Mr. President, I rise this morning to reflect for a

moment on the apparent successful events in Iraq this weekend and also

to look forward to more successful events in the months ahead. It

appears the people of Iraq--10 million of them--turned out on Saturday

to ratify a constitution under which elections will take place on

December 15 of this year. I believe now is an appropriate time for us

to recognize, in the process of liberating the people of Iraq, the

great accomplishments our brave young men and women have made to allow

that process to take place.

About 2\1/2\ years ago, America went into Iraq with three stated

goals. One was to depose Saddam Hussein. That was done. He goes on

trial tomorrow, to be tried by his own people, in his own court, by his

own judges. Second, we went in to rid the nation of weapons that could

hurt others and stabilize the country so we could accomplish the third

goal, which is to allow the people of Iraq to self-determine their

future, as we in America did some 229 years ago.

The first goal, deposing Hussein, was accomplished, and he goes on

trial. The second goal of stabilizing the country has, in fact, been

accomplished. It has been accomplished in a unique way and was ratified

by the very election that took place on Saturday, because on Saturday

the Iraqi military protected the Iraqi polling places to allow the

Iraqis to have an election that had very little disruption or violence

by the insurgents. Now we move toward December 15 and the election of a

permanent assembly for the people of Iraq to govern themselves.

On the first day of February of this year, I visited Baghdad, shortly

after the elections that were held on January 31. I saw on that day the

pride of Iraqis holding up their index finger, stained with blue ink,

with smiles on their faces and self-satisfaction from having voted,

which they did. We saw at that election where a number of the Sunnis

stayed home, where most of the Shiites and the Kurds voted, and there

were about 8 million votes.

Just 8 months later, I watched this morning on TV and saw index

fingers raised with ink stains to evidence the vote that had taken

place, but those ink stains were not just on the fingers of Shiites and

Kurds, they were on the fingers of Sunnis as well because, as was said

after the first election in Iraq in January, the Sunnis learned that in

a democracy, if you do not vote, you do not count. Although their votes

may have been different yesterday, it laid the groundwork for this

country to self-determine its future in peace, for its three groups

within their country to join together, to form a government, to iron

out their differences peacefully, and to grow in the Middle East what

many thought was never possible, and that is an Arab nation self-

determining its future, with its people electing its representatives,

living and growing in peace and harmony with its neighbors.

There have been a lot of critics of our efforts in Iraq. There have

been some who have said the war was wrong and others who have said we

ought to come home, when, in fact, they have misjudged and

mischaracterized the entire event. For us to come home is to lose the

war. For us to stay is for liberty and peace and freedom to take root,

to grow, and to prosper, and for an area of the world that for all time

has been in turmoil to have the chance in future time to be in peace.

That is not just good for the Middle East. That is not just good for

the Iraqis. That is good for America. That is good for the nations of

the world. That is good for the future peace of this great Nation we

call the United States of America, for it was terrorism that drug us

into the Middle East. It is terrorism, through insurgents, that we

fight today in Iraq. And it is terrorism that will lose, not in the end

to bullets but to votes, with a people free to self-determine their

future.

The people in Iraq began that process on January 31 and reaffirmed

that process this past Saturday. I am confident and looking forward to

the future, that on December 15 they will reaffirm that process again

by holding free elections, guarded--and peacefully guarded--by their

own trained troops, who will be the security force that in the future

replaces our men and women, and that they will secure the country of

Iraq not just for one election, not just for one day, but for the

future.

It has been said that victory in Iraq is a process and not an event.

I believe that is an appropriate statement. We have gone through a

process that deposed an evil dictator, stabilized a violent nation,

allowed free elections to take place, for a constitution to be drawn,

for elections for its ratification to take place, and now we are on the

doorstep of the election of those permanent representatives who will

self-determine the future of the nation of Iraq. In this process, known

as freedom, America has contributed much.

Our sons and daughters have been there steadfastly fighting the

insurgents, securing the Iraqi people, and giving the flame of liberty

and freedom a chance to grow and glow. On Saturday that process

apparently took place again. I look forward to it taking place on

December 15. I thank God for the brave men and women of the U.S. Armed

Forces and the resilience of our people as, once again, we are the

leading light for freedom, peace, hope, and liberty not just in our own

country but around the world.