Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Iraqi

people on the anniversary of the establishment of Iraqi sovereignty. A

year ago today, Iraq took the first crucial step toward establishing a

democracy and rejoining the international community as a free nation.

In January, as all of us know, the Iraqi people took another step

forward. In defiance of an insurgency threatening to ``make the streets

run with blood,'' 8.5 million Iraqis cast their ballots.

Now, the political and administrative duties of government are run

almost entirely by Iraqis. With the help of U.S. and coalition troops,

Iraq's security forces now number approximately 170,000. The people of

Iraq deal a crushing blow to the insurgency each and every day through

the spirit and courage that they demonstrate. The American people stand

firmly beside the people of Iraq in their efforts to establish full

democratic rule for themselves.