

the 547 seat lower house of parliament called the Council of People's Representatives. Voters also chose representatives in nine regional state parliaments that will appoint members of parliament's upper house, the Council of the Federation.

Twenty-five million people registered to vote in the election. With 200,000 of those registered to vote living in villages inaccessible by roads, election officials on camels, pack animals, and boats fanned out to distribute ballots in time for the election. The National Electoral Board drafted 38 camels, 65 donkeys, 20 horses and 10 mules to carry election workers, ballots, stamps, counting sheets, and indelible ink to rural parts of a country twice the size of Texas.

In the weeks leading up to the May elections, peaceful mass rallies were held by both the ruling party and opposition parties in Ethiopia's capital of Addis Ababa. At one of the rallies, 250,000 supporters of one of the main opposition parties, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy, rallied in the capital's main Meskel Square. A government rally attracted 600,000 people the day before.

One voter, Solomon Aseffa, told reporters that after witnessing two public rallies in two days, democracy finally really was flourishing in Ethiopia. Another resident said that the peaceful rallies were indicative of the increasing political consciousness of the community. An Addis Ababa resident, Fitsum Argaw, urged young people to cast their votes in order to safeguard a democratic system that had been achieved through great sacrifice.

During the campaign, there was unprecedented media access for the opposition. They received equal time on state-run radio and the opportunity to participate in broadcast debates. One main opposition party even launched a text messaging campaign to get out the vote. European observers praised the openness to the run-up to the elections although they admitted that they witnessed intimidating tactics by the ruling party.

Despite the reports of harassment, there was a stunning 90 percent turnout of registered voters. Foreign election observers found out the worst problem had been the crowds, with some waiting for hours just to cast their ballots. A young female economics consultant called it "a great day because I am able to vote freely and that is a new thing here in Ethiopia."

The election results showed that while the ruling party held on to a majority, the opposition made major gains. However, opposition parties argued that the process was marred by fraud, intimidation, and violence. After the election, Prime Minister Zenawi promptly banned all demonstrations for 1 month and assumed control of the capital police.

Sadly, events spiraled out of control after the university students were arrested for defying this ban. Ultimately,

36 people were shot dead by police and thousands were arrested after protests erupted over the election results. This type of bloodshed cannot be allowed to happen again.

This Sunday there is a rally scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa. Members of the main opposition parties, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces, plan to protest alleged fraud in the May 15 parliamentary elections and call for the formation of a national unity government to supervise new elections.

What we want the folks in Ethiopia to know is that we are behind them in the democratic process. We know it is not perfect, as we are still working on ours; but we wish them success in this great and noble endeavor.

I would like to take this time to urge peace and calm in Ethiopia. There has already been too much violence and bloodshed in the wake of these elections. However, in an ominous sign, on Monday forty-three members of the opposition were arrested ahead of Sunday's assembly and the branch offices of the opposition parties were raided and are now closed. Authorities have threatened "severe consequences" for any illegal acts or violence that occur during Sunday's event.

Mr. Speaker, the path to democracy is never a smooth and easy process. We are seeing that now in Iraq. In Ethiopia, democracy is in its infancy and it must be nurtured along by its leaders.

To that end, I would urge Prime Minister Zenawi and the Ethiopian authorities to allow this rally to occur peacefully. As pre-election rallies were held without violence and bloodshed, post-election rallies should be equally violence and bloodshed-free.

Ethiopia has come so far. From a monarchy followed by suffering under Communism, Ethiopians must be given the opportunity to flourish under the greatest of systems—democracy.

NO NEED FOR AN INDEPENDENT COMMISSION

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

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, a number of our friends across the aisle yesterday once again demanded that an independent commission is vital to what they said is getting to the truth about the response to Hurricane Katrina. They want a commission like the 9/11 Commission. They put their hope and their avowed trust in a so-called independent commission.

They also said, in fact, that there had been no adequate investigations in recent years, even though their glorified 9/11 Commission occurred during that time. Yet it was their glorified 9/11 Commission that recommended putting FEMA under Homeland Security even though it had been working just fine where it was. FEMA previously had the ability to put resources where it needed them without worrying about a higher boss redirecting resources in

the budget. Well, folks got what they wanted, and it may have been a huge mistake.

Our friends across the aisle said yesterday that all that goes on around here is whitewashing and a cover-up and that is all Congress will do anymore. But during my years as a judge, I noticed people will often ascribe to the opponents the very motivations and characteristics that they themselves have and then assume that the others around them are just as devious as they are. Now, whether or not that applies here, I will leave for other consideration.

The fact is, however, if they bear to watch the hearings that have been on C-SPAN or gone to the hearings themselves instead of calling for a press conference or participated in some way, they have would have seen that tough questions were being asked. In fact, some were so tough they were really a bit unfair.

It is Congress's job to oversee such things, and the mere fact that Congress has punted such obligation in other cases so it can point blame elsewhere if a bad decision is made is no reason to run from our responsibility here. In the congressional hearings both sides get to ask questions. You get to submit witnesses. And if you do not like the majority report, you file a minority report.

That is not whitewashing. It is simply disingenuous for people to come to this building and say by their actions and their words that if they cannot be in charge, then they are simply not going to participate. Like on schoolyards, some child stamping their foot, stomping around saying, if we are not going to do it my way, if I am not in charge, I will not play. The trouble is this is not a game. This is our Nation at stake.

Members of Congress were elected to do a job, not complain why someone should be doing it for us. We do not need an independent commission. We need some additional independent-thinking Members across the aisle to step up and help us by doing their job.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from North Carolina?

There was no objection.