Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Price-Miller

resolution, which we have introduced today, to require the President to

submit to Congress a plan for the withdrawal of United States troops

from Iraq in the wake of the October 15 constitutional

referendum, beginning with an initial drawdown.

This is not a requirement I propose lightly. As many in this Chamber

and in my home State know, I have been an outspoken critic of the Bush

administration's policies in Iraq, and I voted against giving the

President authority to invade Iraq, regarding it as an abdication of

congressional responsibility.

I have supported funding for troops in the field and for Iraqi

reconstruction, while calling for an exit strategy, including

benchmarks to which the administration should be held accountable, and

major policy changes that would increase the probability of achieving

at least some of our goals.

But there is no evidence that President Bush has heeded anyone who

does not accept his glib assurances and his stay-the-course rhetoric.

As a result, the mistakes that have marred this effort from the

beginning, poor or nonexistent planning, for example, and weak

international participation, have been compounded.

Such failures must not become a rationale for extending our

occupation of Iraq. In fact, our presence itself is a target of the

insurgents and a magnet for international terrorists. And it may be

encouraging some elements of the Iraqi leadership to defer essential

decisions and compromises that are necessary if their country is to

assume responsibility for its own future.

So we must leave. How we leave does matter: in a way that spares the

lives of American troops and Iraqi noncombatants, in a way that

minimizes the chance that Iraq will descend into massacres, ethnic

cleansing or civil war, and in a way that maximizes the chances for

Iraqi self-defense and self-government.

But we must end the occupation, and the approval of the Constitution

offers us an opportunity to begin that process. It is an opportunity we

must seize. There are no guarantees in this enterprise. Iraq could rise

to this challenge with the Kurds and the Shia more fully accommodating

the essential interests of Sunnis in changes to the Constitution early

next year, based on input from a newly elected Sunni Parliament after

December, or Iraq could further descend into sectarian violence.

Our country cannot absolve ourselves of responsibility for creating

this quagmire, or for helping avoid the worst-case possibilities going

forward, but we must understand, and the President must tell the world

we understand, that a sustained American military presence is not part

of the solution. It is not feasible. In some ways it exacerbates the

difficulties, and it must be ended.

Our resolution draws in concept and content on one introduced in the

Senate by Mr. Feingold on June 14. It updates that resolution by taking

explicit account of the constitutional referendum and proposing an

initial immediate drawdown of troops.

Mr. Speaker, we should never have started this war. We should have

and could have utilized other means of containing and controlling

whatever threat Saddam Hussein represented. No ideal option is

available to us now in ending it, but the October 15 vote offers the

best opportunity we are likely to have to begin the process of

withdrawal credibly, and hopefully to turn the responsibility for

Iraq's future over to the Iraqis themselves, and to repair the

diplomacy and foreign policy from which the invasion of Iraq has been

such a tragic departure for our country.