

various other States. In those dark days, the Federal Government rightly stepped in to extend the guarantees of our Constitution to every American, regardless of race.

Georgians have worked together closely for the past 40 years to heal the wounds of the past, and we have progressed tremendously. Black Georgians today are equal partners, not only in access to the voting booth but also to elected positions of power.

In the parts of Georgia that experienced the most oppressive and violent abuses of civil rights, that is in counties and cities where African Americans are a majority, black Georgians are now the leaders of those local communities. African Americans hold a significant portion of the seats in the Georgia legislature, where many have held positions of great influence. Nine of our 34 Statewide elected posts are held by African Americans, a percentage that comes close to mirroring their proportion of the State's population.

Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker is an African American who has twice won Statewide election to that post. Our Statewide elected labor commissioner is black, as are three justices on our State Supreme Court. Four African Americans hold seats in our 13 member House delegation. Two of those black members defeated white candidates in majority white districts.

African Americans have exercised their electoral muscle for decades now in Georgia. Blacks in Georgia have higher levels of voter registration and participation than do whites. In fact, blacks in Georgia have higher registration rates than do most blacks outside the South.

Furthermore, black and white candidates for public office draw comparable support from white voters. In other words, black and white candidates of the same party win or lose at the polls with similar vote percentages. No longer will Georgians vote against a black candidate simply because he or she is black.

With these facts in mind, I call on Congress to let Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act expire. Section 5 was implemented as a temporary statute to correct a specific problem. In the late 1960s, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 5 was constitutional only because it was narrowly tailored and temporary. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to my colleagues here in the House that 40 years is more than temporary.

Now Congress is considering extending Section 5 for another 25 years, to 2030, without giving any consideration to the changes that have occurred since 1965. If there is a need for Section 5 today in Georgia, it must be needed everywhere.

□ 1915

If it is good for Georgia, it will be good for your State too. But if you do not think your State election laws should be subjected to Federal over-

sight, then I challenge each and every one of you to at least, Mr. Speaker, look at the facts of today's Georgia before casting a vote that does not affect your constituents, but does affect mine.

Georgia has fulfilled the vision of the Voting Rights Act and should be treated the same as every other State.

PASSAGE OF THE PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS PROTECTION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMANN of New York). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. HARRIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. HARRIS. Mr. Speaker, earlier today I was proud to cast a firm vote in support of the Private Property Rights Protection Act. While this measure will not reverse the Supreme Court's mind-boggling 5-4 decision in the *Kelo v. New London* case, it will ensure that American taxpayers will not have their hard-earned dollars used in its support.

No State or locality shall be permitted to employ the power of eminent domain to seize private property in the name of economic development. In addition, the bill will grant appropriate access to State and Federal courts for those who seek justice and remedy for any nonmeritorious seizure of their property.

There is no question that Americans do not wish to shirk their responsibility to take care of their community through support for measures which serve the public good. However, most do not view fulfillment of this obligation as necessitating a forfeiture of their fundamental rights. Few rights are as central to the foundation of our great Nation as is the right of control over one's private property.

As James Madison laid out in the *Federalist Papers*, private property rights lie at the foundation of our Constitution: "Government is instituted no less for the protection of property than of the persons of individuals."

Madison's declaration was echoed by Justice William Paterson in *Vanhorne's Lessee v. Dorrance* (1795) when he asserted: "The right of acquiring and possessing private property and having it protected is one of the most natural, inherent, and inalienable rights of man."

This does not require one to have expertise in constitutional law to conclude from these statements that the Framers did not intend for citizens to cede their "natural, inherent, and inalienable rights" in the name of expanding the local tax base or in the development of one of our favorite Starbucks or Wal-Mart's.

As Justice Clarence Thomas noted in his dissent, the text of the fifth amendment permits the taking of property "only if in the public right to employ it."

In response to the public concern of the *Kelo* decision, the Ohio State legislature recently passed a measure pro-

hibiting cities from seizing unblighted land for economic development in 2006. And Ohio is not alone. Excluding bills prefiled for the 2006 legislative session, the National Council of State Legislatures found that 12 States have already taken legislative steps to prohibit in some form or fashion the use of eminent domain in private property seizure.

Today, we join in the fight on behalf of all Americans who own or aspire to own their small piece of paradise and, more importantly, to own it without fear from unwarranted, unjustified, and unconstitutional seizure.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WAR IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to be here tonight, along with fellow colleagues and with the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Duncan Hunter, to talk to you about the war in Iraq.

During my recent visit to Iraq, it was clear to me that our brave military men and women know what they are doing, why they are doing it, the progress they are making, and the threat to our world and our way of life if they fail. They see the big picture: Iraq is a key piece in a region-wide and worldwide struggle.

What they wanted to know was what were the American people saying and thinking, and they wanted to know why their stories are not being told, and why their successes are not being told.

Mr. Speaker, recently there was a New York Times article that included this quote. It says: "I kind of predicted this. A third time just seems like I am pushing my chances." But in reality, Mr. Speaker, that was a much longer quote that I would like for you to see and I would like for you to hear. What that quote said was: "Obviously, if you're reading this, then I have died in Iraq. I kind of predicted this. That is why I am writing this in November. A third time just seemed like I am pushing my chances. I don't regret going. Everybody dies, but few get to do it for something as important as freedom. It may seem confusing why we are in Iraq. It's not to me. I am here helping these people so that they can live the way that we live, not have to worry about tyrants or vicious dictators, to do what they want to do with their lives. To me, that is why I died. Others have died for my freedom. Now this is my mark." Corporal Jeffrey B. Starr.

We would all like to thank Corporal Starr for his service, to tell him and his family that America mourns their very great loss, and to say that he is a true American hero.

We are here tonight to tell his story and to tell the story of the very brave

men and women who are serving to keep us free. First, I would like to start by recognizing Congressman DAN BURTON from Indiana.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to make a comment about what you just said about the New York Times article. When you see what was said at the beginning there, written in the New York Times, you immediately feel like, well, this young man was saying, you know, this is something we should not be doing, and I am just pushing my chances. But when you read the whole article, it is clear that he thought the life that he was giving for the freedom of those people was worth it.

Mr. Speaker, he said in the last part there: "To me, that is why I died. Others have died for my freedom. Now this is my mark."

I mean, I cannot believe that there are distortions like that in the media. It makes me just cringe when young men and women pay a price like that and write to their loved ones why they are doing it and why it was so important that they made that sacrifice and then have them be mischaracterized by a newspaper that has a preconceived idea of what ought to be done over there. It really, really bothers me.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, my colleague, DUNCAN HUNTER, who is the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, gave me this Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to Sergeant First Class Paul R. Smith of the United States Army. I was reading this and I was thinking about the sacrifices that these young men and women have made to protect people and to make sure that these people get the freedoms that we have enjoyed for so long. It says: "Sergeant First Class Smith braved hostile enemy fire to personally engage the enemy with hand grenades and anti-tank weapons and organized the evacuation of three wounded soldiers from an armored personnel carrier struck by rocket-propelled grenades and a 16-millimeter mortar rounds. Fearing the enemy would overrun their defenses, Sergeant First Class Smith moved under withering enemy fire to man a 50-caliber machine gun mounted on a damaged armored personnel carrier. In total disregard for his own life, he maintained his exposed position in order to engage the attacking enemy force. During this action, he was mortally wounded. His courageous actions helped defeat the enemy attack and resulted in as many as 50 enemy soldiers killed, while allowing the safe withdrawal of numerous wounded soldiers. Sergeant First Class Smith's extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the Third Infantry Division, Rock of the Marne, and the United States Army."

Mr. Speaker, it really bothers me when I see people come down here and start in one way, giving an offhanded compliment to our soldiers and sailors

and marines who are over there fighting and say, you know, we really respect them; and then with the other hand they say, oh, we ought to get out of there right now. We ought to withdraw tomorrow. We ought to get everybody out of there, because this is a lost cause.

It is just not a lost cause. They went over there to do their duty and to stop worldwide terrorism, and this is the focal point. It is really bad that we have people in this body on the other side of the aisle, in my opinion, that say, you know, they are doing a great job and we really support them and, at the same time, the sacrifices that have been made should be for naught, we ought to just bring them home.

We are in a world war against terrorism, a world war, and this is the major battleground right now. The reason we are not being attacked in large part here in the United States, in my opinion, is because these young men and women are making these sacrifices over there, in the middle of the storm, where terrorism has its genesis, where Iran and Syria and other countries are supporting terrorism. They do not want democracy to flourish over there, because they know their days will be numbered if democracy succeeds. Our young men and women who are fighting over there are making their days numbered, in my opinion.

I would like to just make one quote from Sir Winston Churchill, when I think about my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and they start talking about how we have to get out of there right now. Sir Winston Churchill, who was one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century, he said in a speech that he made entitle "We Shall Fight on the Beaches," which is very famous, he says: "Wars are not won by evacuations." You do not win by retreating.

The Iraqis now have almost 190,000 men in their armed services and their police forces over there. They are taking up more and more of the fight every single day. As soon as they become battle-ready and they can protect themselves, you are going to see us starting to bring our troops home. But we are not going to capitulate. Not under this President, we are not, and not under the majority that we have in this Congress.

Now, if the more liberal Members of this body want to cave in, if they want to assuage the enemy and pat them on the back, then that is what is going to be their legacy to this country and to this world; but I do not want to be a part of that, and I do not think my colleagues on this side of the aisle want to be a part of it either.

Let me just say one thing that is not being reported by the media that should be, and it should be reported thoroughly and fully. Things are getting better in Iraq. There are now 196,000 Internet subscribers. There used to be almost none. Now there are 44 commercial television stations. None existed under Saddam Hussein when he

buried alive up to 100,000 people and killed over 400,000 people. There are more than 100 independent newspapers and magazines and 72 commercial radio stations. None existed before under Saddam Hussein. There are now 3,404 public schools, all kinds of projects, police and fire stations, health facilities, and new reconstruction projects going on. Things are moving in the right direction, but they are not being reported by the media in this country.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding to me. I would just like to end by saying that the war against terrorism is one that we cannot and must not lose, and our fighting men and women are paying the supreme price over there right now, defending not only the rights and freedoms of the people in Iraq and Afghanistan, but they are also protecting us as well. So I would just like to say God bless them and thank each and every one of them for what they are doing.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman for taking his time to join us tonight to talk about true American heroes and what they are doing. You will find it interesting that today in the Armed Services Committee, we had a panel of three men, Marines and Army both, who have served in Iraq. And when they were questioned about media coverage, they gave a couple of very interesting comments. One told us he never knew the war was going so poorly until he came home. Another one told us that the Iraqi press is doing a wonderful job of reporting what is going on over there, those independent newspapers and magazines that you have just referenced, now having 100 of them in Iraq. Servicemembers there feel that the press is only reporting when bullets are flying and not the progress that they are making.

So I thank the gentleman for being here, and I thank the gentleman for his comments.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

□ 1930

Mr. NEUGEBAUER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) for recognizing me.

Mr. Speaker, I have had the great honor on two occasions since I have been in Congress to go to Iraq and Afghanistan. I went early in November of 2003 and then again back in March of this year. What a difference those months have made. One of the things that I was awestruck by was the amount of progress that has been made in the country of Iraq since the beginning of the war when we overthrew Saddam Hussein.

One of the things that I am puzzled by is that, when I go back to the district and start talking about how things are going in Iraq, my fellow Texans say, "Randy, why do we not ever get to hear about that when we watch the news?"

You know, that is a really good question. One of the things that I think is

important for the American people to realize is the amount of progress that we have made over there. In a very short period of time, we have liberated Iraq from a terrible dictator, a killer, a murderer, and that country is moving forward to install a democratic government. That is happening. They have met every deadline that they have established for themselves.

In December, they will have a very important democratic election to elect their new parliament.

One of the other things that is going on that is so important is that the Iraqi people are participating in a major portion of the defense of their country. That is an important part of our strategy.

Our strategy is two-fold, to help the Iraqi people to learn to be able to defend their country themselves and also to help them move in a way to establish this democratic government.

I think it is a great tribute to our men and women that, just the other day, 63 percent of the Iraqi people turned out to vote. I wish in some of our elections 63 percent of Americans turned out.

You have to understand the conditions that these people turned out. Sixty-three million people turned out to vote in conditions where it was not snowing or raining, but they were risking their lives; and over 78 percent of those people so far have supported this new constitution.

On a recent trip back from Iraq we stopped in Amman, Jordan, where about 120 or 130 Iraqi women had risked their lives and driven to Amman, Jordan, to participate in a conference to learn how to participate in this new democracy that they are about to inherit.

And one of the things was I was sitting at the table with some of those women at lunch, and we were discussing different things about their coming and risking their lives to come to that. And I asked them, I said some people back home asked if the Iraqi people appreciate what the Americans have done for them, and the allied forces.

This one lady, I will never forget, with tears streaming down her eyes, she said, "Mr. Congressman, you have to understand. We are mothers. We are wives. We are sisters. We are aunts. And we understand the huge price that mothers and sisters and wives and Americans have paid for our freedom. And we shall never forget."

And it is important that America not forget the tremendous contribution that our young men and women are making. As I go around, I always take an opportunity to thank the families, because, right along with our men and women that are in harm's way, those families serve right beside them. They are back home holding down the fort, making sure the kids get to school, making sure the car gets fixed and the house is in repair. We cannot forget them.

On Saturday, unfortunately, I had the opportunity to have to go to a funeral in Dimmit, Texas, for Jacob Dones. J.J. he is called by his friends. But you know what? It was an opportunity to go and be a part to celebrate the life of a young hero.

As I travel back and forth to Iraq, one of the things that I am awestruck about is the enthusiasm and the dedication and the commitment that our young men and women have to the job that they are doing over there; and I always ask them, is there a message that you want me to take back home? And they say, "Congressman, tell the folks back home what a great job we are doing and how important it is that we finish this job."

To get back to Lubbock, Texas, and back into District 19 each week, I travel and I stop at DFW airport. There are always young men and women going and coming from the battlefield, and I always take an opportunity to say thank you for your service.

And one of the things that they start, without me even asking them, they say, "Congressman, it is important that we finish this job." I wish you could see the children that are going to school, boys and girls that get to go to school now, and the fact that electricity is on in parts of the country that in the past it was not and that water systems are in place and that an economy is beginning to emerge in Iraq.

So, as I close and thank the gentleman for this opportunity, I want to say to our young men and women, thank you again. We pray for you. We are glad you are doing the job you are doing. We are proud of you. And to those families we say thank you, also.

So God bless them, and God bless America.

Mrs. DRAKE. Congressman, I would like to tell you two stories about the Iraqi people. On my trip, I was quite amazed, flying from Baghdad to Balad in a black Army helicopter, very low and very fast over agricultural fields; and the people working the fields were waving at the helicopter. When we got to Balad, I commented, only to be told they always wave at us.

The second story was in Arizona this summer I went out for a congressional meeting. Turned out my cab driver was from Iraq. He has been here 16 years. Still has family in Iraq. And he goes to Iraq on a contract working with the Iraqi troops.

When he realized I was a Member of Congress, he stopped the cab, turned around and said, "I would like for you to thank the American people for me for what you have done." He said, "When I go over there, it is like I am on vacation. There is only a few places where there are problems." He said, "You people work so hard and so long, I do not think that you ever sleep, and you do it all for us."

Mr. NEUGEBAUER. It is very humbling, and as we sat and participated with those Iraqi women and talked

about, you know, how they began to participate in this democracy and whether it is at the local level or at the state level or at the parliament, but the commitment and the courage that they had already shown.

I think, as you have heard this story before if you have been to the theater, about the fact that the insurgents are now targeting the Iraqi people because they realize what is going on over there, that the Iraqi people have a hunger for this new gift that we have given them. So they are targeting these recruiting stations where some people were killed maybe the day before, and the very next day there will be long lines of young Iraqi men and women coming forth to serve.

It is very encouraging. I want the American people to know that they can be very proud of their soldiers.

I want to thank Chairman HUNTER for arranging this Special Order Hour tonight as well as all of my colleagues who are taking the time tonight to honor our troops and show support for the brave Iraqi people.

Two and a half years ago, the United States military and its allies embarked on a difficult, yet noble mission: Rid the world of a murderous, lying, and unpredictable dictator and, by doing so, allow the people who had lived for so long under the shadow of totalitarianism to experience the light of freedom.

Our troops and the Iraqi people have risen to each challenge in front of them. Establishing a democracy takes persistence and dedication, and the Iraqi people continue to prove that they are capable of this tremendous task by meeting each deadline on the way to democracy.

Much progress has been made over the past 17 months on the political front. In June of 2004, the Coalition Forces handed over control of the country to Iraqis. A date of January 30, 2005, was set to hold democratic elections for a transitional government.

Despite the threats of terrorists attacking voters at the ballot box, millions of Iraqis turned out on January 30 for a historic democratic election.

This newly elected government was tasked with drafting a constitution and putting it up for a national referendum in October. Right on schedule, on October 15, millions of citizens from Iraq's eighteen provinces stood together to vote on a document that will guarantee and protect their rights and serve as a blueprint for their nation's future.

In this latest vote, 63 percent of Iraq's 15.5 million registered voters once again defied the threat of terrorist attacks and voted. The result: 78 percent of voters backed the constitution.

And the role of women in establishing this fledgling democracy should not be overlooked. In April, I took a trip to the Middle East, including Iraq. While on the trip I attended the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative Training Conference held in Jordan. At this conference, women came from all parts of Iraq. Many of the women tell me they were threatened because of their desire to come to the meeting. Several report that they were shot at. In total, about 130 women were in attendance.

These women were thankful. I told them that the folks back home want to know if the Iraqis appreciate what America has done.

They do, and they also realize the price that many Americans have paid. They said that they are mothers and wives themselves, and they know that mothers in America have lost sons, and wives have lost husbands.

The military has seen its share of successes as well. These successes began with the swift removal of Saddam Hussein from power and his ensuing capture, and have continued through the creation of Iraqi security forces.

One by one, Iraqi Army battalions have stood up and joined the fight to defend their homeland. By the end of October, a total of 206,500 Iraqi Security Forces have been trained and equipped.

Parts of the country that a few months ago were hotbeds of insurgency are now controlled by Iraqi forces.

Our military is now fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with their Iraqi counterparts to track down terrorists every day. Top al-Qaeda leaders have been caught or killed. Stockpiles of weapons and ammunition are being uncovered.

Tough times—both politically and militarily—may still lie ahead for this young democracy. The terrorists will undoubtedly attempt to thwart the will of free people. And Iraqis will need to return to the polls in December to elect a full-term parliament.

However, the Iraqi people have met their challenges and have overcome obstacles at each step along the way. I am confident that as long as Iraq and its allies continue to stand up against terrorism, I am optimistic that more successes lie ahead.

The mainstream media has a habit of only reporting the bad news coming out of Iraq. So it can be tough for some Americans to remain optimistic about our efforts in Iraq. This would not be the case if everyone had the chance to talk with many of the brave men and women who are serving in Iraq.

Since the War began in 2003, I have visited Iraq twice. On each trip, I have had the opportunity to talk with our troops on the ground.

Let there be no misunderstanding: our troops are proud of their accomplishments. We should be too.

Because of our troops and the bravery and fortitude of the Iraqi people, young Iraqi boys and girls are attending schools.

Electricity is being restored to all parts of the country, not just the regions favored by a dictator. Iraqis are beginning to protect Iraqis.

Men and women are participating in the democratic process.

And, most importantly, a ruthless dictator who terrorized his own people and his neighbors, and who had shown a willingness to obtain and use the worst weapons known to man, is no longer in power and will stand trial for his crimes.

Let me end with this message to our troops and their families: We are proud of you, we thank you, and the American people continue to stand behind you.

Mrs. DRAKE. Next I would like to recognize the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY).

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for giving me an opportunity to share this time with her.

Mr. Speaker, I have been to Iraq twice, December of 2003, shortly after Saddam's capture, then again in February of this year. On each of those trips, they are bipartisan trips, many

of the Members, of course, that have been to Iraq and Afghanistan and the theater of operations are members of the Armed Services Committee. But I think many other Members, of course, have been as well.

One of the best opportunities, Mr. Speaker, is to meet with troops, soldiers, men and women from your own State, indeed when possible from your own congressional district, and to have an opportunity to talk with them and, more importantly, that they have an opportunity to talk with us.

The one thing that I can tell you that I never heard was, Congressman, it is too hot over here. It is too dry over here. It is too dusty. It is too cold. I cannot sleep. I do not like the food. Congressman, can you not use your political influence somehow to get me out of here.

Of course, many of those soldiers, as we heard from the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) about the corporal who was serving his third rotation in Iraq, had that premonition in harm's way, knowing that they possibly could be paying the ultimate sacrifice. None of them are asking us to get them home.

Last week, when the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) had an hour, just as we are doing tonight, I had an opportunity then as well to say a few words. I made a feeble attempt to recite that famous poem, In Flanders Fields. I will not try to do that again tonight for my colleagues, because I think all of you know it maybe even better than I do.

But in the last stanza, though, it says, take up our quarrel with the foe, to you from failing falling hands we pass the torch. Be yours to hold it high, for if you break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep though poppies grow in Flanders Field.

What they are saying, and our colleagues tonight, Mr. Speaker, have said this repeatedly, we cannot break faith with these men and women, 2,000 plus who have lost their lives, maybe 8,000 or so who have been injured, some, yes, severely. The worst possible thing that we could do would be to pack up and come home, literally bring them home against their wishes.

They would have no choice in that matter, if we listened to our colleagues on the other side of the aisle. You know, you hear them, Mr. Speaker, talking about how much they support the troops and all of that. I do not doubt that. I am not going to stand up here and suggest that they are not patriots themselves and that they do not care for our troops and they do not want to arm them and make sure that they have the equipment they need. I do not doubt for a minute that they support that.

But they are using our soldiers, our brave men and women, these youngsters that we are talking about here tonight, as pawns really to continually criticize and undermine the Commander in Chief, the coach, the Vice

President, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, indirectly the gentleman from California (Chairman HUNTER), because they want to undermine this team so that they, in the next election, are in charge.

Really, Mr. Speaker, I think we all need to realize that, that there is a lot of politics here; and it is a dirty rotten shame that our soldiers, our brave men and women, are being used as pawns in this political process. God forgive them.

We owe more to these troops than that. And I feel very strongly as a member on leave of absence from the Armed Services Committee to come at any opportunity I have got to take a few minutes and to stand up before my colleagues in this body and say, no, we will not forget you, you soldiers, you men and women who maybe in high school were not the football or track stars, cheerleaders, many of you decided to put off going to college and enjoying the football weekends so you could serve your country. Some of you may have been pushed around, kicked around by the schoolyard bully who does not know anything about a fair fight, but you had the courage to go and to serve this country as an all-volunteer military, whether you are active duty, Guard or Reserve; and I have seen them all in the theatre of operations at the tip of the spear. We owe them so much, and I am proud to stand up here as part of this team tonight.

I really compliment the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) for leading this team and for the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) and my other colleagues that we have heard from and others who are going to speak. I am proud to be a part of this.

Mrs. DRAKE. Congressman, thank you for coming and being with us. I am sure on your trip that it was just like on mine, I realized immediately these are people who have chosen to be here. It is an all-volunteer force. I am sure you also saw, as I did, that many of them volunteered to go to Iraq and to go back to Iraq; and it is just so impressive, the commitment that they have given to our Nation and the words of our men and women just like Corporal Starr.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Tennessee.

□ 1945

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I thank the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) for doing such a wonderful job in hosting this. I thank our chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), for the excellent job that he does in providing leadership for the House Committee on Armed Services. I think we also thank the family of Corporal Starr for their sacrifice, and we hope that they know we join them in their sorrow.

Mrs. DRAKE. And for their willingness to share that that quote was wrong and to share the real quote, something that personal.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. That is so very true, and I thank the gentlewoman for noting that, for setting the record straight.

As the gentlewoman was talking about some of her experiences, meeting a taxi driver who was from Iraq and how he stopped to say thank you, I was reading some things from my news clips.

Here is an article out of the Nashville Tennessean, today's paper, November 3, and an opinion column written by Jonathan Gurwitz who is a columnist for the San Antonio Express News. He is recounting a conversation and a visit with a Dr. Najmaldin Karim who is Kurdish and the headline is "Why this war? Ask someone who is Kurdish."

I was so touched by your examples that, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to share a quote in this. I think it is so relevant to the discussion that we are having tonight. And I am quoting this Dr. Karim: "The suggestion that Saddam Hussein's dictatorship was a 'stable' form of government is outrageous to Iraqis, not on the ideological fringe, especially the Kurds. The war in Iraq didn't begin in 2003. For the previous 35 years Kurds, Shiites and anyone else who threatened the oligarchy fought against the suppression of their very existence."

Mr. Speaker, you know, this morning I spoke on the floor about what we are doing right to win the war on terror and the progress that we are making in the battle in Iraq. And it seemed that the minute I started talking there was some conversation across the aisle. And one of my colleagues from the left got upset, and then sure enough a Democrat Member follows me to the well during 1-minute to speak against the positive changes that are going on in Iraq.

You see, I think that the left in this country has to undermine this war and undermine the resolve of the American people in order to try to win elections next November. They have got to make you and me and every single one of us forget the bigger picture in this war on terror. They want us focused on the casualties and on the setbacks. And, yes, we take one step forward, we take two steps back. It is going to be a long war, but we are making progress.

They do not want us to ask what sort of damage will result from withdrawing from Iraq. They do not want us to ask whether we would be better off with a free Iraq. They simply want to point out all the negatives and demand withdrawal in order to declare America's defeat, and then they believe they will win elections.

Unfortunately, the national media, one would believe for all intents and purposes, is the public relations wing of the left on this subject. Day after day the major newspapers editorialize in both their articles and on the op-ed pages against our efforts in Iraq. They give extensive coverage to casualties and claim they do it to honor those lost. But they do not cover the things

these men and women did to change this world.

They do not cover the moments of pure courage, pure courage and strength that these men and women and their colleagues committed and performed to fix a great wrong in this world. They only cover their deaths, and that is a tragedy, Mr. Speaker, because it was not in their deaths that they became heroes. It was in the day-to-day work on behalf of this country that they became heroes. They gave their lives for something they believed in. They were heroes long before the tragedy of their death. We remember those lost not because they died but because they lived and how they lived in putting others before themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot say that I do not stop and wonder if these losses would be for naught; but when I am doubting and if I am unsure, I talk with some of those who have served in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and I talk to their families and I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we can win this because they know that we can win it. And, Mr. Speaker, they are living it; they are seeing it firsthand every single day.

When I visit Fort Campbell in my district or spend time with our National Guard and Reserves, I see the spirit of America and I see the commitment and the drive to succeed. They settle any doubts. They restore my confidence. They should be our inspiration in this battle. So tonight, despite watching Democrats come to the floor and beat the drums of retreat in the war on terror, I want to recognize those men and women in uniform who we see in the progress, in the change in that region of the world.

Let me just read a list of some of the accomplishments so that America, those watching and those listening and our constituents, will understand the great deeds of these men and women, our heroes who are in uniform.

As of October 24, 2005, a total of 206,500 Iraqi security forces have been trained and equipped with the assistance of the U.S. military. On election day in October, as our colleague from Texas previously mentioned, 78 percent of voters backed the charter Constitution, 78 percent of those that went to the polls voted for freedom, voted for democracy. And as our colleague from Texas mentioned, 63 percent of Iraqis, 15½ million voters, cast their ballot. They took their life in their hands to cast that ballots. The Iraqi Constitution guarantees the rights of all its citizens and enshrines the rule of law. A new parliament will be voted on in December and will form a 4-year term to government to take office by December 31, 2005.

Who would have thought that that was possible? Iraqis appear to be spending more money, signs that consumer confidence is improving. As the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE) mentioned, things are turning green in Iraq. You see the fields that they have

planted. My first visit there, I said Iraqi is a khaki-colored country. It was covered with dust.

Over 15,650 houses have recently been connected to the Baghdad water distribution system by USAID. In all, nearly 100 kilometers of mainline pipe have been installed in the Baghdad area.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on. We know America is once again engaged in a great struggle that will in no uncertain terms decide what kind of world our children are going to inherit. I want our men and women in Iraq to know we believe in them. We believe in what they are doing, and we know that this is going to improve the national security for generations to come. It is going to help preserve freedom.

Our military's cause in Iraq is a noble one, despite what some in this body would have you believe.

In closing, I would like to give you a quote, a part from Ronald Reagan's speech on the 40th anniversary of D-Day. He said this to the World War II veterans who were gathered with him at Normandy:

"You all knew that some things are worth dying for. One's country is worth dying for, and democracy is worth dying for, because it is the most deeply honorable form of government ever devised by man. All of you loved liberty. All of you were willing to fight tyranny, and you knew the people of our country were behind you."

Mr. Speaker, I hope my colleagues across the aisle will join us in letting every man and woman in uniform and every family know this country is behind them. I thank the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE).

Mrs. DRAKE. As the gentlewoman was speaking, I thought I need to make sure that you know that just a few weeks ago in Washington, the Speaker of the Iraq National Assembly came and spoke to people who were able to attend that meeting, and it was exactly like the gentlewoman said. He kept saying to us, there is no other option. And that is exactly what you have said to us and you have said this is where we are; this is what we have done. We may go back a step, but we go forward two or three more. We honor those who have served and died, thereby remembering that there is no other option. We can only move forward.

You also said very clearly who would have ever thought there would be a Constitution in Iraq; who would have ever thought there would be a National Assembly in Iraq. It is a huge success story. I think it is a miracle. I thank the gentlewoman for being here and sharing this with us.

Next, I would like to call on our friend, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CARTER).

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding to me, and I thank the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) for putting together this opportunity to honor those who serve our Nation in the war on terror.

I am up here speaking for the people of the 31st Congressional District of Texas. How does the 31st Congressional District of Texas have credibility to speak on behalf of these efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan? I would like to tell you a little bit about our credibility.

The first American soldier killed in combat in the war on terror is from Georgetown Texas, which is 5 miles from my home; and every death in this war is absolutely critical to Americans. So counting numbers, every number counts. But the 2,000th death also took place, this famous 2,000th death that everybody in the press was just salivating to see happen, it seemed to me, he was also from the 31st district, Killeen, Texas. The people of the 31st district, from Stevensville, Texas to Round Rock, Texas, support our war, support our troops, and support our efforts in the war on terror.

The people of the 31st district know we were attacked in the most vicious attack that has ever been done on the homeland in the history of the United States in our country, and we have retaliated in force and effectively and done our job. And who has done that job? Our 31st district's III Corps went over there. Fourth Infantry Division went over there and captured Saddam Hussein. The First Cavalry Division went over and ran a perfect election and protected people as they went out and, as we have heard tonight, exercised their right to vote.

We have committed two full divisions to this war, and the Fourth ID is on its way back right now as we speak. I have been able to go over when both my divisions have been over there, and I promised General Thurmond and the that guys I talked to about 2 months ago, I am coming back just as quick as I can get over there right after the first of the year, because these are the finest human beings that have ever taken up arms on behalf of our country.

For those people to talk about cutting and running, Americans do not cut and run. You know, this House has a shame on it when they turned on our soldiers in Vietnam, and I take that position and I am not backing off of it. The liberal press shamed a great generation of people who did their duty then and we, cannot afford to allow that to happen again for political expediency so someone can possibly use the war to gain political advantage in the United States.

We are at war with evil people who intend to do harm to American citizens, wherever American citizens live or breathe or walk the street. We are unsafe with terrorism on the street, we are unsafe in our Nation and in every other nation on Earth because it is an evil cancer that can only be taken out by noble men and women who are willing to stand up on the wall and say we will fight for freedom, not only the freedom of Americans, but the freedom of the people that they are intimidating with their terrorism wherever they may appear. And I am telling you,

we have got soldiers that have been willing to do that and have done the job well.

I remember when I was in Afghanistan, the story I love to tell about a 20-year-old sitting looking at a screen of a film of a drone that was broadcasting pictures from the desert. And while we were there, he went to his commander and said, Sir, there is a bunch of camels crossing out there in a part where there should not be any camels. And I thought, how does this kid know there are not supposed to be any camels in this part of the country? He said, I think there are people underneath those camels.

Three Blackhawk helicopters launched about 180 miles away. We were 180 miles from this location. And they caught nine Taliban crawling across the desert under the bellies of camels.

□ 2000

My whole point of that story is: What kind of great, intelligent, smart kids are we sending over there and they are putting their lives in harm's way? This was a smart kid, a computer operator running a drone, able to know the knowledge of the country, to know where our enemy might be hiding. We have got the best of the absolute best over there, the same kind of people that you run into when you go to Iraq and you talk to these kids.

I talked to a 20-year-old African American kid. We were having supper. He was from my district, and we have got a lot of them from my district. And I said, "Son, have you had any hot spots that you have been in over here?" And he said, "Yeah. Yesterday we were in a convoy. They made the mistake of shooting at us." He said, "They will not make that mistake again, sir." He said, "When they stand and fight, they lose."

Our young men and women are doing a fabulous job, and there is shame on anyone in this country who turns on these noble people who are standing up for the freedom of the people in Iraq and Afghanistan and the freedom of the United States of America. They are heroes.

Today, I am very proud to say that one of the first people in my district to be wounded, seriously wounded, Allen Babbin, he has undergone close to 200 surgeries from a round that he took, winning the Bronze Star for pulling another wounded soldier off a bridge in the second day in Baghdad. Today, he flew back home; and he is on his way to full recovery because of the great work of the Army, Navy, and Air Force in getting him to the right kind of treatment.

Everybody is working the right way in this job, and we bring shame upon ourselves, and those who would criticize these young men and women and the job they are doing bring shame upon themselves, and I am sorry for it.

We in America must remember: If we do not fight tyranny wherever tyranny

exists, we have learned this lesson over and over and over in American history, and if we do not support those who fight tyranny wherever tyranny exists, then tyranny will take over that map until tyranny controls the world. There will not just be no freedom in Iraq or no freedom in Afghanistan. There will not be any freedom anywhere. Not even in the cradle of American liberty will there be freedom.

What this is about, Mr. Speaker, is the ability of Americans and others in this world to live the kind of life that everybody wants to live, raise their kids, have a job, eat dinner at night without fearing somebody blowing them up, walk the streets. It is for all the world that we stand in the gap, not just for Americans, not just for Afghans, not just for Iraqis or others in the Middle East. It is for the world that these young men and women stand in the gap.

I am very proud on behalf of the people of the 31st Congressional District of Texas to tell you that we stand tall on behalf of our soldiers. We know they are the best of the best, and they will win the war on terror because it is the right thing to do.

Lastly, we pray God's blessing on each and every one of them and each and every family that is also courageously allowing their family member to do the job that has to be done to keep freedom alive and well in this country. So this is all about us. It is all about the best of the best. God bless every one of them.

Mrs. DRAKE, Congressman, thank you for that. That was very moving to hear about your district and their commitment to our great Nation.

I would like to explain this map to you, though. Because if you will look in the center of the map where it is green, including the Horn of Africa and up through the Middle East, that is the short-term goal of the terrorists. This is from their Web site. Is it not an amazing world we live in that terrorists have Web sites? That is their goal, that everything colored in in green be controlled by them short term.

If you will look in the far corner over there, that is their 100-year goal. If you will notice, everything colored in in green is our entire world. I think it is important for the public to know this is not Thelma Drake saying this. This is from their Web site and their goal, and this tells you what those very brave men and women that you have just spoke so eloquently about, they know this and they know the threat to our Nation.

I also wanted to share with you a quote from a letter that I brought with me tonight to talk about dated October 11, 2005, from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi. The quote is, because you mentioned Vietnam and I think this is important for us to remember: Things may develop faster than we imagine. The aftermath of the collapse of American power in Vietnam and how they ran and left their agents is noteworthy.

So do not think they do not know and they are not watching.

Next, I would like to recognize Congressman Geoff Davis from Kentucky. I thank him for being here.

Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to share a perspective that I think is often lost in the freedoms we enjoy, the freedom to meet in this Chamber, the freedom to reflect upon the great decisions that have been made here through the generations. The decision to enter into a war, to provide freedom and the maintenance of our union, the decision to free peoples in Europe and ultimately preserve our security at home.

On December 7, 1941, President Roosevelt stood in this Chamber and declared that December 7 was a day of infamy. He shared that this unprovoked attack which moved the United States to war, eventually into Europe as well. In the Korean War, we stopped Communist aggression. In Vietnam, the American people responded. During Operation Desert Storm, the American people responded.

In this Chamber in September of 2001, President Bush responded to an attack that was not brought about, my friends, by some nebulous global war on terror. I think it is important that we understand this war is not about some nebulous terrorist concept. This is about Islamic extremism that chooses to impose itself on the world. These people who largely act as agents of states, these non-state actors do not follow the teachings that they purport. Yet if we look more deeply, we see that they are seeking to be true to their interpretation of that religion.

In every generation there is a call upon that generation to defend the freedoms that have been purchased at such a tremendously high price. To maintain the union of our country and to free those who were enslaved cost 600,000 soldiers. In World War II, 444,000 soldiers gave their lives to provide freedom; and now we are engaged in a great struggle, a generational struggle that has been imposed upon us.

I think that it is important that we understand that the freedom that our minority leader had today to say, frankly, entirely inappropriate things about our national leadership, the freedom that all of us have to disagree, the freedom that all of us have to offer alternatives, the freedom that all of us have to protest, the freedom that reporters who sometimes distort the truth and, in fact, in many cases do not even report the truth but fabricate it, all comes down to the men and women who have answered the call to duty.

It is always the same. It is always the minority in the country that does that. Those who believe that there is something bigger in this country than individual selfishness and covetousness of the moment, that there is something worth risking all to protect because of those who come behind us, because they understand they are part of something bigger than themselves, bonded to something of greatness.

I want to thank tonight those Marines of the Second Marine Expeditionary Force, the soldiers of the Third Infantry Division, the soldiers of the 101st Infantry Division, of the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Afghanistan, of the Tennessee and Louisiana National Guards who are rotating back into the United States, and all of those soldiers who are moving in and out, the Marines who are moving in and out, our airmen and sailors who support this effort, because you understand that you have accepted the call of the generations that is so important that many people do not realize.

The freedom we enjoy in this Chamber was brought to us by 10 percent of the population of this country who chose to rebel against tyranny and stand for a principle that was higher than dignity of the individual, the rights and freedom of the individual, and that was purchased not simply in a declaration, but to get to the Constitution that gave us the government we have today was purchased in a great price in blood.

I am convinced that if today's cynical media had to cover the Normandy invasion, the greatest invasion in history that defeated the greatest tyranny in history up to that point, had it been reported by today's media, today's cynical media, today's profit-driven media, Mr. Speaker, I believe we would have lost that war. Because the Nation would have called for a pullout because there was risk associated with that, because things did not seem to go well. Because when unforeseen circumstances that always come up in war, and anybody who has served in the military, let alone in this Chamber, unexpected things happen.

I find those who have not served who are the great experts on military history do not really understand what they are talking about. Rather than commending our soldiers who have adapted to a fluid situation and the great things that have been done to support them, they provide criticism of why could that not have been anticipated?

It is simple, my friends. We are fighting an adaptive and motivated and, frankly, evil enemy that has a religious doctrine that stands and flies in the face of everything on which this country was founded, on which the Constitution was based, that respects the rights of the individual, the dignity of a man, the dignity of a woman to pursue opportunities in the way in which they define. And when somebody wants to impose an attack upon this Nation, and one that was planned long before September 11, and attempts that were made long before September 11, we have no choice but to yield or to respond, and we have responded.

Comments that have been made by my colleagues on the other side that talk about casualties, I can speak with some authority on that issue, having buried some of my friends. I find it interesting that they want to talk about

numbers, which dishonors those who serve. I did not see any of my colleagues who talk about these numbers standing with me as I buried a friend of a friend who was killed in Al Qayyim in June over at Arlington Cemetery. They were back here at PAC fund-raisers and going to receptions and making pointless statements in this Chamber about things they know nothing about.

More than that, I would suggest to you that these same people who want to talk about numbers and these liberal reporters who do not care about this Nation, who do not care about the price that was paid for the freedoms that they enjoy, where were you for the last 25 years? Where were you when 16,000 American soldiers died between 1983 and 1996 in service to this Nation? Where were you when 24,000 American men and women gave their lives between 1980 and 2004? Your comments, frankly, are despicable, dishonorable, uninformed, unhistorical, anti-intellectual and, frankly, un-American. But I respect your freedom to make those statements, because they were purchased with the blood of all of those who served.

I would suggest that in this body that the liberal reporters who watch and our enemies who watch and the soldiers who watch and those who want to speak against this from their positions of ignorance and political convenience, who use our soldiers: You learned your lessons during the Vietnam War. Now you use our soldiers in a dishonorable way as human shields to advance an idea that stands in contravention to the freedoms that have been purchased at such a high price.

I ask my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who have been here for many years and like to speak with false authority: Where were you when my friend Ken Maddock was killed from Task Force 160? Where were you when my classmate from West Point, Mike Scott, died? Where were you when Lee Border died or Brian Haller died in the 101st Airborne Division? I saw no requiems in this Chamber. I saw no requiems on television for them. It was not politically expedient.

But now you disagree with the policy when our Nation is threatened by extremists, and soldiers and Marines and airmen and sailors have responded to that call, and you sit here mouthing your empty words. Casualties are always a great tragedy.

I think the one thing that was most poignant to me as I visited my old Airborne Unit, I deployed to the Middle East with the task force of the 1/508th running aviation operations in support of them, and I went and visited that unit today in Paktika Province in Afghanistan.

□ 2015

A CNN reporter came to one of the forward operating bases. There had been an attack on that base earlier in their deployment as they were clearing out the enemies of freedom, and not

simply ending a military operation but bringing order and civil government and roads and sewers and the fact that the government can be good and the people can be helped and they can be part of something bigger than themselves, which is not a tyranny, an ideological tyranny. That reporter was looking for bad stories and refused to cover the reenlistment of every soldier in the 1/508 on that forward operating base who was up for reenlistment. That is a tragedy, and that is unfortunate.

To me, I think the lesson that we have to ask ourselves is how do we get around this, how do we avoid this problem. Well, the media is not going to be helpful to this country because I think they have lost their connection with the heartland of this Nation, with the people who have borne the burden of the price of freedom through the generations.

Every generation of my family has served in the Armed Forces, not in glorious ranks of generals and admirals, but in the enlisted ranks, carrying the rifles and manning the ships that provided the freedom for the people in this body to say the things that they have said. And I would say this, Mr. Speaker, I do not care about the media. What we need to do is allow these soldiers and these marines to go into every editorial board, into every Rotary Club and chamber in this Nation and let them tell their story. Let them tell their story in the communities and in the fiscal courts. Let them tell their stories in the courthouses and on the street corners, and I guarantee you that these people who purport to be experts on things they know nothing about will be discredited and things will be shown for what they are. Because you cannot refute a 100 percent reenlistment rate in units where these soldiers have borne this burden and they go back over and over again.

To you military people who are watching, I want to say thank you, as a fellow soldier. To you who cherish our freedoms, I thank you. For you in the press who enjoy this freedom but you abuse it, know that the price that is paid by those who frankly have greater moral character than you, who refuse to cover the truth of what they are doing, know that it is their sacrifice, not yours, that allows you to share what you share.

And finally, to those of our citizens in the heartland know that these men and women are doing a great service to prepare the way for us to adapt to the 21st century; that we will have a safe country and a community to pass these freedoms on to the next generation.

I will leave you with a story from the 1/508, commanded by Colonel Tim McGuire, as he was moving northward from Shirana forward operating base to Orgune. He shared that coming back from that mission a little boy ran from a village up to his convoy. He stopped. He did not speak Pashto, and the interpreter asked the little boy what the problem was. The little boy had waved,

as many of the children I saw in Afghanistan did at the Americans all the time. He asked the little boy what he was concerned about, and he said that two bad men had come into the village and put something in the road. That little boy saved potentially American soldiers.

The enemy were dealt with and that village is open and free, but Colonel McGuire asked the question which encapsulates all of what this struggle between radical Islamic extremism and the values of freedom and dignity of the individual that we cherish expresses, and he said, Young man, why did you do that, knowing that there was risk associated with what that boy did. He looked at this airborne colonel in the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and he said to Tim, before you Americans came, I could not go to school.

That is the contrast that we have here: freedom, opportunity, hope, true faith, or extremism, persecution, tyranny and hatred. Thank you for you who serve.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, next, I would like to recognize the chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Mr. Chairman, thank you for being here and listening to the true passion from our Members as they talk about true American heroes.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman. She has done a wonderful job of leading this Special Order, and I want to thank all the Members who participated. They did a great job, and I think our message to all of our troops, to everyone that wears the uniform of the United States is this: you have great value. You are our best citizens. Your cause is just. You will prevail, and we will stand behind you.

I thank the gentlewoman.

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that history will name this generation. And until they do, I have decided I am going to call them the Freedom Believers, because I think there is no greater gift that we give to our children and to our grandchildren than freedom. And so I thank them, and I thank the speaker for the opportunity to be here tonight.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank Chairman HUNTER for arranging for this opportunity to comment upon the remarkable honor and valor of our United States soldiers.

One thing that I reflect on is the high quality of leaders in our military that we are producing right now in Iraq. We have 1st lieutenants with two tours under their belts already. The seamlessness with which our Guard and Reserves fight alongside our active duty is another tremendous evolution benefiting this conflict and paving the way for future military successes. We are making a significant investment in world peace with the strong commitment of our men and women overseas. These brave soldiers fight in a land they've never been for people they've never met to extend the fundamental rights of liberty.

The Middle East is yet another test of this commitment to liberty. Liberty is defended by the vigilant who are willing to sacrifice to de-

fend freedom and stabilize the country's civil institutions. In January of this year, 2005, over 8 million Iraqi citizens voted and reaffirmed only weeks ago with the ratification of their constitution. What a pleasure it was to observe the Iraqi people defying intimidation and threats to define the course of their country's destiny. This dignity, denied them for decades, was afforded to them by the efforts of those people we honor today.

As Veterans Day approaches let us not forget that the men and women serving today will join the ranks of those who have selflessly served this same mission to bring these freedoms to all people. We have ensured that men and women, active and reserve soldiers from each service, return to a grateful homeland eager to honor their service and sacrifice.

Mr. KNOLLENBERG. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize our troops and to support our continuing efforts in Iraq.

It is important that we recognize and honor our troops who are serving in the Middle East. While progress is being made there are still obstacles in the path toward a free and independent Iraqi state. The effort in Iraq is moving along steadily, and our forces are working in conjunction with Iraqi forces toward success in many different areas. American troops are fighting to secure and rebuild cities and to extinguish the insurgency. Our men and women in uniform are doing an exemplary job, and it is essential for us to salute their efforts as they work to ensure stability in a historically unstable region.

Politically, Iraqis have embraced the charter constitution, and the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq reports that 78 percent of voters were in support of its passage. This was a major step in their pursuit of a democratic government and citizens' rights through political reconstruction.

Additionally, American forces are reconstructing the services and infrastructure to move Iraq forward. Electricity, water, education, and sanitation services are being established. Water treatment plants are being built throughout the country, bringing clean water to tens of thousands of homes. Power plants are being restored and refurbished, improvements on transportation infrastructure are being made, and the completion of school renovation and construction projects will facilitate education for Iraqi children.

The war on terror is progressing as well. Our troops are successfully breaking up Al Qaeda by detaining known terrorists and seizing weapons caches. Between the 15th and 18th of October, a known Al Qaeda military leader was killed during Coalition raids and forces from the 172nd Infantry Brigade uncovered 10 weapons caches and detained 16 suspected terrorists in northern Iraq. Continued efforts like these are what it will take to eradicate the threat of terror.

Our soldiers are overseas creating these successes and they deserve our continued support. These brave men and women are risking their lives in order to protect our Nation, our ideals, and our safety. They are fighting for each and everyone of us, fighting for all that we hold dear not just in America, but also worldwide. I want to take this opportunity to thank our Armed Forces for all that they have done and to offer my unrelenting support for their hard work and sacrifice as they continue to work toward the establishment of a free Iraq.