Mr. President, we are now less than a month removed from

the successful Iraqi referendum that was approved by more than 75

percent of Iraqis. This vote marked a new dawn in the Arab world, a

democratically created constitution written by Iraqis and approved by

the general electorate made up of Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. This is

quite a change from the decades in which a militant dictator ruled over

Iraq, with the threat of death hanging over the people for any harsh

word directed toward their central government. It is truly a new day in

Iraq and a new time.

Of course, some would rather ignore the strides that the Iraqi people

have taken. They would rather focus on grim milestones that neither

reflect the true sacrifice that has been made nor give a clear

indication of how far the Iraqis have come to independence. The men and

women of our Armed Forces have created an environment in Iraq that has

given Iraqis a chance for democracy.

This chance is born from the blood, sweat, and tears of our

servicemen and women. They deserve our gratitude and honor.

Friday marks Veterans Day and it is fitting that every year we take

time to pause and reflect on those who have served in the military to

protect our way of life and advance freedom around the globe. While we

celebrate this year, we do so with heavy hearts knowing that there are

many future war veterans who are currently serving in the theater

abroad. As they have done in the past, our armed forces have taken up

the challenge yet again to defend our freedoms from violent extremists

to ensure that future generations of Americans can continue to prosper.

Many of these war veterans have already served previous tours in Iraq,

and my thoughts and prayers go out for another safe return home.

Many thousands of troops who are engaged in Iraq are Coloradoans. For

example, the 10th Combat Support Hospital that left Fort Carson for

Iraq in October. This medical unit is being deployed not only to treat

our injured servicemen and women, but also any civilian that is brought

in to their trauma unit regardless of affiliation. I want to take a

minute to pause and reflect on that. Our trained medical doctors and

technicians will be using their skills to save the lives of not only

Coalition Forces, but anyone who is brought in--including insurgents.

They might be saving the very lives of those that would do great harm

to our soldiers. These are the types of actions that show what kind of

men and women serve in the armed forces. These are the types of actions

that show what freedom and democracy can bring to a region long devoid

of it.

The individuals in our armed forces continue to shine throughout the

country with remarkable levels of service. Individuals like Col. James

West of Palisade, CO. Colonel West recently received a Bronze Star

after distinguishing himself during two consecutive tours of duty in

Iraq. He served as a Senior Program Manager in the Project and

Contracting Office in Baghdad, Iraq from December 2004 to September of

this year. Because of the critical nature of his position and the need

to maintain the lines of communication and trust he developed with the

Iraqi Oil Ministry and the primary Iraqi owned operating companies,

Colonel West volunteered himself for two consecutive tours of duty.

During this time, his leadership in the field provided the foundation

necessary to achieve the goal of rebuilding the Iraqi Oil production

capacity to pre-war levels. The Department of Defense and the Air Force

believe that his professionalism and devotion to duty merit special

recognition. I honor him for his service to our country and

congratulate him on his well-deserved Bronze Star.

More than just being engaged in fighting the radical insurgents who

have polluted the country, our men and women like Colonel West are

risking their lives to reach out to the Iraqi people to show them the

heart that is behind the uniform. From the Army engineers throughout

the country helping to rebuild the infrastructure, to ordinance

disposal units helping to cleanse farmland from explosives left from

decades of neglect, our troops continue to make a positive difference

in the lives of Iraqis.

It is important to put our military's efforts into the proper

perspective. The enormous progress that has been made in Iraq is the

real story.

It was only 2 1/2 years ago that the Hussein regime was in power

terrorizing large portions of the Iraqi population. And now just 9

months after they elected their own leaders for the first time, the

Iraqi people have approved a historical referendum by an overwhelming

majority. These are the milestones we should be celebrating--the ones

that could only be achieved through the sacrifices of our soldiers,

sailors, airmen, and marines.

This Friday marks Veterans Day. Let us not forget our future war

veterans who are gallantly serving the cause of freedom abroad. And let

us remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice to help bring

democracy to Iraq.

I yield the floor.