Madam Speaker, I thank the chairman.

I rise in strong support of House Resolution 873. On several

occasions, I have had the opportunity to visit Iraq and had the

privilege of visiting the Kurdistan Region. I have seen firsthand the

stability in this rapidly developing part of Iraq. Which is why on

October 27 of last year, I joined Congressman Rohrabacher in

introducing H. Res. 873, a resolution that would encourage the State

Department to establish an American consulate in Erbil, which is the

capital city of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Almost 20 other

countries, including developed European allies and other world powers,

have already set up their consulates in the Kurdistan Region, and

America, I believe, should do the same. Establishing a consulate in

Iraqi Kurdistan should be part of our transition in Iraq, from a

military presence to a civilian and diplomatic one. This is an

important step on Iraq's path to normalization and recognizes the

growing stability in that part of the world and in northern Iraq.

A consulate in Erbil will serve both U.S. and Iraqi interests. A

consulate will aid in fostering the growing economic, potential

commercial and cultural/educational ties between the Kurdistan Region

of Iraq and the U.S. The lack of a consulate is putting America at a

disadvantage in the region and is a disservice, I believe, to our Iraqi

Kurdish partners.

Since introduction of this resolution, the State Department has

released plans to set up two permanent consulates in Iraq, readying

itself for a larger role in the country as the U.S. military presence

prepares to leave. The administration is requesting funds in the

military supplemental for a consulate in Basra and one in northern

Iraq. I believe the one in northern Iraq should be located in Erbil.

Erbil is one of the longest contiguous residential cities in the

world, and as we have engaged in Operation Iraqi Freedom, not a single

soldier, not a single American life has been lost in combat in the

northern part of Iraq. America's friends throughout the world and

America's friends in Kurdistan I believe deserve the presence of a

consulate in this country in Erbil in northern Iraq.