Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my strong

support for both the men and women of our Armed Forces and the American

civilians serving in Iraq through the Department of State and other

U.S. agencies. I thank them for their courage and the dedication that

they have so bravely displayed in carrying out their noble mission of

liberating and securing Iraq from tyranny and terrorism.

Mr. Speaker, I have witnessed such dedication in conversations with a

former staffer of mine who returned from Iraq this past summer and from

one of my former interns who served with the United States Army in

Iraq. I have frequently discussed the situation in Iraq with my

husband, Dexter, a decorated Vietnam veteran who was wounded in combat

and was awarded a Purple Heart.

However, it has been my talks with my stepson Dougie, a first

lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps who is currently serving in Iraq,

which has helped me the most and has had the most profound effect on me

and helped me to fully comprehend the importance of the mission that

our men and women in the Armed Forces are embarked upon in Iraq. To him

it is not an obligation. It is an honor and a privilege to have the

opportunity to serve our country; to contribute to the freedom of the

Iraqi people; to confront the terrorists; and perhaps most importantly,

to fight tyranny, as the Greatest Generation did during World War II.

Our mission is just. It has far-reaching, longstanding, strategic,

and political ramifications. It is helping to further U.S. security and

foreign policy goals throughout the region. For these reasons and, most

importantly, for my stepson Doug Lehtinen, and his fiancee, Lindsay

Nelson, who is also a Marine officer currently serving in Iraq, and all

of the members of the U.S. Armed Forces serving in Afghanistan and Iraq

and elsewhere, we must continue to fully support our troops and their

mission. Simply stated, we cannot afford to yield a victory to the

terrorists in Iraq and throughout the region.

Iraq is one of the epicenters of the U.S. comprehensive strategy to

fight terrorism worldwide, a strategy that includes killing and

disrupting terrorists abroad; confronting theocratic and autocratic

regimes that harbor terrorists and facilitate terrorist attacks; and

promoting economic reform and democracy as a means to address those

threats.

Our ability to project major Armed Forces to the very heart of the

Middle East provides the United States, as well as our allies in the

war against terrorism, the wherewithal to directly address the tactical

and ideological challenges of Islamic extremism. Our presence in Iraq

further strengthens our leverage against current and emerging

democracies and increases the deterrent value of U.S. power.

Finally, through the promotion of incipient Iraqi democracy, we can

continue our concerted efforts to counter the root causes of Islamic

extremism and terrorism in that area.

However, our success in Iraq will not come without challenges.

Creating new and effective political and security institutions in Iraq

takes time. The task before us is not insurmountable; but if rushed, we

do risk failure for lack of persistence. The continuing presence of

U.S. and coalition forces must be determined by the achievement of

concrete objectives. We cannot send a message to the terrorists that

their war of attrition is succeeding and that we are weakening in our

resolve to win.

The Iraqi people have not weakened their resolve, and they have

clearly demonstrated their commitment to both the establishment and the

solidification of a democratic political culture through their January

30 election, through the October 15 referendum on their Constitution,

and their preparations for the December 15 elections.

Our men and women in uniform are not and have not weakened their

resolve. Let us not weaken our resolve in the United States Congress.

Let us not waver in our commitment to our mission, our very important

and noble cause in Iraq.