Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to lose count of the number

of reasons why we went to war in Iraq. First it was because Saddam

Hussein was closely linked to al Qaeda, the terrorist group that

conducted the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11.

After that theory was disproved, the reason for going to war became

the imminent and immediate threat that Saddam posed to the United

States. According to the White House, Saddam possessed stockpiles of

nuclear and biological weapons.

When we learned that Saddam's nuclear weapons program had actually

been dismantled after the 1991 Gulf War, which was a full 12 years ago

when the U.S. began its first invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration

changed its rationale yet again. This time the reason for going to war

was for the very cause of democracy itself, to bring democracy to the

Iraqi people.

Some have said that Iraq's recent elections are the very embodiment

of Iraq's quick embrace of democracy. It is important right now to

commend the brave 58 percent of registered Iraqis who voted in these

elections, voted to select the legislators who will write the Iraqi

constitution.

In fact, Iraq's voter turnout was higher than the turnout in most

American elections. Believe me, the people who live in my congressional

district, Marin and Sonoma Counties, north of San Francisco, across the

Golden Gate Bridge, know how important elections are to keeping a

viable and vital democracy in a country. In last November's election,

we voted with a record 89.5 percent of registered voters turning out.

Sadly, despite Iraq's elections, the Middle East is as unstable as it

has ever been. The war in Iraq has made Iraq a more violent and

unstable place, making America less secure from the threat of terrorism

by creating a terrorist breeding ground in a country that had never

been a haven for terrorist groups like al Qaeda in the first place.

Some members of the Bush administration have expressed their

disappointment with the high Shiite turnout of Iraq's elections,

fearing that significant participation by religious Muslims may lead to

the creation of an overly religious Iraqi constitution, but that is the

danger, the danger risked by invading a country when you will not admit

the real reason you are there in the first place.

Are we there to stabilize Iraq so we can control their oil resources?

Are we there to force our notions of democracy onto the Iraqi people?

Or are we there to honor the Iraqi voters, voters who went to the polls

because they want to control their own destiny?

The most important thing to recognize is that Iraq will not resemble

the United States, and Iraq's constitution will not be an updated

version of our own. Mr. Speaker, it has become clear that we cannot

keep our troops stationed halfway around the world with the hope that

Iraq will become a Middle Eastern version of the United States.

But the elections do demonstrate that the Iraqi people are prepared

to manage their own affairs. That is why, now that Iraq's elections are

completed, the United States must ensure that the people of Iraq

control their own affairs as the country transitions towards democracy.

We can do this by supporting the Iraqi people, not through our

military, but through international cooperation to help rebuild Iraq's

economic and physical infrastructure.

We owe this to the people of Iraq, who are being killed by the

thousands. We owe it to our troops who are sitting ducks for the

terrorists, and we owe it to the nearly 1,500 American troops who have

died in this ill-conceived misadventure, as well as the 11,000 who have

been severely wounded.

To help the situation in Iraq, I have introduced H. Con. Res. 35,

which is legislation that will help Iraq secure its own future and

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

far, 27 of my House colleagues have signed on as cosponsors of this

important legislation.

My plan for Iraq is part of a larger strategy that I call SMART

security, which is a Sensible Multilateral American Response to

Terrorism that will ensure America's security by relying on smarter

politics.

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.

Instead of troops, we need to send scientists, educators, urban

planners and constitutional experts to help rebuild Iraq's flagging

economic and physical infrastructure.