Mr. Speaker, I yield

myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in strong support of this resolution.

I want to commend my friend

from New Jersey for his leadership on

this issue. The resolution before the

House supports the people of Syria who

live under a violent and repressive regime.

The last Congress, this body

passed the Syria Accountability Act

with 297 cosponsors. That bill primarily

addressed Syria’s behavior in

the Middle East, including its sponsorship

of terrorist groups and its continuing

occupation of Lebanon. This

resolution, Mr. Speaker, focuses on

Syria’s domestic misbehavior for which

Damascus must also be held fully accountable.

After all, nobody has suffered

more from the brutality of the

Syrian government than the Syrian

people.

According to the State Department’s

annual human rights report released

recently, Syria continues to commit

egregious human rights abuses, including

torture, arbitrary detentions of political

prisoners without trial, censorship

and harassment of journalists,

protections for spouse-rapists, and

light sentences for so-called honor

killings. According to Amnesty International

and Human Rights Watch,

Syria is engaged in an unceasing campaign

to harass and intimidate human

rights organizations.

In recent days, the world has focused

on Syria’s outrages against the Lebanese

people and, indeed, another resolution

we are considering today deals

directly with that issue. But, Mr.

Speaker, we cannot credibly say we

favor political reform in the Middle

East if we ignore Syria’s depredations

against its own citizens.

Syria is certainly, and I quote, one of

the world’s most repressive regimes, as

the United Nations Commission on

Human Rights has indicated. Accordingly,

it is important that this Congress

be on record not merely in condemning

the Syrian government for its

actions against its neighbors but, more

importantly, to express our support for

the Syrian people in their struggle to

achieve the kind of government they

deserve.

When I met with Syrian President

Assad in Damascus, I urged him to

change his government’s behavior at

home and abroad so that Syria could

rejoin the ranks of the civilized world.

This resolution is one result of his failure

to heed that advice.

Mr. Speaker, a Syria that is accountable

to world standards and norms, a

Syria that respects its own citizens and

no longer occupies Lebanon or supports

terrorism against Israel must be a central

goal of our project of reforming

the Middle East. In the long run, a

Middle East in which people are stakeholders

in public life offers the greatest

hope for peace and safety in the region

and beyond.

I urge all of my colleagues to support

H. Con. Res. 18.

Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to yield

such time as he may consume to my

friend and colleague, the gentleman

from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER), a distinguished

member of the Committee

on International Relations.