Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the courageous Iraqi

people who voted in Sunday's Iraq election. My congressional district,

Marin and Sonoma Counties just north of the Golden Gate Bridge, had an

89.5 percent voter turnout in the last election. Believe me, we know

how important elections are to a democracy.

Sunday's election in Iraq was an important step for the people there,

and it is also an important milestone for America's role in Iraq. With

the elections completed, we in the United States must ensure that the

people of Iraq control their own affairs as Iraq transitions toward

democracy.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Bush and his team have not gotten much right when it

comes to Iraq, and Sunday's election provides them with yet another

opportunity to get back on course. Let us hope they take the smarter

path this time, one that supports the Iraqi people with international

cooperation to rebuild their economic and physical infrastructure.

President Bush loves to talk about democracy. While elections are

absolutely necessary to establish a democracy, they are not sufficient

to establish a democratic government. Democracy cannot take root in

Iraq when an occupying power remains in the country. Right now, the

presence of 150,000 American soldiers in Iraq is an obstacle to the

prospect of an Iraqi democracy because it is a rallying point for

dissatisfied Iraqis and others in the Arab world. Plus, our first

responsibility is to America and our American forces, which means we

must not leave them in Iraq as sitting ducks.

Last week I introduced legislation to secure Iraq for the future and

ensure that America's role in Iraq actually does make America safer. My

plan for Iraq is part of a larger SMART security strategy, which is a

Sensible, Multilateral, American Response to Terrorism that will ensure

America's security by relying on smarter policies. The withdrawal plan

that I, with the support of over two dozen other Members, have proposed

includes four components. First, develop and implement a plan to begin

the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. More than 1,400

American troops have died in the line of fire in Iraq. More than 10,000

other soldiers have been injured. These soldiers leave behind grieving

parents and grandparents, spouses and children, brothers and sisters,

friends and neighbors all around the country whose lives will never be

the same because of the war in Iraq. The best way to support our troops

is to bring them home.

Second, develop and implement a plan for the reconstruction of Iraq's

civil and economic infrastructure. The United States has a moral

responsibility to clean up the mess we made in Iraq. But that

responsibility needs to be fulfilled not by our military but by

humanitarian groups and companies that will help rebuild Iraq's

infrastructure. That does not include no-bid contracts to companies

like Halliburton and Bechtel. It does ensure that the Iraqi people will

benefit in the rebuilding process of their country.

Third, convene an emergency meeting of Iraq's leadership, Iraq's

neighbors, the United Nations and the Arab League to create an

international peacekeeping force in Iraq and to replace U.S. military

forces with Iraqi police and national guard forces to ensure Iraq's

security. Iraq's security problems are still the most serious cause for

concern in the country, and Iraq requires an international peacekeeping

force to address this problem, not the United States military. An

international peacekeeping force, supported by other Arab countries,

Iraq's neighbors and the United Nations will provide real legitimacy to

a conflict that has flown in the face of international law from the

very beginning.

Fourth, take all steps to provide the Iraqi people the opportunity to

control their internal affairs. The Iraqi people cannot truly control

their own affairs until the United States military has ceded back

authority to those very people. That is why it is essential for Iraq's

police and national guard forces to manage Iraq's security, not the

United States military.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. We should not abandon Iraq. There is

still a critical role for the United States in providing the

developmental aid that can help create a robust civil society, build

schools and water processing plants and ensure that Iraq's economic

infrastructure becomes fully viable. In the end, this is the smarter

option. And we must begin always taking the smarter path if we are to

succeed in Iraq.