Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding me this

time.

Mr. Speaker, for more than 20 years, Saddam Hussein used tactics of

torture, brutality, and fear to terrorize the citizens of Iraq and

neighboring countries. Exactly 16 years ago this week, Saddam Hussein

unleashed weapons of mass destruction that killed 5,000 of his own

Kurdish citizens. He encouraged Iraqi officials to rape and torture

women. Men and women of Iraq were repressed, and they were isolated

from the rest of the world.

One year after the United States and coalition forces liberated Iraqi

citizens, the people of Iraq are embracing this opportunity to build a

new and free Iraq for their children.

Last October, I saw firsthand the remarkable activities that are

taking place on the ground in Iraq. There are now over 3,800 programs

that offer immediate assistance to improve the quality of life for all

Iraqi people. As reconstruction efforts continue to move forward, many

essential services like water, sanitation, electricity, and

telecommunication have been restored and even surpass prewar levels. In

fact, public health spending is now 26 times as great as it was under

Saddam's regime.

Today I met with a delegation of Iraqi leaders to talk about the

continuing advances in Iraq. This was a diverse delegation. It was men

and women, Shi'ias, Sunnis, tribal leaders, doctors, members of the

free press. They are dedicated to promoting and to teaching democracy

throughout south central Iraq. They shared their personal stories. They

talked about the Democracy Regional Center where a democracy discussion

was held for more than 1,500 Iraq people from different backgrounds,

and they are launching a radio station, and they are promoting

democracy to 10 million people through that part of the country. The

Iraqi people are embracing democracy with open arms.

Mr. Speaker, last week I held a roundtable discussion with a group of

remarkable women leaders from Iraq. One of the women in the group gave

me her wedding ring to keep as a reminder that we should not waiver

from our commitment to women.

I urge my colleagues to support this resolution, support the Iraqi

men and women who have done so much for us in that Nation. We should

help them.