Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak

about the upcoming Iraqi national elections on Saturday, January 30,

and to congratulate the millions of brave Iraqi citizens who plan on

voting in their first free election.

After suffering for decades under Saddam Hussein's brutal regime, the

Iraqi people finally have an opportunity to form a representative

government that truly reflects the will of the Iraqi nation. Despite

ongoing pockets of violence in a few Iraqi cities, it is clear that

millions of Iraqis will finally be able to shape their own futures by

expressing and exercising their right to vote.

Mr. Speaker, this will truly be a national election that Iraq and the

rest of the Middle East can and should be proud of. More than 14.3

million Iraqi citizens have registered to vote. More than 190 political

parties will be on the ballot, encompassing almost 19,000 Iraqi

citizens standing for election. Finally and most importantly, nearly 80

percent of Iraqis say that they will vote, even in the face of

threatened violence from the terrorist insurgency.

Mr. Speaker, these are fantastic statistics.