Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished

gentleman from Georgia for the opportunity to speak for 5 minutes. Two

of our esteemed colleagues are en route here, and I would like to take

this 5 minutes to further thank the Members who have been involved in

the Iraq Watch.

I say so from the bottom of my heart because I think at the end of

the day there has been a great discussion that has been going on within

this body, but unfortunately, in so many respects, it has not fully

reached the American people, or it has in drips and drabs; and I

commend our colleagues on the other side of the aisle who were down

here in the previous hour.

I think, as the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie) has

suggested, we need to have that kind of frank discussion and debate

that all too often really does not take place on this floor. It is an

important dialogue that the American public needs to hear.

I believe in the final analysis it is not the shock and awe of our

military and the strength that it has that determines America's

greatness, but rather, the strength of our ideas and our ability to

express those ideas not only here on the floor but for citizens who are

out there listening, for them to partake and ultimately put in their

own words, with their own voice, from their own heart and head, their

feelings about these issues.

So often I go back to my district and so many of them will ask why is

no one speaking out about these issues, and not understanding the

workings of the House of Representatives and not understanding that so

many times meetings are actually going on in committees that do not

happen to make it on to C-SPAN, but also wondering where the voice and

conscience of the country is, and the Iraq Watch has done an

outstanding job in terms of making sure that there has been this

opportunity to reach out to the American public and inform them in a

nonpartisan way about these issues and raise these questions that are

so important for the American people to digest, especially as we face

upcoming elections that will determine the fate and course of the

Nation.

If we consider that in the previous election, less than 50 percent of

the American people voted and understanding that in the aftermath of

September 11 there has been a great outpouring of patriotism and

citizenship, and what better way to express that than by going out and

voting and immersing and involving one's self in the issues of the day,

it is our responsibility as Members of Congress to make sure that we

inform and educate the general public; but it is equally responsible

that the public have an opportunity to express their concerns.