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House of Representatives

Election Day In Iraq

OF TEXAS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Tuesday, February 1, 2005

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Poe) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, 2 days ago, amidst intimidation and threats and actual violence, the people of Iraq spoke out against the past oppression of Saddam Hussein and his dynasty of tyrants and spoke loudly for democracy. And I was there, privileged to be there, to witness this birth of a new era in this Nation of Iraq. I saw how the Iraqi people boldly, with the courage of a free people, said no to the outlaw desperadoes that plague their land almost daily, with the terror of abuse, ambush, and assassination. A people yearning to be free cannot be deterred by the acts of cowardly villains who harm the innocent and the unarmed.

Even on this day, January 30, Iraq's Election Day, a day of promise, there were still 212 reported acts of violence against these people, 44 of whom died, one being an 8-year-old mentally challenged boy. Yet 60 percent of these proud Iraqis walked to 30,000 polling stations with watchful Iraqi security police on rooftops of schools armed with M-16 rifles.

Yet they ventured out with their families. They stood in lines, received historic ballots with 111 selections from which to choose. They entered a cardboard voting booth, and they made their free choice. They all cast a vote for Iraq.

I talked to these people, the young and the elderly, who were all defiant of the violence and proud to be voters in this first free and fair election that carries the hope of democracy. I even saw husbands taking photographs of their wives while their wives were voting.

The atmosphere of democracy unfolding was almost carnival in nature. After voting, each Iraqi dipped their right forefinger in an inkwell to record the fact that they voted. Some even left the polling place singing as they held their finger up high, a symbol that has come to be termed a badge of courage. They wanted all to know they had participated in this day. One young girl told me that she got there very early that morning so she could be the first person in her community to vote.

This election was planned and conducted by Iraqis. The security force of 100,000 officers were all Iraqis. The votes will be counted by Iraqis, and the 275 members of this new parliament will all be Iraqis.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the United States made a sound decision in helping start this democracy. Similar to the events following World War II when America launched democracies in the nations of our enemies, Japan and Germany, the skeptics and critics said it could not be done, and those skeptics and critics are still around today. But today Japan and Germany are not only thriving democracies but they are also world economic powers and they are our allies.

So this, too, will be our hope and desire for Iraq and for Afghanistan. These two nations will become democracies in spite of the hardships and detractors here at home and abroad. Those people who utter words of gloom, doom, and despair, history will prove those people wrong. History corroborates that freedom can grow in the desert of oppression.

Our efforts have not gone without appreciation by the Iraqi people. The individuals I spoke to on that Sunday morning and afternoon said they love Americans, especially our military. They are truly grateful.

As Election Day drew to a close on Sunday afternoon, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. Shays) and I spoke with the president of Iraq. And in an almost emotional tone, he told us that the Iraqi people recognize that America has sacrificed their young men and women for Iraq, for this day to come.

We should be happy for the Iraqi people and proud that we have sown the seed of freedom in this land far, far away. And we must remember the words 40 years ago of a young man from Massachusetts, President John Kennedy, when he stated our commitment then and our commitment today. He said, "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty."

We are doing that in Iraq, Mr. Speaker.