Mr. Speaker, we have just witnessed one of the

freest elections ever held in the Middle East. It is important to

recognize that independent multinational election monitors have

confirmed that yesterday's Iraqi elections, in which a remarkably large

number of Sunnis turned out to vote, met international standards. It is

estimated that 10 to 12 million Iraqis renounced fear and defied those

who seek to demoralize them and to undermined U.S. and international

support for their noble commitment to rebuilding a civil society.

As we seek to encourage our friends in the Middle East on their

journey of self-determination, let us take a moment to recall with an

appropriate level of humility that our own democratic journey was

neither quick nor easy and no less worthwhile for the difficulties

endured.

Mr. Speaker, this historic moment inspires me to highlight an

outstanding bipartisan initiative here in the House which is making a

significant impact to strengthen fledgling democratic institutions

throughout the world.

I want to commend Speaker Hastert for his foresight in launching the

House Democracy Assistance Commission on which I serve along with 15 of

my colleagues. I wish to thank my colleague, Congressman David Dreier,

for his leadership on this initiative and his dedication to see it

through to fruition.

I also wish to acknowledge Representative David Price and my

predecessor, Congressman Doug Bereuter, for their hard work since 2003

to move this initiative and to make it a reality.

Since the establishment of the commission in March 2005, Members and

staff have worked diligently to identify countries and legislative

bodies in need of technical assistance. The House Democracy Assistance

Commission has established an exemplary framework to help elected

legislators develop badly needed parliamentary infrastructures to

foster just and thriving civil society based upon democratic

principles.

In his second inaugural address, President Bush issued a global call

to freedom, the heritage of all mankind. Through the commission,

Members of Congress have answered the President's call to move the

principles of democracy around the world. And beginning next year,

Democratic and Republican Members alike will join together to support

and encourage our counterparts in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim

country; in East Timor, the world's newest country which hungered for

independence and now hungers for working democratic institutions; in

Georgia, where the 2003 Rose Revolution ushered in peaceful change; in

Macedonia, which emerged from the brink of civil war to a new day of

freedom; and also in Kenya, a regional African power in the forefront

of the war on terror.

Through technical assistance missions, material assistance and

exchange programs that bring legislators to the U.S. and allow our

Members to share their knowledge and experiences with members of

parliaments in partner countries, the House of Representatives is

working directly with legislators around the world to provide expertise

and parliamentary best practices. This assistance will emphasize

committee operations, budgetary issues, defense oversight, specialized

legislation and oversight, legislative procedures, research services,

information services, as well as constituent services.

The commission also plans to support emerging legislative

institutions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Lebanon, countries where

governments had imposed unspeakable hardships on their own people

previously. It is staggering to realize that just a few short years ago

the brutal Taliban regime held all of Afghanistan hostage.

On December 19, thanks in great measure to the perseverance and

dedication of our men and women in uniform, Afghans are inaugurating

their first parliament in over 30 years.

Khalid Farooqi, a legislator in Afghanistan's Lower House of

Parliament, was recently quoted as saying, ``We want to build our

country, we do not want to destroy it again.''

For the first time since Saddam Hussein began his savage reign, and

despite factional tensions and the threats of nihilistic insurgents, an

astounding 70 percent of Iraqis courageously rose yesterday to

determine their own future and held elections for a new National

Assembly and government.

We also look to a new dawn of hope in Lebanon, where, tragically,

Gibran Tueni, a publisher and deputy at Lebanon's Parliament, was

assassinated this Monday in a bombing by those who fear the freedom

that comes from self-determination.

Just as our troops and over 22,000 soldiers from 30 coalitions

nations stood strong to help make yesterday's victory possible in Iraq,

I am proud of my fellow Democrats and Republicans as we stand together

to provide hope, encouragement, and vital technical assistance to the

work of the House Democracy Assistance Commission.