Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend my heartfelt

congratulations to the Iraqi people for their bravery, their courage,

and their sacrifice along the road to self-determination and

sovereignty.

As I contemplate the recent progress in Iraq, I am reminded of the

fact that it was 13 years from the time we declared our independence

until we elected our first president.

In Iraq, it has been a mere 13 months since Saddam's capture. In

America, it took 132 years for women to have the right to vote, but in

Iraq women voted in their very first democratic election. This election

is only the beginning of democracy in Iraq.

As their newly elected leaders draft a constitution this year,

America's commitment to Iraq's security is critical. We must ensure

that democracy and freedom take root and begin to thrive in the hearts

and the lives of the Iraqi people.

I also believe as more nations in the Middle East move towards

freedom and democracy, it will provide for a more secure and peaceful

world.