Mr. President, I will be speaking as the designee of

Senator Reid, the Democratic leader.

I rise to speak to the resolution congratulating the people of Iraq

for their historic elections which took place on January 30.

The Iraqi elections were an important step forward and a tribute to

the courage of the Iraqi people. It was actually incredible to see them

go to the polls literally as they heard explosions in the streets. The

images that we saw were quite moving.

The election is only the first step in a long road filled with

potentially lethal potholes, and the next months are going to be very

critical.

If the elections are to be a true turning point in the history of

Iraq, then it is critical, and I believe the administration fully

understands, that the administration act with the urgency that is

needed in several key areas to sustain this very positive momentum.

In my view, the first priority is to build Iraqi capacity. The

election, hopefully, strengthened the political legitimacy of the Iraqi

government, but it did nothing to build its governing capacity.

The Iraqi government is no more capable today than it was the day

before the elections of providing law and order, defeating the

insurgents, or delivering basic services like water, gasoline, and

electricity.

We have squandered 2 years developing these capabilities, and now it

is time to move into high gear, especially in training Iraqi forces

that are able to operate independently and effectively. Our ability to

draw down responsibly in Iraq depends on that happening.

Second, we must promote political power sharing. Because many Sunni

Arabs stayed home or, quite frankly, were scared away, understandably I

might add, from the polls, they may feel even more alienated and

continue to support the insurgency.

I am encouraged by conciliatory statements by some Sunni-affiliated

organizations that suggest they are willing to work with the new

government in drafting Iraq's permanent constitution. We all should

remember this election was primarily about electing people who are

going to be the people who write the constitution. In a sense, it is a

little bit like our Constitutional Convention that took place in

Philadelphia. These folks are going to write

a constitution, then they are going to present it to the Iraqi people

essentially in a referendum at the end of this year, next fall. If the

Sunni Arabs are not in on the deal, it is not likely to be accepted.

We must use our influence with the Shi'a and the Kurds to reach out

to those who were left out, that is the Sunni Arabs, who are willing to

participate in the writing of that constitution. They also have to be

well represented in the cabinet of this transitional government.

Finally, just as the international community appointed a first-rate

representative to the independent Iraqi election commission, so, too,

should it consider similar assistance as Iraqis begin to grapple with

the complexities of drafting a constitution.

Thirdly, we have to make Iraq the world's problem, not just our own.

Secretary Rice said before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee ``the

time for diplomacy is now.'' The proof will be the administration's

efforts and success in getting more help to train Iraqi security forces

and to build Iraq's infrastructure. The administration has to make a

diplomatic full court press.

Our allies claim to be concerned about the plight of the Iraqi

people. Well, now is their chance to prove it. The Europeans have to

get over it. George Bush has been elected for the next 4 years. The

fact is, they must get involved and stop shirking their responsibility.

We also must help the Iraqi government develop positive relations with

its neighbors and regional states. Our Presidential elections are over,

the American people have spoken, and it is time for our allies to get

over their past differences with the Bush administration and act in

their own self-interest to promote a stable, unified, representative

Iraq.

A week ago, several of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle had

the chance to visit with President Chirac. I think it is fair to say we

sensed a new willingness to work with us if France is given a seat at

the table.

Similarly, Chancellor Schroeder, during Secretary Rice's visit last

week, offered additional German assistance to train Iraqi security

forces, build Iraqi ministries, and support Iraqi civil institutions.

We must not squander yet another opportunity to bring our key allies

into the effort.

Last April, I called for the creation of a board of directors--a

contact group--consisting of the major powers, the Iraqi government,

and key regional countries to support Iraq's transition. It would meet

on a monthly basis to coordinate diplomatic, political, economic, and

security support for Iraq.

I urge the administration to reconsider creating a contact group. The

President could use his forthcoming visit to Europe to launch the

effort.

A broader group which includes other nations on the U.N. Security

Council, the G-8, and the multinational force can meet on a regular,

but more infrequent basis to discuss ways to support the contact

group's efforts.

Fourth, we must show reconstruction results. More than a year ago,

the administration told Congress it urgently needed $18.4 billion for

Iraq's reconstruction.

Congress delivered but the administration has not: Less than 20

percent of that money has been spent. Electricity production in Iraq

has fallen to below the level it was under Saddam. Lines for gasoline

stretch for miles. Oil production is lagging behind targets.

The administration must develop a plan to spend the money

efficiently, with clear benchmarks. We should emphasize small-scale,

Iraqi-run projects that deliver quick benefits to the Iraqi people--at

least 40 percent of whom are unemployed and on giving our military

commanders more flexibility to spend money directly on reconstruction.

Finally, I know that I do not need to remind my colleagues that we

must support our military.

Our troops in Iraq must be equipped and trained for the mission in

Iraq. The troop rotation schedule must not degrade readiness or

diminish retention.

Above all, the administration must do what it has consistently failed

to do in Iraq: Level with the American people.

A week ago Sunday was a good day for democracy, but there are many

hard days and more sacrifice ahead. The President must make that clear

if he is to sustain the support of the American people.