Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to engage in a colloquy for

the remainder of this Special Order joined, as I was in travel, by my

colleague, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. Flake), also of the sixth

district, him of Arizona, me of Indiana. The gentleman from Arizona and

I had the privilege of

traveling in the last 2 weeks to cities in Iraq under the leadership of

the distinguished subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from Indiana

(Mr. Burton), of the Committee on International Relations. On this

trip, as we will reflect tonight, we not only, as this photograph

suggests, had the opportunity to spend time with soldiers in the

instance of this photograph in the belly of a C-130 on our way into

Baghdad. But more compellingly, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, today, as

we went through a vigorous and, in many ways, historic debate in this

Congress, about the merits of Operation Iraqi Freedom, we found

ourselves arguing one between another about the existence of certain

types of weapons and the credibility of arguments. It seems that there

was a group of people that was left out of that discussion today, and

it was the people of Iraq and how they have benefited or how they have

been moved or how they have been inspired by the heroism of American

and allied forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

It is in that spirit, Mr. Speaker, that the gentleman from Arizona

(Mr. Flake) and I come together tonight on the House floor to reflect

on our experiences, principally during the first congressional

delegation trip into the city of Basra, Iraq.

Basra, which is an area of southeastern Iraq under British control,

had, prior to 2 weeks ago, never entertained American Congressmen. So

when we arrived in Basra that day, we were literally, the four of us,

we were the first Members of Congress that these Iraqis, regular, rank-

and-file Iraqis, men and women from every station in life had a crack

at, had a chance to speak to. We had truly a unique opportunity meeting

with religious leaders, political leaders, but, more to the point as we

will emphasize in our reflections today, regular Iraqis who shared, as

I will reflect and detail and then yield to my colleague, the gentleman

from Arizona (Mr. Flake), they shared a story that we are not hearing

in America today. And I would offer humbly, Mr. Speaker, we did not

hear very much about it on this floor today; and it was an outpouring

of gratitude and appreciation for American soldiers and allied soldiers

who had freed them from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, and just as

intense was their enthusiasm and their passion in almost a grade-school

level enthusiasm that I saw for democracy that is beginning to take

hold.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I yield to my colleague, the gentleman from

Arizona, for such remarks on the trip as he would make.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his comments. In

fact, as my friend from Arizona said today in his remarks during the

debate over the resolution, the opulence of Saddam Hussein's palaces is

rendered even more immoral when one sees the squalor in which he forced

the largely Shi'ia population of southern Iraq to live in huge

communities like Basra, and where we see sandstone homes, a sewage

system that has 20 percent of the capacity that it needed. So as one

Iraqi told me, for years a good rain in the streets become the sewers.

Yet, as we traveled to Baghdad, we saw, having visited not just a

couple of Saddam Hussein's palaces, but the sheer opulence, the

decadent self-indulgence was, in my judgment, sinful. But it showed the

immorality.

Mr. Speaker, our first meeting, as is captured in this

photograph with the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. Flake) and myself and

our delegation, on the right was with a series of Iraqi religious and

political leaders. We see a Muslim imam here, the Catholic bishop of

Basra was in attendance and warmly received by those present. But my

memory of this meeting had more to do with the very silent Muslim

cleric who sat at the end of the table, the gentleman wearing ancient

garb and a long beard who, after we had gone through the series of

questions about everything from border jurisdiction to the process of

reconstruction, it fell to us to be able to ask questions. And up to

this point, we had heard mostly from these religious leaders who were

quite chatty through an interpreter, and this gentleman had been icily

silent.

At that point I remember asking, What do you think of our decision to

remove Saddam Hussein? And before any of these three could answer, the

gentleman in the white headdress suddenly leaned forward and began to

speak urgently in Arabic and pointing his finger in my direction with

his eyes on fire. And as I waited for the translation, the interpreter

explained that he had said, Saddam Hussein is a nightmare, and the day

you ended his regime, you lifted a dark curtain from our people and the

daylight was able to shine in. It was for me an extraordinary moment

where this icy and quiet figure who was clearly suspicious of American

officials traveling thousands of miles to sit down in a delegation

meeting, suddenly had his moment to speak a truth from his heart, and

it was a truth about a nightmare that the United States of America had

brought to an end.

I yield for the gentleman's reflections.

Mr. Speaker, I have tried to explain that. I admire the

way my friend describes the morale of the troops, because I really

believe it is also a good description of the enthusiasm of the Iraqis,

some 60 or 70 with whom we spent a considerable amount of time that day

in Basra, that regardless of the arguments that we have here on this

floor and across this country and, frankly, through the course of a

Presidential election year, all of which are appropriate, about

evidence and information and intelligence, it struck me that that was

completely irrelevant to the cause as it was understood by our soldiers

that we met in Iraq and the Iraqis that we met; that this was a cause

really between good and evil, between a tyrant who oppressed and

murdered over a million of his own countrymen, 400,000 bodies of men

and women, boys and girls who have been found in mass graves so far,

over 800,000 Iraqis remain missing, people dragged from their homes in

the dead of night without due process of law, never to be heard from

again, versus the forces of the Western World coming together for the

rule of law and for ending that tyranny. I am very grateful for my

colleague's reference to a cause, because it emanated out of everything

that I sensed about the people with whom we spoke.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, I must tell him

that that time that we spent, and this is another photograph of our

time with Iraqis during this trip, but the time that we spent with

former political prisoners, one man who had been jailed a dozen times

in the course of 25 years, to hear not just that individuals were

dragged from their homes in the dead of night if they were thought to

be suspected of disloyalty of the regime, not just that those

individuals were tortured by the regime of Saddam Hussein, but to hear

from these men that it was routine and ordinary practice to torture

prisoners' wives in front of them, their mothers, and their children in

order to extract information; and that oftentimes the torture would

result in the death of a loved one and then the summary execution of

the prisoner; and that this happened in numbers that boggle the mind.

And I must tell my colleague that I returned with a burden on my

heart to carry this message back on behalf of these good people in Iraq

for whom I developed a tremendous amount of affection and respect, that

they lived in a hellish environment, subject to the most unspeakable

cruelty by the tyranny of Saddam Hussein.

We cannot lightly pass over that and we cannot lightly ignore that

and we cannot trivialize that, regardless of whether or not the human

rights record of this regime was a central focus in the public debate

prior to the war. It is nonetheless a fact that cries out from over 270

mass graves that have been found so far and the remains of some 400,000

Iraqis. I yield to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. Flake).

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding. And I

think it is a wonderful place for us as we approach the end of our

conversation tonight to end it that I am overwhelmed by the sense of

gratitude expressed by the Iraqis with whom we interacted in Basra. I

mean, the touching of the heart, I came to find out virtually every

Iraqi that we met ended their conversation with me, and I know with the

gentleman from Arizona (Mr. Flake), by touching their hearts. And I

would later find that this is a form of deep respect in the Muslim and

Islamic tradition. It is the touching of the heart that means the

ultimate expression of gratitude.

When we met with political prisoners and we thanked them for their

candor and we thanked them for being willing to meet with us, they

touched their hearts and bowed to us. And in this instance here where

we visited one of hundreds of democracy workshops that are taking place

all over Iraq, and here you see Ana who is a young Islamic Iraqi woman,

wearing an abaya, and she is presenting me one of my most treasured

possessions since becoming a Congressman. It is a stack of handwritten

poems in English about what freedom means to her. And she illustrated

the poems with almost child-like caricatures of freedom of religion and

freedom of expression and the right to vote with a small ballot box.

The enthusiasm of all the people in this room that spoke broken

English was very endearing to me and profoundly inspiring. Not only had

we managed in Operation Iraqi Freedom to bring to an end a darkness, as

one Iraqi said to me that day in Basra, a darkness that had descended

on their people, but also the daylight of democracy, the daylight of

freedom and liberty streaming into Iraq. And it is being greeted with

enthusiasm.

The devastating bombing that took place today claiming lives in

Baghdad, the car bombs that were detonated the

day after we left Baghdad Airport, it was the bloodiest day since the

end of major combat hostilities, all draw the mind to the violence.

They draw, it seems to me, the American public's focus to a very

small number of Iraqis who seek to use violence to reclaim the

dictatorial power they once enjoyed when this is a country of 10

million people, a sample of which we met, who were overflowing with

gratitude to the people of the United States and our allies in this

cause.

As this picture attests, and I hope it is on screen and, Mr. Speaker,

I hope it can be seen, that you can see that enthusiasm on their faces,

that enthusiasm for democracy that I encountered in Iraqi after Iraqi.

And it is an enthusiasm I believe will be a foundation for a free Iraq

for decades to come.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arizona (Mr.

Flake) for yielding and for his participation. And I think those words

especially eloquent. Because it was the gratitude and the enthusiasm

for their freedom that I found most moving among the Iraqis that we

met.

I close with a picture, Mr. Speaker, that I think the gentleman from

Arizona (Mr. Flake) actually took. We were visiting the second of two

palaces of Saddam Hussein now being rehabilitated into a hospital for

Iraqis in Baghdad. And as we were making our way, we came across

regular Iraqis who were moving materials. And as you see here, and I

hope it is evidenced in the picture, the enthusiasm with which we as

Americans were greeted was overwhelming. People stopping, smiling,

reaching out.

I did not even expect that the thumbs up symbol would be

international, but it was. And you see the warmth and you see the

generous spirit that is present among the Iraqi people. I say without

hesitation, as I said to many people upon my return, I fell in love

with the Iraqi people. They are bright, visionary, optimistic,

educated, and a people that are of such strong opinions that I thought

they were from the Midwest in most of our conversations.

But in the midst of all of it, I came away with an image that I had a

burden, Mr. Speaker, to come back and as we consider this important

resolution today, even to help finish the debate today with my

colleague from Arizona (Mr. Flake), to try and focus this debate on the

real beneficiaries of Operation Iraqi Freedom, because certainly

Operation Iraqi Freedom brought down a tyrant who represented, as the

President concluded, a threat to the United States of America and our

allies and that clear and present danger justified our decision to go

to war. But the true beneficiaries are these Iraqis and the generations

of Iraqis who will follow them, who will be born in a free country,

that will live under not the rule of one, but the rule of law. And they

will live under a constitution that is, as Ambassador Bremer said to

us, not so much a revolutionary document, as for this part of the world

and its torn history, a radical document, with freedom of religion,

freedom of expression, freedom of speech, and equality of the genders.

This is an astonishing accomplishment. And I am here to report very

simply, Mr. Speaker, that the Iraqi people that we met with, some four

or five dozen in the course of our days in Basra and Baghdad two short

weeks ago know that. They understand that. They are deeply and

profoundly grateful to the people of the United States, to the families

of our men and women in uniform for the sacrifices that have been made

on their behalf.

And they are deeply hopeful and deeply enthusiastic and deeply

ambitious to see democracy and a constitutional republic take hold in

this beleaguered land.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the gentleman from

Arizona (Mr. Flake).