Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from

Illinois (Chairman Hyde) for authoring this very important resolution.

Mr. Speaker, much of the dark and unseemly world of Saddam Hussein is

only now coming to light, and it is significantly worse than many of us

had thought. The fact that as many as 400,000 victims were

systematically brutalized and raped and tortured to death ranks the

Hussein dictatorship as one of the worst in modern history. Had the

United States and coalition forces not gone in to liberate Iraq, there

is no doubt whatsoever that the killing fields would have continued

unabated and that tens of thousands Iraquis or more would have met a

terrible fate.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of chemical weapons, we know that chemical

weapons used by the Iraqis are not mere conjecture. Hussein used

weapons of mass destruction and used them with impunity both in the

Iran-Iraq war and he used them against the Kurds. We know for a fact,

according to Human Rights Watch and many other organizations and the

U.S. Department of State, that upwards of 5,000 Kurdish people died a

horrific death from those chemical attacks. There have also been, as my

colleagues know, a staggering number of disappearances, believed to

range between 250,000 to 290,000.

Mr. Speaker, the Armed Forces of the United States and our coalition

partners have conducted themselves in Iraq with incredible valor,

professionalism, and commitment. Our forces and those of our allies are

peacemakers. We often talk about peacekeepers, soldiers who go in when

the situation, while volatile, presents the opportunity to ensure that

the combatants can be separated. Our men and women went into Iraq and

they ``made'' the peace. They are peacemakers in a place in the world

where peace was an oxymoron.

The recently adopted interim Iraqi constitution, Mr. Speaker, will

more likely get further worked once the new assembly is up and running

next year, is historic; a constitution which articulates basic

fundamental human rights and the rule of law in the Middle East. After

Israel, which has an excellent constitution, we now have Iraq. And I

think there is a great opportunity for democracy to break out and the

rule to be respected and that also mitigates the danger of Iraq which

now is a peacemaker itself to its friends and allies in the region.

Finally, just let me say, a previous speaker talked about shame when

it comes to our veterans and our men and women who are returning home.

I chair the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. We have seen, since

the Bush Presidency began, and it continues the trend line of the late

1990s, more than a 30 percent increase in health care funding and we

will increase it again this year, and we will do so significantly.

President Bush has signed no less than 16 separate bills to enhance,

to expand veterans benefits. The Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 was

signed on December 16. There were seven titles to it, filled with very

important provisions to enhance veterans benefits. The Veterans

Education and Benefits Act contains a 46 percent increase in the GI

Bill, 46 percent increase in college funding. I know, because I

authored it. I was the prime sponsor of the bill. With no fanfare

whatsoever, this President signed that legislation and 15 other bills

into law.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope that these trying to use veterans issues as

a political football would cease on this floor today. We are trying, in

a bipartisan way, to meet the obligations and the needs of our

veterans. I stand committed to that. This party, and I would say to my

friends on the other side of the aisle, to do so as well, we should all

be pro-veteran, and we are matching our words and our rhetoric with

funding and with responsive and responsible laws.