Mr. President, today marks a proud and momentous day in

Iraq's history. Today, on December 15,

2005, 15 million registered voters will go to the polls to choose their

first permanently elected government in modern Iraqi history. Along

with them, Iraqis from all around the world will cast their votes for

freedom, for Iraq's future--including Iraqi Kurds in my home town of

Nashville, Tennessee.

As it so happens, Nashville is home to the largest Kurdish population

in the United States of approximately 8,000 Iraqi expats. This past

January, over 3,000 of our Kurdish neighbors voted in the historic

January 30 elections which put Iraq on the road to independent,

democratic self-rule. Tennessee election organizers predict that the

turnout for today's vote will be double that number.

Iraqis from all around the region are converging on Nashville to cast

their votes in solidarity with their brothers and sisters of their

native land.

Susan Dakak, whose family moved from Baghdad to Tennessee 27 years

ago, tells the Chattanooga Times Free Press, ``This is a dream come

true. I never thought in my life that Iraq would get to where it is

politically.''

Susan and her husband, Janan, plan to travel from Knoxville to

Nashville, and they plan to bring their 9-year-old son with them to

witness the personal and historic moment of casting their ballots as

free citizens. And as Susan understands, her vote is not just for her

birth country, but for her adopted country, as well.

Susan and Janan's votes, along with the millions of Iraqis voting

today, are critical to helping defeat the terrorists and vanquishing

their violent aspirations.

In the short run, today's broad participation will further isolate

the terrorists and constructively engage Iraqis across ethnic and

sectarian lines. And in the long run, a peaceful, united, stable and

secure democracy in the heart of the Middle East will expose the

brittle and intolerable tyranny of the terrorist enemy. And it is

precisely this outcome that our terrorist enemies fear.

Early in the conflict, a letter from Al Zarqawi was intercepted by

coalition forces. In it, he wrote that a free and prosperous Iraq would

reject his vision of a medieval, fundamentalist state. He recognized

that if Iraqis became accustomed to self-determination and self-rule,

they would refuse to submit to a tyrant and they would reject his

extreme interpretation of Islam.

Furthermore, Iraq would become a model for the entire Middle East

region, driving out extremism and heralding in moderation and peace. Al

Zarqawi understands the power of freedom. That is why he is bent on its

destruction. But as this remarkable year of steady progress has proven,

he cannot and will not succeed. The desire of freedom is too strong and

its logic is too irreducible.

Democracy is on the march and today 15 million Iraqis are heading to

the polls. Once again, they are showing the world their extraordinary

courage and determination to join the modern, free world.

America pledges to stand with the Iraqi people in that worthy effort

as they strive to secure the blessings of liberty.

As Tahir Hussain, president of the Nashville Kurdish Forum, told a

Tennessee paper on this week: