Mr. Speaker, Iraq's final general election will be held

a week from tomorrow, December 15. Iraqis have paid a great price to

get to this point. 30 years under Saddam Hussein, the last 2\1/2\

years, thousands of Iraqi have died in a conflict.

The United States has paid a great price. Over 2,000 of our finest

soldiers have been killed, many more have been wounded, billions of

dollars have been spent, some have said this is a quagmire, some have

compared it to Vietnam. And yet, I think it is appropriate to mention

at this time that progress has been made.

Now I will mention several areas in which considerable progress has

been made. First of all, in the area of education, 774 schools have

been built or renovated since the conflict began. We see an 80 percent

increase in attendance in schools in Iraq. Most of these increases are

due to young women who have never attended school previously.

We have had 36,000 teachers trained in Iraq since the conflict began.

In the area of health care, 17 hospitals either have been built or are

currently under construction. 142 health clinics are under construction

today or have been completed. And 3.2 million children under the age of

5 have been vaccinated. This is roughly 97 to 98 percent of that

population.

As far as the economy is concerned, we see many small business

starting to spring up. Cell phones, satellite dishes, newspapers,

television stations are apparent at every turn. And there are 1 million

more automobiles today in Iraq than prior to the conflict. So the

economy is not perfect, but it is getting better.

As far as the government, we have mentioned many times that the

constitution, of course, has been written out, approved October 15 by

more than 70 percent of the people. The Sunnis voted in large numbers.

And now the election is December 15.

As far as the plan to get out of Iraq, the exit strategy, we often

hear that there is no plan. The plan has been very clear from almost

day one to train and equip 270,000 Iraqis. To date we are at 211,000

Iraqis trained and equipped. There are many areas of Iraq that are

totally under Iraqi control with no U.S. forces present or even as

back-ups.

This is something that oft times is not reported. So this is a

critical time. We often hear people say, well, the Iraqis want us to

leave. I think that is true. They would like to see us out of there.

But if you ask them, they will tell you, not yet. Not at this point.

Not at this turning point.

So I think that we have all of this discussion now going on about our

pulling out. And this discussion to the effect that we are losing, that

we cannot win. These comments go world-wide, and they are made by

policy makers, often here in Washington. And they certainly carry

weight in the Middle East. And I would like to make an observation from

the world of athletics, something I know a little bit about. There are

some principles of competition that I think apply, not just to

athletics, but to military conflict as well.

And I would say, first of all, number 1, never tell your team that

you cannot win. You would not tell them that before the game, you would

not tell them at half time, you would not tell them in the fourth

quarter that they cannot win and that they are not winning, because

there is such a thing as self-fulfilling prophecy.

This is something that no coach would do, nobody who is responsible

would do this to people that you care about, to people that you want to

win, it is something that simply would not be done. And the soldiers

that we talked to, I have been to Iraq three times. I talked to them.

They do not believe they we are losing. They think that we can win.

They think this is very winnable. They see accomplishment.

And the reason that we have so many soldiers reenlisting to go back

over there for a second and third tour is because they see the

accomplishment. They would not do this if they thought they were

losing. A second principle is never give encouragement and reason for

optimism to an opponent.

This is something you would never do in an athletic contest. So as

the game goes along, and as you enter the fourth quarter, what you do

is you carry yourself as though you are winning. You do not show

fatigue. You do not show injury. And so you do not give encouragement.

You do not allow people to believe that somehow they are going to wear

you down. And so this is something that I think is critical that we

carry that understanding.

And so if we pull out prematurely, much as a Captain from Nebraska

told me when I was in the Middle East, he said this. Number 1, if we

pull out early, those killed and wounded will have sacrificed in vain.

That is very true. What do we tell their families? How do you go and

address a mother or father who have lost a solider, when we have really

quit?

Secondly, large numbers of Iraqis will die and we will have broken a

promise. We told them we would not pull out. This is a promise we made.

And then thirdly, we will certainly encourage terrorism everywhere.

Anytime terrorists feel that they are winning, or that their methods

are effective, all you do is encourage more terrorism worldwide, and

the United States will become a bigger target.

So as I have talked to many Iraqi women, and I am the co-chair of the

Iraqi Women's Caucus, what they will tell you consistently is this, we

now have hope. We now see a future. Iraqis truly believe that things

are getting better. They think that things will be better 6 months, a

year from now. And I hope that the American people will have the same

feeling, the same confidence, the same optimism, because this is

something that we cannot afford to lose.