and people that have paid

this sacrifice and what did they give it for? What did their sons and

daughters give up their lives for?

Last but not least, I think about First Lieutenant Tyler Brown.

Lieutenant Tyler Brown, president of the student body at my alma mater,

the Georgia Institute of Technology, just a few years ago, 26 years old

at the time of his death, killed by a sniper in Iraq, just 2 weeks

after being redeployed there from the demilitarized zone. No picnic.

But Tyler Brown gave his life. He was a wonderful young man. His

parents, I think about them. I see their faces as I stand here tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I think about these people. I know that they have the

comfort of knowing as well that their sons and daughters did not die in

vain. I mention these three. There are many others. My colleagues,

maybe they have there, maybe they have been to more funerals than I

have been and seen more mayhem, but this is seared in my memory, and it

always will be. When you go to Arlington, when you visit as a tourist,

it is one thing, but when you go to Arlington to watch a young soldier

whose family you knew and represented laid to rest, who died for our

country, this is something of a totally different story.

That is why I am proud. I am proud to talk about this tonight, and I

am proud of these young men and women who have done this for us and

served us so well. So that is what I want my colleagues to think about.

Let me, before we use up all of our time, Mr. Speaker, and I get too

carried away, I do want to introduce another Member on our side of the

aisle, a new Member, a gentleman from the great State of Texas, a

judge, a fine judge, a member of the appellate branch of the judiciary

who might be a freshman Member, but he has got a lot of experience and

a lot of things to share with us tonight, not only on this issue that

we have been talking about for the last 45 minutes but also a point

that is very near and dear to his heart as well.

I proudly yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Gohmert).

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas. The

gentleman obviously speaks with passion and knows of what he speaks,

and I suspect that we will be hearing more from him on this issue as we

go forward in the 109th Congress because it certainly clearly needs to

be addressed, and the time tonight, of course, is in the context of

talking about freedom, talking about liberty, talking about the rule of

law and what we are trying to share with the Iraqi people and other

oppressed people of the Middle East and other parts of the world and

other Arab nations who have not yet felt that fresh smell of liberty

and democracy. So I thank the gentleman for joining us tonight and

speaking so eloquently.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I want to mention a couple of quotes that

mean a lot to me, mean a lot to everybody who has ever heard them, mean

a lot to this great country, mean a lot to Great Britain, but first of

all, this one.

The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the

blood of patriots and tyrants, Thomas Jefferson, November 13, 1787. The

blood of patriots indeed and the blood of tyrants indeed, and this is

what we are talking about.

This is a sacrifice that the Iraqi people have made on behalf of

themselves and what we have been making on behalf of them over these

nearly 2 years now as we have sacrificed our sons and daughters.

The other quote: Democracy is the worst form of government except for

all the others that have ever been tried. Of course, Sir Winston

Churchill. We are sharing, and that is what the President talked about

during his inauguration address on January 20. That is what we are

talking about, sharing. That is what he will talk about tomorrow night.

God bless you, Mr. President, and God bless America.