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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution. I first

want to commend the bipartisan leadership of this body for bringing

this resolution to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, the votes are still being counted in Iraq, but it is

already clear that democracy has won. The people of Iraq have cast

their ballots in favor of freedom, including the right to choose their

own leaders and their own fate.

We should not be surprised. We have seen people choose freedom over

tyranny repeatedly during the past 15 years in country after country.

But Iraqis voted in unprecedented circumstances, literally risking life

and limb merely to exercise the privilege that most of us take for

granted and many of us do not even exercise. Their courage inspires us,

reinvigorating our own love for democracy and testifying to the power

of freedom's call.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to have been a fly on the wall of those in

power throughout the Arab world who watched the televised spectacle of

Iraqis freely choosing their own leaders. We do not know yet who will

lead the new Iraqi government, but we know that that government will be

the sole representative of democracy in the halls of the Arab league.

And we know that increasing numbers of Arab citizens in other Arab

countries are already asking why their governments, with very limited

exceptions, are chosen and perpetuated only at gunpoint.

The evident success of the election should boost the self-confidence

of all concerned. Iraqis themselves organized the campaign and

election. They monitored the vote, they secured the polling places, and

now they are counting the ballots.

U.S. forces wisely situated themselves beyond the horizon of the

polling places, but no one should lose sight of the fact that it was

American and coalition soldiers who made this day possible because of

their performance on

election day and for many days and weeks before.

Mr. Speaker, we must pay special tribute today to the bravery shown

by our fighting men and women, to the commitment shown by our civilian

personnel in Iraq and to the dedication and sacrifice shown by their

families. I am proud that this resolution does just that.

We also acknowledge with respect those who have been wounded in the

prosecution of this war, and we remember with the deepest sadness those

who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Not the least of the gratifying developments on Sunday was the

excellent manner in which the Iraqi armed forces acquitted themselves.

We need to pay special tribute to General David Petraeus for his

extraordinary work in training Iraq's military forces.

Mr. Speaker, I believe Sunday's election is an important milestone in

the democratic development not only of Iraq but the entire Middle East.

But it is also another battle won in the fight against the

antidemocratic terrorists who opposed the election and continue their

pernicious struggle. The impressive voter turnout, perhaps most

impressive in the Sunni areas where antidemocratic intimidation was the

most intense, is the surest sign that Iraqis as a whole are embracing

the legitimacy of their new government and their new security forces.

But we must be realistic, Mr. Speaker. Democracy entails far more

than a day at the polls. The major challenges are still ahead for Iraq.

Can Iraqis ensure that all segments of their nation have the

opportunity to be heard? Will they produce a fair and workable

constitution leading to a durable democracy? Will they learn the art of

compromise that will be essential to their success? Will they be

moderate or will they dig in their heels on the difficult issues such

as the role of religion or the disposition of the contested city of

Kirkuk?

Building democracy in the Middle East will require immense patience.

It surely is a multigenerational project. Even building democracy in

just one nation, especially one with a complicated society such as

Iraq's, is a long-term challenge. But for today, Mr. Speaker, let us

recognize that the Iraqi people have just taken a first but vitally

important step towards meeting that challenge, and let us affirm that

they merit the admiration of all free peoples across the globe. And

last, but hardly least, let us take pride in America's enormous

contribution towards true Iraqi self-determination.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this resolution.

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

Mr. Speaker, before yielding back our time, may I just

remind all of my colleagues and all of the American people that we have

been debating three important policy resolutions with a degree of

bipartisan unity that should fill us with pride and joy in the

recognition of the fact that, despite all the commentary of deep

divisions in this body, we stood together, Republicans and Democrats,

supporting the same resolutions and the same policies.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.