Mr. Speaker, earlier this month I traveled with the

Iraqi Women's Caucus members, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. Granger),

the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Tauscher) and the gentleman from

Illinois (Mr. Shimkus) to meet with Iraqi women to discuss election

procedures.

We held the meeting in Amman, Jordan. These were women who were

candidates for the January 30, 2005, elections in Iraq. And it seems

kind of strange that we would be training them in election procedures,

how to campaign, when certainly that is a very different place, and the

elections are being held in a war zone, and it is very difficult for

candidates to get their name out, to even have their picture out and so

that they are on lists which provides for the different groups. The

women were from all different parties that are involved in the

election. There are over 100 parties.

We had 20 of these women that came to discuss the elections. But we

were so amazed and so impressed with the caliber of women. They are

educated, articulate, well spoken, and at least five of them have

Ph.Ds. But they are not only running for election, where we talk about

how you have to speak against opponents, and you might say that you are

going to really kill each other; they are actually putting their life

on the line. So many of them have been intimidated. They have been

threatened. One of the women has lost her 17-year old son along with

her guard. Last week there was an assassination attempt on her again

with four insurgents dressed as Iraqi policemen. Fortunately, they did

not succeed, and she is still running.

One woman had been kidnapped and held for ransom and was finally

released. Another woman lost her son. Another woman had five family

members who have been killed just recently. And yet they are willing.

Because they believe so much in democracy, they are willing to put

their names on a list to be elected.

And fortunately for the women of Iraq, this is a national constituent

type of election, and so it is not what we think of as having districts

or provinces. But there is a list of the different parties, so people

will have one

vote for the list, and then the number of people that are elected will

receive--will be included in the government that is being elected and

will have the opportunity to write the Constitution. But it was decided

by the transitional government that women would be included, and that

25 percent of those who are elected will be women. And the way that

that was done is that every third name on the list is a woman.

So we had the opportunity to meet for several days with these women,

and the longer we met, the more engaged everybody became. You could

have really very frank discussions. So many times when we go over

there, it is just for a meeting of very short time. You never really

got to know the women.

There have also been women that have come over here to work with us.

But despite the differences in the women, they were Shiites, Sunnis,

Kurds, independents and Christians, that they had not really discussed

political issues with each other, and what we were able to do was to be

able to facilitate and help them develop the tools and the skills to be

able to work together and realize that politics really is the art of

compromise. Some of them were very rigid in what they believe should be

done, but they were able to see that you need to discuss, and it is

very important to have a majority party, but also to have a minority

party.

Even the Sunni women that were there, who came in wanting to postpone

the elections because their areas are obviously unsafe, they still want

to participate. What all of the women told us was that they need to

have everyone participate, all the different groups. Many of them, even

within the different groups, are divided into other groups.

But we were really able to discuss this with them, and I think they

went away with a positive reinforcement of how to deal with that. What

we came away with was such a feeling of how important it is, how they

view the democracy that we have and the freedoms that we have and how

they really want to have the same type of thing.

Now, these elections are really only the first step in them reaching

democracy, and they will be able to write their constitution and form

an interim government. The constitution will have to be written by

August 15, which is a very short time. The interim government will take

effect, and then they will have a slate for eventual election of the

permanent officers who will govern in December of 2005. But they are on

their way.

One thing that they said to us is, The U.S., we think of them as

occupiers, but please do not leave us until the job is done. We need

you there. We really need to have a democracy. And they are willing to

give their life for it.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate them and wish them well on their

election.