Mr. President, on October 15, one week from tomorrow, the

Iraqi people will cast their votes on a new, permanent Iraqi

constitution, a social compact, which if ratified, will be unique in

the history of the Arab Middle East.

Since the stunning January 30 elections, Iraqi leaders have worked

tirelessly to draft this historic document. Next Saturday, the Iraqi

people will have the chance to formally express their support for this

historic document.

Throughout the summer, we witnessed the complex and painstaking

nature of the constitution drafting process. These negotiations

included leaders from all of Iraq's ethnic and religious groups. The

product is a result of patience, flexibility, and compromise.

As the President said yesterday in his televised speech,

Indeed.

And they have made this progress under a hail of constant threats and

violence from terrorist enemies within and without their borders.

American service men and women have sacrificed greatly to advance

America's interests in Iraq, but many more Iraqis have been killed and

injured in the pursuit of a free and democratic Iraq.

The draft permanent constitution lays a solid foundation for a stable

and democratic Iraq in the heart of the Middle East. It establishes a

true democratic system. The voice of all Iraqis will be heard. Human

rights will be protected. The rule of law will be respected. And women

will be full and equal participants.

It is critical that Iraqis from all walks of life and all segments of

Iraq's diverse population participate in next week's referendum.

It is also important for Iraq's Sunni population to support this

document and the democratic system of government that it establishes.

Sunni leaders have expressed strong reservations about several

aspects of the constitution in recent weeks. Many will vote no; that is

their right.

However, I believe that they also recognize the importance of

participating in the referendum. Only through participation and

integration into Iraq's new democratic system can Iraq's ethnic and

religious groups ensure that their rights are secured and their

interests are protected. They learned this hard lesson after avoiding

the January vote. They will not make the same mistake again.

When several of my Senate colleagues and I met with Interim President

Jalal Talabani last month, I was convinced that the Iraqi people

recognize the magnitude of this moment.

And I am confident that when the time comes next week, they will once

again show their courage and determination.

The enemy will try to intimidate and threaten them. But the Iraqi

people are strong.

Eight and one-half million voters defied the killers last January,

and Iraqis continue to volunteer for the Iraqi security forces, ready

and willing to defend their new democracy. They do so

despite the fact that security forces are being targeted. They do so

because they believe in the vision of a free and democratic Iraq.

I am confident that the Iraqi people will demonstrate this same

fortitude in the referendum next Saturday.

And for those who vote against the constitution, they will have the

chance to express themselves again in December when the Iraqis go to

the polls to elect a permanent government.

In the meantime, the Iraqis also must undertake another momentous

task.

On October 19, the Iraqi Special Tribunal will begin the trial of

Saddam Hussein and some of his closest associates. The opening portion

of the trial will focus on the 1982 killings of 143 Shiites in the

village north of Baghdad. Saddam will also face charges of human rights

abuses, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

In particular, Saddam Hussein will be required to finally answer for

his use of chemical weapons against the civilian Kurdish population of

Hallabja in 1988, and the violent suppression of mass uprisings

following the Gulf War in 1991.

It will be a riveting sight to see the justice system in the hands of

the Iraqi people. And to watch as they face down the man and his

minions responsible for so many hideous and barbaric crimes.

I am confident that the Iraqi people will give their former

oppressors a fair trial and that the guilty will be brought to justice.

Step by step, the Iraqi people are on the path to democracy. And with

each step, the terrorists are dealt a devastating blow, and freedom

shows once again its power to inspire and prevail.

The Senate stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the Iraqi people as they

fulfill their democratic destiny. They deserve our deepest and most

sincere support.

I look forward to watching with hope and admiration as they take to

the polling booths once again to secure their future as a free and

prosperous nation in the heart of the Middle East.