

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Presidential Inauguration, 2005

Last month I realized a long-time dream when I traveled to Washington D.C. for the Inauguration of President Bush. Sandwiched between snowstorms, the trip encompassed many exciting moments. Looking back on the weekend, I will surely recall seeing the celebrities, attending the parties and watching the parade. The experience that will stay with me longest, however, is the memory of the President's inaugural address.

This week's Byline strays from the usual state and local issues to comment on President Bush's address.

As I sat listening to him describe the importance of freedom and charge America to defend and extend freedom, it seemed like he was accepting a very hard task. I thought of the inscription on the Liberty Bell: "Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." Those words, quoting an Old Testament verse, underscore the importance placed on liberty throughout the ages and were in harmony with the President's words.

As the speech neared its end, President Bush himself drew on the Liberty Bell inscription, adapting its end to "throughout the world." That change is in keeping with his theme, and it seems an appropriate expansion to the Philadelphia bell that rang in colonial times. The modern world is smaller than that of the American colonies, and modern threats to American liberty come from outside our borders. The President sees extending liberty to other nations as the best way to "preserve, protect and defend" our nation, a promise he had just made when he took the oath of office.

The speech laid out a bold agenda for the nation. All who heard the speech, either on the Capitol lawn or on television, surely pictured the young American servicemen and women who are putting their lives on the line as they work to bring freedom to the people of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Tyrants no longer rule those nations. On January 20th, Afghanistan had already completed a successful election, but the election in Iraq lay just ahead. Nobody could predict the outcome of that election. Terrorists were making daily murderous attacks and pledging massive assaults on polling places and any Iraqis who dared to vote. Terrorist leader al-Zarqawi responded to the speech by announcing that democracy itself must be destroyed.

As I write this week's column, the Iraq election has just taken place. In spite of the threats and the bombings of several polling places, early reports indicate a voter turnout similar to that of the American presidential election. Even though voters were risking their lives by going to the polls, television footage shows Iraqi women waiting in long lines to cast their ballots. Men are literally dancing in the streets. Voters proudly display their ink-stained fingers that prove they voted.

Those proud Iraqis have shown the same yearning for self-determination that inspired Americans hundreds of years ago.

This week's election is one of many steps involved in building a new Iraqi nation. It may be followed by new strife, or it may be a harbinger of change in other Middle Eastern nations. Simply because it transpired, it takes one more step in proclaiming liberty throughout the world.