Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me time.

I congratulate the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. Granger) and the

gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. Ros-Lehtinen), the gentlewoman from

California (Mrs. Tauscher) and the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr.

Osborne) for their focus on this legislation.

This is a very exciting time. I know it is a contentious time. I just

returned from my ninth visit to Iraq yesterday morning. My purpose in

going was to meet with the drafters of the new Constitution, to express

our gratitude for their work and appreciation for their bravery, but

also to make sure they realize that they have an awesome opportunity to

a create successful country if they recognize that when they move

toward democracy, it has to include certain vital components.

Democracy obviously involves majority rule. That comes easy to folks.

They get majority rule but they also need to recognize the importance

of minority rights. And right along with that is the fact that

democratic countries that succeed are those democracies that recognize

women are an equal part.

When you look at the gross domestic product of the Arab nations, it

is astounding to recognize when you take in aggregate their total GNP

and in spite of controlling nearly two-thirds of the world's oil, they

still have a collective gross domestic product only equal to Spains'.

The message is clear, when you cut out half of your populace, you are

not going to prosper and grow. So it is in the self-interest of every

man and woman in Iraq to make sure women have an equal role in the

activities of their country.

When I met this past weekend with Iraqi women in Amman and in

Baghdad, and met with men and women who were participating in their

constitutional convention, it was clear they feel like they are the

Jeffersons and the Madisons and the Adamses and the Franklins and the

Shermans. They know they have this unbelievable opportunity to shape a

great nation.

It is right for our country to encourage them to do the right thing,

to tell them we know what has helped us succeed. But in the end, it is

their country and they will decide what is in their best interest.

They are going to decide, but if they want to succeed, and Lord knows

we want them to, they need to make sure that along with guaranteeing

majority rule and minority rights, right along with that there is the

very real need to guarantee women are not only protected as equal but

have an active role in their government.

Last June when the President demanded we transfer power to the

Iraqis, there were many who did not agree with him. We took this

American face and transferred it to Iraqis, and Iraqis began to be in

charge of their own country. They had their election this January. More

Iraqis participated in their election on a percentage basis than

Americans participate in their own elections.

And now they will met this August 15 deadline. They have assured me

they are going to have their constitutional draft done, they are going

to have their referendum on the 15th of October, and elect their new

government in December. They will succeed.

What is astounding is in spite of the bombings, in spite of the

chaos, it has not deterred the Iraqis from moving their country

forward.

I am going to conclude my remarks by again thanking the gentlewoman

from Texas (Ms. Granger) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. Ros-

Lehtinen) for their work, and the gentlewoman from California (Mrs.

Tauscher), and the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. Osborne) for his work.

I believe Iraqis know the importance of what they are doing, and that

this little nudge from us is important, but ultimately they get it.

They recognize women have a huge role to play in this potentially

powerful country, with 10 percent of the world's oil, with all the

water that a Middle East country could want. God bless our country, and

God bless our new fledgling democracy in Iraq.