I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time.

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

the free elections held in Iraq this past weekend. I think it is

important that the world watched as millions of Iraqis defied the edict

of Zarkawi and other terrorist leaders, defied their edict not to

participate and went forward to cast what for most was the first

meaningful vote in their lives.

Thousands of Iraqis served as poll workers. There were thousands of

observers, as this resolution notes. The

turnout exceeded all expectations. Iraqis of all backgrounds celebrated

this milestone in the history of their country, but I believe it was a

milestone for the Middle East and a milestone for the world. Tyrants

and dictators would have people believe that democracy is a charade.

Tell that to the Iraqis celebrating in the streets throughout Iraq.

They rejected Saddam Hussein in a way that they had not had an

opportunity to before, and they actually rejected him with an

exclamation point in this election. What we saw was yet more evidence

that the yearning to shape the political life of one's community and

one's nation is universal. Freedom truly is a human aspiration.

Voting, as we have heard, is a step. The ballots have not yet been

counted. A constitution needs to be drafted. Democracy, if it is going

to work, must respect the interests of minorities. Otherwise, it is the

tyranny of the majority.

In general, everyone wants their own rights respected. The challenge

is to get people to respect the next person's rights. Kurdish rights

must be protected, Sunni rights must be respected, and the rights of

the Iraqi down the street must be respected. As President Bush has told

the American people, this will be a long struggle. Iraq is very

difficult terrain.

The stars of last weekend clearly were the Iraqi people. They put

their lives on the line for a better future. Some were killed. But,

make no mistake about it, there was a key supporting cast. Our Nation

owes a debt of gratitude to the many members of our Armed Forces, our

diplomats and other Americans in Iraq who are also risking their lives

and in some cases sacrificing their lives to help Iraqis and also

Americans.

We have a strong national interest in seeing Iraq become a success.

If this happens, when the history of this era in Iraq is written, these

men and women will be widely revered.