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

time.

I would like to acknowledge the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. Cole)

and his leadership. We had the opportunity to travel recently to Iraq,

to Amman, and to Israel. Both Israel and Iraq have now passed through

two very historic elections. I had the opportunity of speaking about

the Palestinian election just recently.

Despite the fact, Mr. Speaker, that we have differences over our

Nation's military action in Iraq, I supported the effort and will

support the funding to accomplish the objectives. But I have made valid

criticisms, as others have, of the administration's administration or

execution of the policy. However, Mr. Speaker, I believe that all of us

are united today, hopefully, in saluting the courageous Iraqi people

who turned out to vote on Sunday. I know that every Member of the body

commends the bravery and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform

whose patriotism and professionalism made this important day possible.

We must hope that 50 years from now a future generation of Iraqis can

look back at this election, this event, as a turning point in the

history of their nation and as a victory for freedom over tyranny, for

democracy over despotism.

After toiling under the boot of Saddam Hussein for decades and

weathering a vicious terrorist insurgency over the last 2 years, the

Iraqi people said no, no to intimidation, and yes to the most basic

democratic right, the right to vote.

Sunday's election, Mr. Speaker, in which millions of Iraqis cast

ballots, is a stunning repudiation of those who despise freedom and

democracy. Zarkawi, that criminal leader of terrorist activity and

insurgency in Iraq, said it accurately for the terrorists: They despise

democracy. They despise freedom. They fear the decisions of free

people. That is why they tried to intimidate the Iraqi people.

Having lived under the totalitarian Saddam Hussein regime all these

years, however, the Iraqi people know that the insurgents offer nothing

but further repression and violence.

Last Friday, Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of visiting the out-of-

country voting station in New Carrollton, Maryland, and watched as many

of these Iraqis Diaspora cast their votes freely for the first time in

their lives. The joy and pride on their faces and in their hearts had

to move everyone with whom they spoke. It was a moving moment, it was

an historic moment, and it was a poignant reminder to all of us that

our rights, while God-given, must never be taken for granted; a

reminder that the cost of protecting those freedoms is sometimes high,

and we must honor those with the courage and commitment even for others

across the sea to protect those rights in the realization that

democracies and free people are safer for us here at home than the

tyrannies that have prevailed in history.

Without question, Mr. Speaker, there are difficult days ahead. The

truly hard work that remains in establishing a viable, stable democracy

that is capable of maintaining internal order in Iraq is not finished

by far. But today, today at least, Mr. Speaker, let us celebrate the

courage of the Iraqi people and express our gratitude and pride in the

bravery of our Armed Forces, our men and women in uniform who made that

day possible.