Madam Speaker, I feel honored this evening as we

approach the midnight hour here in Washington to realize that it is the

dawn of a new day in Iraq. The sun is coming up almost as we speak, and

I raise my hand and my index finger in symbolic fashion to salute the

10.5 million people who went to the polls in that historic election on

December 15.

Madam Speaker, listen to what some of the Iraqi people have had to

say about how they feel about the vote that was cast yesterday. ``This

day is revenge for Saddam.'' Kurdish voter Chiman Saleh, whose two

brothers were killed by Saddam's forces. The ink-stained finger after

he voted.

``The time has come to build Iraq with our own hands and to use the

great wealth that God has granted to Iraq, to rebuild Iraq so that we

can turn our poverty into wealth and our misery into happiness.'' Prime

minister al-Jaafari.

Finally, from the Associated Press, some good news: ``So many Sunni

Arabs voted that ballots ran out in some places. The strong

participation by Sunnis,'' the backbone of the insurgency, Madam

Speaker, ``bolstered United States hopes that the election could

produce a broad-based government capable of ending the daily suicide

attacks and other violence.'' From the Associated Press. Good news

indeed.

Madam Speaker, listen to what General George Casey, the Multinational

Force Commanding General in Iraq, said today: ``The Iraqi people have

had a great day. It is their third national poll this year: January

30th elections for the Transitional National Assembly, 8.5 million

people voted; October 15th national referendum on the constitution, 10

million people voted on. December 15th elections for a permanent

assembly, 10.5 to 11 million people voted, and many, many Sunnis. Voter

turnout was high. We expect it to be at or above the October level.

Turnout in the Anbar Province in western Iraq, the most violent part,

the Sunni stronghold, is suspected to have increased fairly

substantially over October. There was low violence across Iraq. We

expect it to be at or below the October level. The Iraqi Security

Forces performed wonderfully to maintain security at the polling sites.

The high sentiment was set this morning when Iraqis swiftly repaired

damage from an improvised explosive device at a polling place and that

polling site was still open at 7 o'clock in the morning.''

Listen to this, Madam Speaker, from General Casey. ``Three years ago,

Saddam Hussein was still tyrannizing the Iraqi people. The

accomplishments of the Iraqis and the Coalition since then have been

unprecedented, even in the face of a ruthless and a resilient

insurgency. They include the transition to sovereignty, elections for a

transitional government, a peaceful transition from the interim to the

transitional government, the drafting and approving of the

constitution, the building of Iraqi Security Forces to more than

200,000, and today, the elections for a permanent assembly.''

Madam Speaker, as we close out, I just want to say that this is also

a great day for those 2,175 soldiers, men and women, who have given

their lives, 15,000 others who have been severely injured, and 30,000

or more innocent Iraqi people, many of them women and children, who

have given their lives for this cause. This is a great day.

This gives some peace and comfort, I am sure, to the Brown family of

Atlanta, who gave their son Tyler, a First Lieutenant, in this battle,

as he was killed in action; and the Johnson family of Armuchee,

Georgia, in my district, when Joe and Janet gave their precious son

Justin.

At least some comfort will come to these families at this time of

Christmas when everybody else is celebrating and they have a certain

sadness in their heart that will never go away. They will know that

their sons did not die in vain, that this is the success that they were

fitting and dying for. God bless them, God bless the Commander-in-

Chief, and God bless America.