Mr. Speaker, first, I want to congratulate the

courageous Iraqi people who participated in last Sunday's election to

nominate legislators to write Iraq's Constitution.

My congressional district gets it when it comes to the importance of

elections to our democracy. In November's Presidential election, a

record 89.5 percent of registered voters in Marin and Sonoma Counties

turned out to vote.

The problem is that irresponsible behavior has been a guiding

principle of the administration's behavior in leading the Nation to war

in Iraq. This has been a dishonest war from the word go. The President

said he had heard evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, yet

to date no weapons of mass destruction have been found. President Bush

himself has officially called off the hunt for weapons of mass

destruction.

The Iraq invasion has made the Middle East a more violent and

unstable

place, and it has made America less secure at home by creating a

terrorist breeding ground in a country that was not a haven for

terrorist organizations like al Qaeda before we invaded it. The sad

irony is that after our Nation was attacked on 9/11 by al Qaeda, the

Bush administration's response was to bomb and kill civilians in one of

the few countries in the Middle East that was inhospitable to al Qaeda.

Mr. Speaker, there is no justice in an operation based purely on

ideological reasons, reasons that caused the deaths of more than 1,400

Americans and untold thousands of Iraqis, not to mention well more than

10,000 American troops injured and very, very severely wounded.

So now that Iraq's elections are completed, we in the United States

must ensure that the people of Iraq control their own affairs as Iraq

transitions toward democracy. In fact, Sunday's election in Iraq gives

the United States yet another opportunity to get back on track in Iraq.

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, people

who are being killed by the thousands, and to our troops who are

sitting ducks for terrorists.

Last week, I introduced H. Con. Res. 35 with 24 original cosponsors,

legislation that will help 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, smarter 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 I have proposed includes four major components.

First, develop and implement a plan to begin the immediate withdrawal

of U.S. troops from Iraq. The soldiers who have died in Iraq leave

behind grieving loved ones whose lives will never be the same because

of the war in Iraq. The best way to support our troops is to remove

them from harm's way.

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, and not through no-bid contracts to companies like

Halliburton and Bechtel.

Third, convene an emergency meeting of 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. A peacekeeping

force supported by Iraq's neighbors and the global community will

provide real legitimacy to a conflict that has flown in the face of

international law from its very beginning.

Fourth, take all steps to provide the Iraqi people with 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 the Iraqi 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.