Mr. President, my distinguished colleague from Colorado

has spoken very eloquently with regard to the elections in Iraq. I

would like to add a few thoughts of my own, for it was truly a

momentous event in the sense that a nation which had not had any

government since 1920 was given the opportunity to begin its course

toward joining the nations of the free world to have some form of

democracy of their own choosing--and I underline that: Of their own

choosing. They thereby take a place in the world with a responsibility

for securing the basic freedoms people worldwide desire.

On Saturday, October 15, 2005, the Iraqi people, once again,

following their historic election in January of this year, took another

significant step forward in Iraq. We saw millions of Iraqis indicate

their willingness to embrace the democratic process by virtue of their

voting. There was a strong turnout nationwide, a significantly higher

turnout than we anticipated in certain areas. This turnout,

particularly in the Sunni regions, is more remarkable because it was

often in the face of insurgent intimidation.

We all observed three important signs of Iraqi progress in the events

of October 15th. First, the electoral process proceeded as planned.

Insurgent efforts to disrupt the elections that were attempted

throughout the summer and right up to the elections simply did not

succeed.

Second, Iraqi Government's outreach to Sunni leaders during the

constitutional drafting process is having an effect. Prime Minister al-

Jafari said, ``The victory for Iraq is that Iraqis are voting.''

Third, the Iraqi security forces provided protection to more than

6,000 polling sites. I cannot overstate the importance of that. The

United States, together with its coalition partners, worked hard for

some 2 years now to establish a military and a police force. I would

say, having followed this very carefully in the Armed Services

Committee, that significant progress has been made in the last 120

days. We have established criteria to assess the quality and the

professional level attained by these individuals, and how best to

integrate them in the overall security framework needed to preserve and

protect the Iraqi people and preserve their sovereignty. Real progress

has been made. The voting day was an example of how they perform. At

the polling sites, security was primarily the responsibility of either

the Iraqi police or the national forces. It was clear and visible that

the Iraqis took the lead in this effort. No security incident appeared

to affect voting. The level of security breaches was far below the high

of some 300 breaches during the January election of this year. I

believe there was less than 20 incidents total that tried to disrupt

the election, but all failed to affect the casting of votes at these

polling places.

We have no confirmed figures on the results yet. We, the world, await

the outcome. Newspapers throughout the world carry reports of the

importance of the election and saluting those who made it possible--not

just the security forces but also the United Nations and other

international organizations which came in and supervised this historic

day. Basically the streets were calm. In some places there were mild

celebrations.

Last month, for example, in Tall Afar in northern Iraq, coalition and

Iraqi forces were engaged with insurgents for control of that city--a

bitter battle. It is interesting that on Saturday the Independent

Election Committee of Iraq estimated that 80 percent of the registered

voters in that community

voted. Therefore we must praise the efforts of the Iraqis, the U.S.

civilian and military personnel, all those of our coalition partners

and those of international organizations for planning and executing an

electoral referendum in such a challenging environment. The United

Nations chief electoral adviser in Iraq said:

The Vice Chairman of the International Mission for Iraqi Elections, a

coalition of electoral monitoring bodies, praised the referendum for

its legal framework, planning, and logistics. Now the world will await

the final result, due hopefully later this week. The Independent

Electoral Commission in Iraq is supervising this process and will

announce an official tally after votes are counted at a central

location overseen by the United Nations election advisory team to

ensure that international standards are being met.

There are, no doubt, difficult days remaining ahead. Generals Abizaid

and Casey told the Congress, the American people, and indeed the whole

world, just that in appearances throughout the United States last

month. Both men were confident that we are moving in the right

direction. We saw that progress this Saturday and we salute them for

their leadership and their participation and their responsibility in

achieving the results that came about on Saturday.

If the constitution is ratified, Iraqis will vote again on December

15. This time they will vote for a permanent government to take office

on December 31. That leaves 60 days, basically, between now and

December 15. It will be a very unusual period in the history of Iraq,

in that many of those in this current government, the interim

government, will be seeking office in that election. So we have to

exercise a degree of patience as we watch them, as they pursue their

political campaigns at the same time they have official duties to

maintain a government and serve the needs of the people of Iraq--

whether it is the power, whether it is the water, whether it is the

security. All of those things must be maintained during this

interregnum until the election takes place.

Then, following December 15 there is basically a 60-day period as

established under the law that they have adopted. There is a 60-day

period in which that government must replace the existing one and take

the reins of authority and govern Iraq for a period of 4 years--truly a

permanent government.

As this political situation matures, so too will the Iraqi security

forces, and I am confident we will see a continued strong pace to

obtain the needed numbers of trained police, border security, internal

security, national guard, and a standing army to provide that nation

with protection for its sovereignty and internal protection from the

insurgents. With an Iraqi permanent government in place and steady

progress in these security forces, I see--and I want to say with great

caution--an opportunity, following the first of the year, to begin to

review our present force structure and to consider such options as will

hopefully be available to lessen the size of our overall troop

presence.

Watching Iraqis vote, we as Americans should be especially proud of

the contributions of those men and women who proudly wear the uniform

of the United States. When I speak with them in Iraq, as I did weeks go

on my sixth trip, and in Afghanistan, they know the importance of what

they are doing.

I would like to underline that. Individually, they know and

understand the importance of the mission which they, as members of the

all-volunteer force of our military, have undertaken. Together with the

commitments in support of their families back home, they are performing

brilliantly in Iraq, Afghanistan, and all across the world, protecting

the security of this Nation and the security of our principal allies.

We will continue to demand from these people as we always have, but

they are like generations before them, answering a call to duty to

defend the values and freedoms we cherish. We wish them well. We wish

the blessings of the Almighty on them and their families. We have taken

heavy casualties in this conflict, both in terms of lost lives and

wounded. Not a day goes by that those who are privileged to serve in

this Chamber do not have that foremost in their minds, as do most

Americans.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.