Mr. President, later today, several of our Senate

colleagues and I will have the honor of hosting interim Iraqi President

Jalal Talabani and members of his cabinet in the U.S. Capitol.

President Talabani was elected in April of this year. Since then, we

have seen the Iraqis form their first democratically elected Government

in over half a century. We have also witnessed complex and painstaking

negotiations to draft a permanent Iraqi constitution. That historic

document, that hopeful document, will be put to the people October 15,

which is one short month away.

The draft Iraqi constitution is a solid foundation for a democratic

Iraq. It establishes a true democracy, a democratic system in which the

voice of all Iraqis will be heard, human rights will be protected, the

rule of law will be respected, and women will be full and equal

political partners. It is a product of deliberate negotiations that

included letters from all of Iraq's ethnic and religious groups. The

process required enormous patience and flexibility--in other words, the

tools of the democratic process--and it required great courage.

In the face of constant terrorist threats and violence, the Iraqi

people showed once again their determination to secure their rights and

their future as a free and democratic nation. Garnering support for the

new constitution is now one of President Talabani's most pressing

tasks. In our meeting today, I will urge President Talabani to continue

his efforts to reach out to all segments of Iraq's diverse population.

It is vital that Iraqis of all walks of life participate in this

referendum next month.

It is also vital that the Sunni population rally behind this

constitution and the framework of democracy and the governance it

establishes. The Sunnis have raised concerns about federalism, about

the role of Sharia law, and the allocation of oil revenues. These are

all important issues that concern all of us as well.

I look forward to hearing President Talabani's response in our

discussions today. I also look forward to learning more from the

President about conditions on the ground, his views on the security

situation, the training and equipping of Iraqi security forces, and the

pace of economic reconstruction and revitalization. I will report back

to this body either later today or tomorrow what I learned.

In the meantime, I urge my Senate colleagues to continue to support

the democratic aspirations of the Iraqi

people in their efforts to secure their liberty and to fulfill their

democratic potential. This is an extraordinary opportunity to change

the course of history and bring peace and stability to the heart of the

Middle East. The challenge is great, but we must persevere. America's

security will depend on it. We cannot allow the terrorists to achieve

their twisted aims and we cannot allow Iraq to fall into chaos or

sectarian violence or return to those days of brutal tyranny and

support for the terrorists.

By the same token, Iraqis must continue to persevere as well. They

must defeat the terrorists. They must deny them sanctuary in their

communities. They must reject their heinous philosophy of murder.

Freedom for Iraq is essential for freedom at home, and that is why we

must continue to stand alongside our Iraqi partners. Over time, we will

step aside as they assume complete responsibility for their security

and for their future.