Mr. President, it has been 1 week since 8 million Iraqis

cast their historic vote for freedom. Already a new sense of optimism

is infusing the Iraqi people. I refer my colleagues to a story in the

Washington Post this morning on this rising tide of civic pride.

A young pharmacy owner tells the paper:

A Baghdad bakery store manager said that he, too:

The Post reports car stereos and storefront speakers proudly blare

the anthem, ``My Homeland,'' which was banned by Saddam Hussein.

Neighbors have more trust for one another after years and years of

forced fear and suspicion.

Most encouragingly, Iraqi police officers and national guardsmen are

getting better tips and better information on the terrorist insurgents

who are widely regarded by the Iraqi people as criminals.

History is not going to soon forget that extraordinary sight of 8

million Iraqis risking their lives for freedom. Amidst those terrorist

threats and bomb blasts, Iraqi voters streamed to over 5,000 polling

stations across the country to cast their ballots. Families brought

their young sons and daughters so they, too, could be witnesses to

history.

We also cannot forget the Iraqis who voted in over a dozen countries

besides Iraq, including the United States. In fact, in my own hometown

of Nashville, TN, we saw thousands of Iraqis voting in their first

election in years. Election officials say they will have the total vote

count by Thursday of this week. Whatever the outcome, January 30, 2005,

marked the beginning of a new era in Iraq and the beginning of changes

that will reverberate throughout the region.

In the words of the President: The world heard ``the voice of freedom

from the center of the Middle East.''

As we know, many Sunnis in the Baghdad region did not vote out of

fear--probably it was more a mistaken belief that their actions would

in some way delegitimize the electoral process.

Over the last several days we have heard encouraging reports that

Sunni leaders want to play an active role in the drafting of the

constitution; that they want to be a part of the process and not

separate from it, not isolated from it. Equally inspiring is the news

that Shiite leaders are reaching out to the Sunnis and other

minorities, reaching out to include them in the process. They, too,

want the Sunni Iraqis to be part of that constitutional process, a part

of the new, free, and democratic Iraq.

What we saw on the 30th mirrors what many in Iraq told me and my

colleagues who went to Iraq, now several weeks ago. They were right.

Before we went over, and actually after we came back, you would hear

again and again the doubts about the elections. Many watchers were

humbled by the transformative power of these elections, similar to what

we saw in Afghanistan last October.

The effect these elections can have on a people and on a government

and on a nation is so powerful, and we saw it played out recently in

these elections.

We saw it in the Ukraine, we saw it in the Palestinian Authority and,

as I mentioned, in October in Afghanistan and now in Iraq. We hope to

see it in the broader Middle East in the months and years ahead.

Once oppressed by a brutal dictatorship, the Iraqis are inspiring

people all over the world with their courage and determination. They

now stand as a great, bright hope in a land that was too long shrouded

by tyranny and by violence.

We still have a long road and a hard road ahead. We all recognize

that. No one should expect the violence to end, but the election and

its ripple effects confirm that the Iraqi people are on the right path;

and it renews our confidence in the human desire for liberty and for

self-determination.

The United States joins the President in his praise of the Iraqi

people by the resolution we are about to pass here in the Senate. In a

few moments, we will pass a resolution that expresses our support for

the Iraqis as they move forward toward a free and full democracy that

respects the rule of law and the rights of all its citizens.

I want to give my personal thanks and thanks on behalf of all our

colleagues to Senators Lugar, Dole, and the Democratic leader, Harry

Reid, for all their leadership on this particular resolution.

The Senate and the American people stand shoulder to shoulder with

the Iraqis as they continue their remarkable journey toward freedom and

democracy. Last Sunday's elections were the first of many momentous

steps to come.

Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.