Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may

consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this important resolution relating

to the free elections held in Iraq on Sunday, January 30. I commend the

leadership for bringing this important measure to the floor at this

time.

This past Sunday, freedom permeated from all corners of Iraq. Iraqis

celebrated their vote. They reveled in it and embraced it. They clearly

demonstrated to the terrorists and to the world the power of the human

spirit. They showed the indomitable will of a free people anxious to

exercise their rights as human beings and citizens. We witnessed women

in this Arab nation taking their place as free individuals alongside

men, their voices and their votes given equal weight.

The Kurdish people, who have been the victims of unspeakable human

rights violations under Saddam Hussein's evil regime, at long last

voted to take their well-earned, equal, respected place in a new Iraq.

Both Shias and Sunnis, through the ballot box, were afforded an equal

opportunity to exercise their rights and a role in their future

government.

Some naysayers have focused on percentages and what ethnic group

voted more than others. I, however, will always remember the images of

the young and old Iraqis, of men and women of all backgrounds, proudly

showing their ink-stained fingers, while hugging and waving to American

soldiers in a show of gratitude.

I have never been prouder to have been an American and know that we

have and will continue to contribute to make these images of hope

possible. It is a testament to the power of freedom that as we

commemorated the liberation of Auschwitz we finished that same week

with elections in a country previously shackled with decades of

tyranny.

It is a victory for those of us who believe that people throughout

the Middle East are not just ready but enthusiastic for democracy. It

is a victory for the principle that human rights are universal and not

gifts bestowed to a select few.

However, our work is by no means complete. From Iran to Libya, from

Saudi Arabia to Syria and beyond, much of the Middle East remains

engulfed in oppression under the iron grip of dictatorships. Only by

securing a decisive shift towards democracy across the region can the

misery endured by the people of the Middle East be relieved.

Simultaneously, we must encourage those governments and populations

in the region who have heeded the call for political and economic

reform to expand those efforts, as they will surely ensure a prosperous

future for their people and a more secure and stable world for us all.

Let us congratulate and commend the courageous Iraqis for defying the

terrorists in going to the polls in huge numbers. Let us honor the

brave men and women of our Armed Forces and all Iraqi security forces,

officials and innocent civilians who have given their lives so that all

Iraqis were given the opportunity to exercise a valuable, cherished

freedom.

As the great communicator, former President Ronald Reagan, said on

January 20, 1981, ``No weapon in the arsenals of the world is so

formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women.'' This

was clearly evident in Iraq this past Sunday.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to overwhelmingly

support this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.