Mr. President, this morning I have the honor of meeting

with Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari. The Prime Minister is in

the United States to meet with President Bush and other Washington

leaders to discuss the next steps in Iraq's transition to a free and

democratic society. I have not yet met the Prime Minister. I look

forward to doing so in the next couple of hours.

The Prime Minister deserves great praise for his leadership. He has

worked hard as Prime Minister to reach out across ethnic and religious

lines. Because of his efforts, Iraq is led by a transitional government

that includes ministers from each of Iraq's ethnic and religious

groups.

The Prime Minister's steady leadership has been inspiring. Next

Tuesday, 5 days from now, June 28, will mark the 1-year anniversary of

the transfer of sovereignty from the Coalition Provisional Authority to

a sovereign Iraqi Government. Since then, Iraq has fought the

insurgency with determination as it has undergone truly remarkable

changes. Perhaps none was more remarkable than the elections on January

31. On that day, 8 million Iraqis cast their votes for the first

democratically elected national assembly in more than 50 years. They

came on foot, they came by car and some even came by wagon. They defied

all manner of terrorist threat and terrorist intimidation.

It was truly extraordinary. No one who saw the images of those brave

citizens emerging from the polling stations, holding aloft those

stained, blue-inked fingers, could help but be moved and inspired.

While the task of forming

a government has taken much longer than any of us would have hoped, the

Iraqi people now turn to the task of drafting a constitution and laying

the groundwork for a new round of elections at this year's end.

Last week, leaders of the 55-member committee charged with drafting

the new constitution reached a compromise with the Sunni Arab groups.

Together, they decided on the number of Sunni representatives to serve

on that committee. This was a major step forward and a significant

effort on the part of the majority to reach out to the Sunni

leadership. It was also significant because of the impact it could have

on the ground.

As we have seen political progress slow, we have watched

unfortunately the violence increase. Building and sustaining momentum

in the political process is clearly linked to undermining the

terrorists and their support. During their low turnout in the January

elections and the current spate of violence, the Sunnis realized they

cannot achieve their aims by standing outside the process or by failing

to face down the insurgents.

Like all Iraqis, they have a tremendous stake in the success of Iraq

becoming a peaceful and prosperous democracy. They know the best way to

ensure the outcome and to ensure their rightful place is to work

constructively with their fellow Iraqis. I am heartened by the efforts

of the Shi'a and Kurd leaders to include the Sunnis in the political

process.

These are difficult times, and they require thoughtful leadership.

The efforts of all parties to reach out and be inclusive deserves our

praise and our steadfast support, as do the brave Iraqis who have

stepped forward to defend and protect their country. The Iraqi forces

have suffered more deaths and casualties than coalition forces. Despite

repeated direct attacks on their ranks, every day thousands of young

Iraqis continue to volunteer for service. The Defense Department

reports that, as of June 8, more than 160,000 Iraqi security forces

have been trained and equipped.

Yes, many of them have much experience to gain and much more to learn

before they will be able to act independently, but this will take time

as we strive to get 270,000 Iraqis in uniform by July 2006.

Progress is being made. Two or three months ago, I had the

opportunity to travel to Jordan and visited one of the Iraqi-Jordanian

police training academies. They are on the ground. One can see the

progress that is being made in Iraq and with the Iraqi police recruits.

One can see their commitment to seeing the job through.

It is all a difficult task, and it is going to take a lot of

determination, but I am confident the Iraqi forces will continue to

improve and continue to demonstrate their bravery in the days ahead.

As Iraqis assume a greater responsibility for their own defense, the

pace of Iraq's reconstruction should also gain speed. After decades of

corruption and mismanagement by Saddam's regime, many of Iraq's towns

and cities were in shambles, sewage in the streets, tumbled-down

schools, unreliable electricity and unreliable and unpotable water.

Coalition forces have been working hard to help the Iraqis rebuild and

retool.

We are also helping the Iraqis strengthen the rule of law, a civil

society, and private enterprise. A strong economy means more

opportunities, better jobs, more jobs and a brighter future. Opinion

polls show a majority of Iraqis remain optimistic about their economic

future despite ongoing security concerns. It is all hard work, and it

is made much harder by foreign interference.

The State Department reports that while Syria has taken some steps to

improve border security, supporters of the terrorists continue to use

Syrian territory as a staging ground. On the Iranian front, Secretary

of Defense Rumsfeld and CIA Director Goss report that Iran has sent

money and fighters to proteges in Iraq. The fact is, some of Iraq's

neighbors fear a large, prosperous democracy on their borders. They

fear that a democratic Iraq will export freedom and liberty to their

lands. But fear will not stop freedom's progress. Iraq will succeed and

will become a beacon of hope throughout the region and throughout the

world.

We have already seen the beginnings in the Cedar Revolution in

Lebanon. Freedom is on the march, and the Iraqi people are leading the

way.

I urge my colleagues in the Senate to continue to offer our steadfast

support. This is an extraordinary opportunity to change the course of

history and bring peace and stability to the heart of the Middle East.

Such steadfastness will not be easy and will not be without cost, but

we must succeed. We cannot allow the terrorists to win, and we cannot

allow Iraq to fall into chaos, sectarian violence or the rule of

extremists. This is going to take a lot of time. It is going to take a

lot of money. It is going to take a lot of patience.

The American people need to understand that we will be in Iraq for

some time to come. It is vital to the Iraqis that we be there. It is

critical to the region that we be there. It is essential to our own

security that we be there. Our time line will be driven by success and

our exit will depend on the security situation. It will depend on

democracy's advance and the wishes of a sovereign Iraq.

It is clear to me that as Iraqis are able to stand up and provide

their own security, without coalition assistance and without foreign

intervention, we should be able to begin withdrawing personnel from

that region.

When I meet with the new Iraqi Prime Minister later this morning, we

will discuss all of these pressing matters. I will let him know America

is fully committed to Iraq's success. I will also tell him we expect

continued progress on security, on reconstruction, and the formation of

a functioning democracy.

In the end, Iraq, the region, and the United States will be more safe

and more secure.

I ask unanimous consent that the time just consumed be counted

against the majority's allocated time prior to the cloture vote.