

and representative of the best interests of the Palestinian people. On too many occasions, he has walked away from the peace table and given tacit approval to renewed violence by Palestinian extremists. Arafat remains—for better or worse—the “chosen” representative of the Palestinian people. For real progress to occur, however, the Palestinian people need a prime minister with real authority—the authority to go after the extremists, the authority to negotiate with the government of Israel, and the authority to make decisions that will not be overturned at Arafat’s whim. If a lasting peace in the Middle East is the ultimate goal, and I firmly believe that it must be, the Palestinian people must have a capable, effective prime minister. I am hopeful that Ahmed Qureia, sworn in as the Palestinian prime minister earlier this month, will be permitted to take the steps necessary to end the terror attacks against Israel and return the Palestinians to the peace table.

I am not opposed to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Neither, for that matter, are the people and government of Israel. That state, however, can only be established if it and the larger Arab world in turn recognize Israel’s right to exist. Without that recognition, there can be no lasting peace. If Israel were to accept the establishment of an independent Palestinian state that maintained its opposition to Israel’s existence, the country would only be ensuring its own destruction.

I firmly believe that our country should continue providing financial and military assistance to the Israeli people. As long as the nations surrounding Israel continue to provide assistance to those trying to destroy the country, the United States should continue its efforts to support her. As the region’s only democratically elected government, Israel deserves our support.

Our Nation has an important role to play in the peace process, Mr. Speaker, and we should continue to do so. We can and should continue diplomatic efforts to bring a lasting peace to the region. It remains to be seen if the Arab states, which have called on us to play a more active role, will actually respect that role. I do not believe, however, that our involvement should extend to the deployment of U.S. troops to “police” any final peace agreement. Any agreement that requires peacekeepers to be deployed is flawed to begin with—it means neither side actually expects the other to abide by the agreement’s provisions. We must pursue a comprehensive agreement that both sides accept.

Having accepted Israel’s right to defend herself, I also believe there must come a time for negotiations and a legitimate peace process. Israel should make every effort to limit incursions into Palestinian-controlled areas. There must be recognition, both in this country and around the world, that both sides must be willing to talk. The Israelis have shown that willingness in the past, and have made significant proposals aimed at achieving a lasting peace. What remains, however, is the need for a serious commitment on the part of the Palestinians to return to the table and actively work with the Israelis.

In order for that to happen, though, the new Palestinian leadership must denounce terrorism once and for all and make a firm commitment to restrain, arrest, detain, and destroy those militant elements in Palestinian areas that want the violence to continue. After all,

there are groups who have stated that they will never accept cease-fire, nor respect any peace agreement. More than a firm commitment, however, the Palestinians must take firm action—or empower a prime minister to take firm action on their behalf.

In crisis, Mr. Speaker, there is opportunity. The only thing that remains is for both sides to accept the challenge, and take advantage of the opportunity. Peace in the region is long overdue, but it will take the active participation of both sides to achieve it.

HONORING PAUL J. SIMMERT OF
NORWICH, CONNECTICUT

HON. ROB SIMMONS

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 21, 2003

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Cadet Paul J. Simmert of Norwich, Connecticut who was recently named Chief Petty Officer of the Nautilus 571 Division of the United States Naval Sea Cadet Corps.

At only 17 years of age, Paul will be in command of 50 cadets, ranging in age from 11 to 17 years. This appointment follows tremendous hard work and dedication, including the completion of regulation U.S. Navy courses and many months of training throughout the country over the past 4 years.

Having a father in the Navy inspired Paul’s interest in serving his country at a very young age. At 12, he took the first steps toward what will be a very successful career in the U.S. Navy by joining the U.S. Sea Cadet Corps. Through this program, Paul has been able to take on important responsibilities and learn the ropes of the United States Navy.

Chief Petty Officer Simmert is an exemplary young man and is highly deserving of this great honor and responsibility. I am most proud to have him serving his peers in this capacity. Now more than ever, we need young men like Paul to take the lead in protecting the freedoms that this great country was founded on for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the Members of the House of Representatives to join me in congratulating Chief Petty Officer Paul J. Simmert in receiving this prestigious award and thanking him for the contributions he makes to his country.

IN RECOGNITION OF AN INTER-
FAITH CELEBRATION OF
THANKSGIVING

HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 21, 2003

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a group of congregations in my district that will come together to give thanks in the true spirit of Thanksgiving. These congregations are of different faiths, different sects and different practices. Nonetheless, they have in common a love for our country and gratitude to our Creator for bringing them or their forebears to a democratic country where civil rights and individual freedoms are protected. This inspired them to plan a joint service to give thanks.

Thanksgiving is a holiday that belongs to every American. It unites our country and embodies the principles upon which our great nation was founded. The first Thanksgiving is an account of immigrants arriving on a remote continent, launching a new life, surviving dangerous conditions, encountering a different culture, and sitting down with strangers to enjoy the bounty of this land. As waves of new Americans have found welcome here, they have embraced American values and joined in celebrating Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving symbolizes the bond that unites the very first immigrants with every subsequent generation of Americans. When we recreate the meal eaten at the first Thanksgiving, we remember the importance of sharing, kindness and tolerance, and we are grateful for the rich bounty offered us by this country. This is a land filled with plenty—fertile soil, rich resources and, most of all, liberty. We also recall, with sadness, that although the early immigrants were greeted with friendship by the native Americans, they reciprocated with hostility, greed and intolerance. Thanksgiving gives us an opportunity to be at our best, to welcome friends and family into our homes, and to recall those who are not as well off. Many Americans take time to feed the hungry in Thanksgiving celebrations at homeless shelters, soup kitchens and neighborhood civic organizations.

The Pilgrims arrived in the new world in November 1620, too late to plant crops. Of 110 men and women who arrived here from Europe, fewer than 50 survived the first hard winter. With help from a neighboring tribe, the Pilgrims learned how to cultivate local produce. In the fall they celebrated the harvest with members of the tribe. Over time, this harvest celebration became an institution. In 1817 New York State adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom. By the middle of the 19th century many other states also celebrated a Thanksgiving Day. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln appointed a national day of thanksgiving. Since then every subsequent President has issued a proclamation designating a day of Thanksgiving.

At dark times in our history the celebration of Thanksgiving has seemed especially poignant. For example, in 1942, London’s Westminster Abbey held its first secular service in nine centuries, hosting a Thanksgiving event for U.S. troops stationed in England. More than 3,500 people filled the church, reveling in singing “The Star Spangled Banner” and “America the Beautiful”. Everything that marked their differences—geography, religion, race—seemed insignificant in comparison to the things that united them and the liberties they had joined in battle to defend.

In times of tragedy, Thanksgiving has served to rally our nation. Six days after the assassination of President Kennedy, President Lyndon Johnson addressed the nation on Thanksgiving Day. He asked his fellow citizens to remain “determined that from this mid-night of tragedy we shall move toward a new American greatness.”

Mr. Speaker, I pay tribute to the congregations that honor the true spirit of Thanksgiving by setting aside the differences among their faiths and joining together to celebrate the liberties and freedoms we all treasure.