Mr. Speaker, this year in January, I had the honor to go to

Iraq for their first elections in history for a democracy. Iraq is

where the world began, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Myself

and Congressman Chris Shays of Connecticut were the two Members of

Congress that were in Iraq on election day.

You remember, Mr. Speaker, those were the times when the skeptics and

the terrorists said, Oh, there won't be an election. The Iraqis won't

do it. They won't go and vote. Yet they did. Sixty-one percent of those

people went and voted.

While there, I learned a lot from the Iraqis. I learned, first of

all, they are a very proud people, that they are somewhat

underestimated about their ability to have and believe in a democracy.

I also learned that those people are just like us and all people in the

world, because, Mr. Speaker, down in our soul, where we are made, every

person has the yearning to be free. The Iraqis are no different than

Americans or other peoples in the world.

I also learned, Mr. Speaker, that they will not be intimidated by the

terrorists. The terrorists in January told the Iraqis that if they go

and vote, they will be killed. They were told that if they were seen

with that purple finger, they would be killed. Yet the Iraqis voted.

They willingly stuck their finger in that inkwell and stained their

finger for several days. I remember here on the House floor where many

of us stood when the President of the United States in his State of the

Union message talked about those Iraqi people and how we stood defiant

as well as those people with our finger in the air, showing that

freedom will prevail and rule the day.

Mr. Speaker, this has been an interesting year for the Iraqi people.

They started a country in January with their Parliament. They then

elected a Prime Minister, a President. They wrote a constitution, they

voted on it, and they have all done it in less than 10 months.

Remarkable. We sometimes forget history. We forget our own history that

it took us 13 years after 1776 to get our Constitution. In fact, only

nine States ratified it at first, and the two big ones, New York and

Virginia, were late comers to the table. In fact, North Carolina did

not ratify it until the next year and Rhode Island took 2 more years to

ratify the U.S. Constitution. Not all Americans supported the

Constitution. One of my favorite Revolutionary War people, Patrick

Henry, did not believe that the new Constitution should be ratified. He

believed in a stronger State instead of a Federal Government.

We sometimes forget our own history and we sometimes sell the Iraqi

people short as many people have done this year. Those people, the

Northeast elites and the west coast Hollywood leftists, said it would

not happen, that the Iraqis would not have a government this year. But

they did. Maybe those folks seem to be somewhat disappointed that the

Sunnis, the Kurds and the Shiites all came to the table and voted for

this Constitution. Those Northeast elites and those west coast

Hollywood leftists were the same ones who said that we couldn't help

Germany and Japan in World War II. We fought those two countries, those

two regimes of totalitarian states, but the United States went in and

set up democracies in both of those countries. Now those countries are

not only free but they are world powers and they are our allies.

And what if it happens? What if Iraq and Afghanistan do the same

thing that Germany and Japan did, become world powers, become

democracies and, more importantly, become free and our allies?

Mr. Speaker, democracy is the enemy of terrorism and freedom is the

enemy of anarchy, and the people are the enemy of dictators. The United

States in its history has gone to war numerous times, but we go to war

not to conquer but to liberate. We go to war not to enslave but to set

free. And so our troops that I met with in January and the troops that

are serving there today are serving a purpose in Iraq. I have talked to

them and they are proud that they are able to represent the United

States and fight the war on terror. But they are also proud of the fact

that they are setting up a democracy in that land far, far away.

Mr. Speaker, history will look favorably on our role in Iraq and

Afghanistan. History will record what amazing people these Americans

were. It will be a good time in history for the United States and the

Iraqi people.

Mr. Speaker, freedom once again has ruled the day.