Mr. President, first I ask unanimous consent to speak as

in morning business.

Mr. President, let me acknowledge my colleague from the

State of South Dakota, who is unique in this Chamber. Those who voted

on the question of whether America should go to war in Iraq were

certainly representing our constituents in thinking of the American

people in that historic and tremendous decision. My colleague from

South Dakota, Tim Johnson, was the only Member of the Senate who

understood that decision would affect his family directly. I am glad

your son is home safely. I am glad he is now living in Illinois. I hope

he is still enjoying that experience and happy about his recent

marriage to a Lithuanian-American woman, and I wish them the very best.

For those who ask the question, and it has been asked by some, How

can Members of Congress appreciate what a war means if none of their

children are serving, my colleague, Tim Johnson from South Dakota

certainly understood that personally as others have in the past.

What a great triumph yesterday. There was a possibility that all the

violence in Iraq would discourage people from voting. One can

understand that when they are lobbing mortar shells in the green zone,

the protected zone in Baghdad where American soldiers a couple weeks

ago were eating a meal. One can understand the vulnerability of life in

Iraq.

Each citizen had to make a decision yesterday in Iraq, whether to

risk their life to vote. It appears millions were prepared to do so. As

Senator Lott of Mississippi said earlier, after they voted, they dipped

their finger into this indelible ink, an indication they had already

voted so there was no duplication voting, and that ink was on their

hands today, testimony, as well, for the insurgents that these Iraqis

had defied the insurgency to cast a vote for their future.

It was a great triumph, a triumph of human spirit, and a triumph for

the Iraqi people, all that they have been through, to finally have this

moment to have an election. A great deal has to be said for the men and

women of our American military who made it possible. They risked their

lives again yesterday, as they do every day in Iraq, to try to bring

this to a peaceful end. They were successful yesterday in creating the

zone of safety so that the Iraqi people could be part of this

triumphant moment in their history.

I thought about that triumphant moment as I reflected on information

I received over the weekend about two Marine Corps corporals from

Illinois who died on January 26 of last week in the deadliest day of

the war for the United States. That was the day when the Marine Corps

helicopter crashed and 31 Marines lost their lives. Among those 31

Marines were Hector Ramos of Aurora and Nathaniel Moore of Champaign,

young men in their twenties who volunteered to serve this country, who

with great pride joined the Marine Corps, went through the rigorous

training, and went off to risk their lives for America. That story has

been told and retold thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of

thousands of times, but we do not appreciate how important that

decision is by each of the men and women in the military until a

tragedy occurs, as it did with the crash of this helicopter a few days

ago.

I read the stories in the paper about the two young men. They were

excellent people. I am sorry I did not get to know them. I dropped

notes to their families expressing my sorrow about their loss, and I am

sure everyone in America will join in expressing sorrow for the loss of

some 1,400 now, American soldiers, who have made the supreme sacrifice

in this war in Iraq.

What it leads to is this: If yesterday was a turning point in Iraq

for their self-governance, the question I am prepared to ask is, Was

yesterday a turning point in terms of Iraq's security in its future? We

have been trying for almost 2 years to train Iraqis to take

responsibility for guarding their own country, and we have had a

terrible time of it. The administration gives us inflated numbers,

120,000 Iraqis in their army and security force, and yet other military

experts say no, only 4,000 will be willing to stand and fight. Many

more have gone through the training, but they are not willing to defend

their country.

So what happens? One-hundred fifty thousand Americans risk their

lives just like the marines who went down in that helicopter last week

and the others who have died since.

My question to this administration in the White House here, as well

as the new government in Baghdad, is this: Now that you have reached

this new point in your history of self-governance, of the

responsibility of controlling your own future and your own fate, will

you now step up and meet with our President and our leaders and discuss

the day and how soon it will come when Iraq can defend itself? How soon

can we expect Iraqis, trained, well-equipped, to stand in and take the

place of American soldiers to come home?

Illinois is not unlike a lot of other States. Seventy percent of our

National Guard have been activated or have already served in Iraq. I

have attended sendoffs and the welcome-homes. They are emotional times.

I went a few weeks ago to Litchfield, IL, and saw 80 of our National

Guardsmen who were activated in an infantry unit off for 5 months

training in Ft. Stewart, GA, and for a 12-month deployment in Iraq.

Emotions ran high in the Litchfield High School gymnasium that Saturday

afternoon as the troops stood at attention and the families faced them

and we all wished them the very best and told them they would be in our

prayers, as they should be.

I would like to be able to say to the families who are waiting

anxiously back in the United States that the election yesterday meant

something. It meant that we have reached a turning point. It meant that

Iraq is now going to take responsibility for its own future. We have

been talking about it for a long time, for over a year and a half, and

have little to show for it. Now is the time for concrete results, for

this administration to meet with the new Government of Iraq and to

start moving in a specific pattern, in a definable

schedule, toward a real goal of starting to bring American troops home.

When I hear that, then I will be ready to stand up and applaud what

happened yesterday; not just for the courage of the voters but the

courage and leadership of the new Government in Iraq, that they will

stand up for their people so that our soldiers can come home safely,

which is what we all pray for.

That is what I took from yesterday's election, a great triumph for

the Iraqi people. Tragedies that we have seen involving Americans, I

hope, will diminish now. This administration has to move us beyond the

promise to the reality of the Iraqis defending themselves.