Mr. President, I am always distressed with the media and

the way they are misrepresenting what is going on in Iraq, and

particularly the accomplishments this last weekend. It is hard to

believe.

On Saturday, the Iraqi Parliament, which was elected last December,

convened to fill the top Government leadership positions. Exemplifying

the democratic traditions beginning to take root in Iraq, the Iraqi

Parliament successfully negotiated these nominees, clearing the way for

the first permanent, popularly elected Government in Iraq's history.

The first permanent, popularly elected Government in Iraq's history--

that is mind boggling.

In addition, I want to commend our soldiers in the theater. Without

their brave efforts, this progress would have been impossible.

I just returned from my 11th trip to the Iraqi AOR. I come back, and

I remember the stories that are told by our different troops there.

Some of the things they come up with are amazing--the anecdotal things,

stories that are comparable to the stories we heard back during World

War II.

American soldiers continue to clear out terrorist strongholds,

allowing democracy a chance to flourish. The accomplishments of

American soldiers have permitted Iraqis the opportunity to vote and

elect a parliament that has now produced leaders of this nation's

national unity government. It has been a long road getting to this

point, and we have further to go. There are some major hurdles these

new leaders must keep in mind. These are Iraqi leaders. These are the

elected leaders. For the first time in Iraq's history, they must build

consensus for reigning in the militias, protecting critical

infrastructure such as oil pipelines, preserving human rights for all

Iraqi citizens, implementing necessary reforms to revive the civil

economy, and, perhaps most importantly, the new leaders must inspire

confidence in the permanent Government.

While what these seven nominees put forward on Saturday represents a

huge political breakthrough, challenges lie ahead for both Iraq's new

leadership and our troops stationed there. Our best men and women

continue to serve valiantly in some of the most trying conditions. Some

have been gravely wounded, and some have paid the ultimate price. The

question you hear quite often is, they say, Is it worth it? It is

impossible for me to answer that question on an individual basis, when

you think about the depth of suffering of a wife or a child or a

father, the loss of a loved one. I mourn that we have lost even one

life, but I do not regret the cause in which that life is lost.

I will say that as America's elected leaders, we have been chosen to

use our best judgment in these most difficult choices. Throughout

history people have chosen to take an uncompromising stand in what they

believe in. They have done this because they understand some things are

so valuable that we must risk everything to preserve them.

Can the cost of preserving freedom ever be too great? That is a

question I wrestle with day and night. As I do, I am sure other members

of our Government and military leaders do the same.

I know freedom cannot be imposed, but I also know the thirst for it

cannot be quenched. If September 11 showed us anything, it was that we

affect and are affected by the rest of the world. Standing by and

hoping for the best is not an option. When it comes to fighting

terrorism around the world, we are involved, whether we like it or not,

and the quicker we wake up to this reality, the better chance we have

at setting

things on the right course. The American public must be as resolute in

this mission as our troops on the ground.

President Bush has stood stalwartly behind our troops and the Iraqi

people and measurable progress has been achieved. It would be

appropriate to list a few of these. You don't get this from the media,

so you are going to have to get it from the floor, from those who have

been over there personally and witnessed things happening.

Iraq's first Ambassador to the United States in 15 years presented

his credentials to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at a State

Department ceremony on April 11.

The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq calculated that nearly

11.9 million Iraqis--approximately 75 percent--voted in the December

2005 elections. This represents an increase of about 4 million voters

from the January 2005 election.

Since June 2004, when the Coalition transferred sovereignty, Iraqi

people elected an interim government in January 2005, drafted and

ratified a constitution in October 2005, and elected a 4-year,

constitutionally based Government in December 2005.

There have been strong, positive economic changes as well. Iraq's

economy is recovering after 30 years of dictatorship and lack of

infrastructure maintenance. In 2005, the Iraqi economy grew an

estimated 3 percent in real terms. The International Monetary Fund

anticipates the Iraqi economy will grow by more than 10 percent in

2006. Certainly the Presiding Officer, one of the greatest economists

of this body, understands the significance of the accomplishments in

the economy of Iraq.

Under Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraqis' standard of living

deteriorated rapidly. Iraq's per capita income dropped from $3,800 in

1980--higher than Spain at that time--to $715 in 2002, which is lower

than Angola. Today economic recovery is picking up, with gross domestic

product growing from $18.9 billion in 2002 to $33.1 billion in 2005.

Before liberation, Iraq's cities suffered from inadequate sewage

systems. The United States has helped Iraqis build or repair sewage

treatment plants for 5.1 million Iraqis. U.S.-funded projects have

improved access to clean water for 3.1 million people.

You almost have go to there and see these people, and see what they

are doing now that they say they couldn't have done. It is very

difficult for an American to walk through the streets--whether it is

Tikrit, Fallujah, Baghdad, or anywhere else--without people running up

to you and saying my daughter can now get married, our girls can now go

to school, now we have water we can drink, now we have a sewage system

that we haven't had since the end of the regime of Saddam Hussein.

I think the greatest miracle of Iraq which the ``cut and run'' caucus

refuses to acknowledge has been the performance of the security forces.

Coalition military commanders are focused on developing Iraqi police

forces, and are helping Iraqis develop a disciplined force that

protects the rights of all Iraqis. One-hundred thirty Iraqi Minister of

Defense combat battalions are now rising up from just a handful in

August 2004. Of the 110 bases operated by Coalition forces, 34 have

been closed and transferred to the Iraqis. That is something we have to

understand. We were manning 100 percent of the bases of operation, and

a third are now being taken care of by the Iraqis.

Thirteen Iraqi brigade headquarters and fifty battalions have assumed

battle space. They are taking care of their own battle space. Iraqi

forces control 65 percent of Baghdad.

I recall meeting General Madhi in Fallujah. At that time he had been

working as a brigade commander for Saddam Hussein. He hated Americans

until Saddam came down and General Madhi became the brigade commander

for security forces in Fallujah. He started training with the Marines

in Fallujah. They call it embedded training. They get in there with

him. They worked together and they became so close that when we rotated

the Marines out of Fallujah, they got together and they cried.

That same general, General Madhi, was transferred to Baghdad where he

took over the security, starting from the east to the western part of

Baghdad, and now has control of 65 percent of the eastern part of

Baghdad. We do not have Americans doing that. We have Iraqis doing

that. There are more than 250,000 trained and equipped Iraqi security

forces, up from 115,000 16 months ago.

I stood here 3 months ago and talked about my experiences with the

commanders in the field. They have a good answer to the question that

keeps being asked each Member of the Senate: When will they be on their

own and handle their own security? How long will it be? Not many

politicians want to give the answer to something like that. I don't

mind doing it because I think it is a good idea of what the answer is.

I remember talking to the commanders in the field over the last

several years and they have consistently said if we get to the point

where we can have 11 divisions of Iraqis trained and equipped--that

translates to 325,000--they will be ready to take over their own

security. That does not mean all Americans will leave. We still have

American troops and an American presence in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sinai, and

other places, but they are not doing the security there.

At that time when we get to the point where they have 11 divisions,

which should be by the end of this year, or at the very latest by

midyear of the following year, they will be able to handle their own

security.

Something heretofore considered to be virtually impossible is going

to happen. One of the main problems with this war is how the media is

focused on weapons of mass destruction. We never should have been

talking about weapons of mass destruction. We know Saddam Hussein had

weapons of mass destruction. We know that some 4,000 of their own

people were killed with weapons of mass destruction. We know in the 8-

year Iran-Iraq war, over 100,000 Iranians were killed with weapons of

mass destruction. We know they had them. There is no question. That was

not the important thing.

The important thing in Iraq is that the most sophisticated training

was taking place, training people to be sophisticated terrorists in

cities such as Samarra, Ramadi, and Salman Pak, where they had the

major trading areas. They are not training anymore. One Iraqi defector,

CAPT Sabah Khodada, observed foreign Arabs being trained in hijackings,

kidnapping of airplanes, trains, public buses, planting explosives in

cities, and suicide operations. It could very well be most likely that

is where the training took place that caused their successful attack on

America's soil on September 11. Very likely it was. That is what they

were teaching at that time.

We went into Iraq and we confiscated 2 million ``exploitable''

documents that we are still analyzing. Some of the documents have

already proven the existence of the camps.

I want to lay out the facts. We know Saddam was giving money to the

Palestinian families of suicide bombers. We know Saddam violated

numerous U.N. resolutions since the end of Operation Desert Storm. We

know the air defense forces would regularly shoot at our airplanes. We

know he tortured, abused, murdered, and massacred many thousands of his

own people.

I ask a very important question. Where would we be now if we had not

gone into Iraq? The answer will be left up to history to decide.

Probably we will never know. We know we have not been attacked on our

territory since September 11. My own personal belief is the work we

have done, the successes in Iraq have been responsible for that great

victory.

I returned from my 11th trip to the Iraqi AOR. I met with the people

over there, including General Madhi. However, the cut-and-run caucus

can only think of surrender. They are still out there. Recent casualty

rates exposed the insurgents' true intentions.

A lot of people are concerned, as I am, about the Americans, but if

you see what has happened in the first 3 months of this year, in

January and February and March of this year, the insurgents, the

terrorists have been able to successfully kill 112 U.S. forces.

However, during that same period of time they have killed 2,720 Iraqi

civilians and security forces. What a huge change from the past.

We need to judge the insurgencies not by what they claim but who they

actually are attacking. This is an

enemy that we cannot surrender to or give ground to. Their objective is

fear. Their method is death. They will never be appeased. If we were to

withdraw early, we would abandon Iraq to violence, but we also would

cause irreparable damage to this country.

It is not about Iraq, it is about defending America. We were attacked

on our soil. The cut-and-run caucus is always there. Surrender is

always their option. They are appeasers. An appeaser is someone who

throws his friend to the alligators hoping they eat him last. No man

lives when freedom fails. The best men rot in filthy jails. Those who

yell, ``appease, appease,'' are hanged by those they tried to please.

My wife and I have been married 46 years. We have 20 kids and

grandchildren, and I say this: We are winning the war on terror, and

winning it in their territory. I ask God to richly bless the

decisionmakers and the troops.