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Madam Speaker, it was truly great to have the 56th

Brigade home this past weekend from Iraq. Commanded by Colonel James

``Red'' Brown of Lindale, Texas, they did a great thing this past year.

It was the largest deployment of troops from the Texas reserve unit

since World War II. This was not just a difficult year in their own and

their families' lives, it was a historical year for the ages.

Many believe that the area Iraq occupies was where mankind had its

beginning. There, in the cradle of mankind,

Iraq, had an historic election of representatives to write a

constitution. It drafted and approved its constitution, and now today,

because of the efforts of so many military members, including the 56th,

that area elected its first true representatives to lead a democratic

form of government.

There are those who have said it is a quagmire in Iraq and it is a

mistake for us to be there. Some made these statements because of

personal heartache. Some, on the other hand, were made from partisan

political motivation, and some from disdain for our president and a

desire to see his efforts fail, even though it risked world stability

and national security.

But our soldiers were there. They know they have done a great thing.

They have seen the admiring faces of Iraqi children that were never

present in Vietnam. They have heard gratitude from many there in Iraq,

our soldiers have. We have not heard as much here.

They not only fought, protected and defended, the 56th, for example,

built a school and other important infrastructure improvements. They

also saw the frantic efforts of terrorists who were terrified that

democracy and the people will begin to rule over them and their

oppressive dictatorial ways. They kept many terrorists occupied there,

rather than here in America.

Some say that the freedom, democracy and liberty they were fighting

for and the evil they have fought against simply was not worth it. My

friends, it is worth it, and they are our heroes. They and their

families have sacrificed for us, and we are grateful.

My friend from Lindale, who is also a Texas Aggie and a citizen

soldier, Colonel Brown, is an American patriot. He and his

distinguished command Sergeant Major Chambless led a band of great

American patriots, and they led them well.

The quote from the 1800s by philosopher John Stewart Mill certainly

applies to our present situation. He said,

Those who have been serving in Iraq and Afghanistan and in harm's way

on our behalf are some of the better people of whom Mills spoke.

Today was just an incredible day in Iraq. That for which we have been

hoping and fighting happened. The Iraqis elected their first elected

officials who will preside for the next years to come. There have been

threats this year against any Iraqi who voted on. Those Iraqis who

stuck their fingers into the ink knew they were readily identifiable

for two to three weeks to any terrorist that wanted to kill them. What

courage. We have voters here who will not even go out if it sprinkles

or rains, and yet they were willing to risk the threat of death. They

are not out of the woods. They can see the home lights though glowing

from where they have gotten.

It was particularly distasteful though that so many had stepped up

their screaming and their histrionics to ``pull out now.'' Have you

wondered why the surrender call became so shrill just weeks and days

before this historic election? Many of those knew if things went too

well, the President's numbers might go up, the Republicans' numbers

might go up. So, some had good motives, some did not. They risked the

national security.

Now, because of the work of our heroes in Iraq, a great thing

happened today, and we are grateful. May God comfort those who have

paid with the sacrifice of a loved one in our Nation's defense. May God

bless our defenders, our champions, our service members. God bless their

efforts and keep them safe. And through their valiant efforts may God

continue to bless our America.

To those in Iraq, I say I look forward to seeing you in just a couple

of days.