

millions of Iraqis stood in line and cast their vote. As they came out, we saw those pictures of those ink-stained index fingers, the symbol of the power that is captured in that vote of freedom and democracy.

The Iraqi people yesterday showed their bravery, their boldness, their courage, and their heart. They showed the world that Iraqis, like all people, do yearn to be free. Baghdad's mayor was so overcome with emotion that he told one news agency:

I cannot describe what I am seeing. It is incredible. This is a vote for the future, for the children, for the rule of law, for humanity, for love.

This morning, and over the course of yesterday, I received numerous e-mails, letters, and written communication. The following letter from an Iraqi voter describing his elation at participating in this historic moment for his country really captures the essence of what the elections were all about. He writes:

Allow me on this historical opportunity to tell you how happy I am, and all those who I know. It is a great victory for Iraq, the United States and all freedom-loving people in the world. This is the event that children of future generations will read about in history books with great pride and appreciation to all who made it happen.

Today a new Iraq was born. This is the first seed of true democracy and freedom in our country and indeed the whole Arab world. Thanks to all who participated in, contributed to, protected and supported this historical event.

I also will want to applaud President Bush and the American people for their steadfast commitment, support, and encouragement of freedom in Iraq. Peace has not come and is not coming easily. We have suffered tough days and we all know there will be tough days ahead. We know the terrorists are committed to their violent campaign, but they will not succeed.

As we saw yesterday, Iraq is moving forward with the heartfelt support of free peoples all around the world. One of the people who will be instrumental in helping Iraq secure its freedom is our new Secretary of State, Dr. Condoleezza Rice. Last week, this Senate voted overwhelmingly to support her confirmation, and that was a proud and, indeed, historic moment. We are all fortunate to have a leader of her talent and intellect helping Iraq take each momentous step toward democracy.

It was a meaningful and productive week, as I look over the last several days. The Senate also confirmed former RNC Chairman Jim Nicholson to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs, and Michael Leavitt to lead Health and Human Services. Both are talented, gifted, and highly qualified men, and I know we all look forward to working with them.

Great tasks indeed are before us. We have much to accomplish, including, as I mentioned earlier, the confirmation of Judge Alberto Gonzales.

As we think about the week ahead on this Monday, it is appropriate to pause

and take note of yesterday's historic achievement for the Iraqi people and for the cause of democracy. As the President said in his inaugural address:

The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.

Yesterday, we did come one step closer to realizing this great vision. Yesterday in Iraq we saw that liberty can light even the darkest corners and inspire great acts of bravery. We saw the proof of our deepest held principle: That all people do aspire to be free.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for 10 minutes.

The Senator from Mississippi.

PROUD OF OUR NEW SECRETARY OF STATE

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I, too, feel inspired and in fact moved to comment on the elections in Iraq and also some other things that I have witnessed during the last 2 days. I felt very emotional as I watched Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice yesterday morning, during one of several interviews on television.

Specifically, I am speaking of Chris Wallace's interview of our new Secretary of State. It was one of the most impressive interviews I believe I have ever seen in my life. This is obviously a highly talented, qualified, thoughtful, articulate person who has been sworn in to be Secretary of State. I have never seen a more moving interview in my many years in Washington, in fact over 36 years, than I witnessed during the interchange between Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Chris Wallace.

Actually, I found myself to the point of tears as I listened to what she had to say, and how she said it. I was captivated by how she responded not only to the world given the very important position that she holds in answering those questions, but also on a personal basis by representing what is good in America. This is a lady who came from Birmingham, AL, an African-American, who grew up at a time when Birmingham was segregated and it was difficult for her to get the education, the experience, and the opportunities that she needed for life.

She persevered, as did her family, friends, and neighbors, and she has now risen to one of the most important positions in the world that anybody could

have. She will be the face of America to the leaders of all of the rest of the world, and it is one that I believe they, as I, will be impressed with.

I will read one part of what she had to say in that interview. Interviewer Chris Wallace noted that he would play a clip from earlier this week at the White House when Condoleezza Rice was sworn in as Secretary of State and she referred to her relatives from Alabama who were there in the audience, and he asked his viewers to take a look. Secretary Rice said:

They represent generations of Rices and Rays who believed that a day like this might somehow be possible.

And then Wallace continued:

You have gone from a little girl in the segregated South to being the chief representative of this country to the world. What does that say about the United States?

At that point I felt sure that tears would well up in her eyes and she would have difficulty responding, but she kept her composure while she said this:

It says that the United States is a place that is living up to its principles, that has had a struggle to do that. I[t] also said in that, Chris, it was Thomas Jefferson who said that the God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time and, of course, didn't himself personally carry that out perfectly. . . .

It just shows that democracy, if you have the right principles in place, if you have the right institutions in place, it may take a long time, but eventually the aspirations for one society unified despite race and gender and religion can start to come into being.

We still have a lot of work to do in America. I look out and I see that work. But I do believe that in a world where difference is a license to kill, to look across and to see people like me or Al Gonzales or others says that America is trying desperately and, in some sense, succeeding, in living up to those principles.

I thought that was a magnificent testament to her life, what she experienced, what others are dealing with, but also what it means about our country and the hope for a lot of young boys and girls who see Condoleezza Rice in the position she is in and recognize that they can succeed, too, in the American dream.

I continued to watch television, many different networks, and I started seeing the results of the Iraqi elections. It appears that it was a good election with a good turnout. I don't know what the exact turnout percentages are. Reuters reported it as being perhaps as much as 72 percent, I believe. In some parts of the country it was more than that, I would presume, and in others much less than that, but still an incredible turnout. Maybe it will be 60 percent, maybe it will be 58, maybe it will be 62, but the people of Iraq, under the threat of intimidation or death or future abuse, went into those polling places in huge numbers, stuck their finger in that little bottle of dye, and came out and showed it off proudly.

By the way, they are going to have to come to live with their dyed finger the

next couple of days. There will not be any hiding. If you voted in Iraq today, your finger will be stained today and tomorrow, but your life will be changed henceforth.

Maybe we can learn from them. We didn't have a 60- or 70-percent turnout in our election. I don't know exactly what the turnout was, but I am sure it is much less than that in America where we don't vote if the weather is not good or the traffic is too bad. But in Iraq they walked to the polling places, they put their lives on the line, and they were thrilled to be able to be a part of a historic event, of democracy in action, and they came out and danced in the streets. They said: We are very happy. They also said: Thank you, America.

A lot of credit can be passed out. It begins with the people of Iraq for what they did yesterday, to the men and women who are trying to make Iraq safe, their own policemen and national guard, and their own military. But a lot of credit goes to our military men and women who have done a marvelous job on the ground in Iraq. Even yesterday, they were there. They helped provide as much security as they could, but they were not interfering with the voters. They backed away. They left it to the people of Iraq and to their military and police and others.

I cannot give enough credit to the young men and women who have been there and their officers and noncoms, all of them, soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and Coast Guard. Obviously, they have all been a part of this. When I have talked to the young troops we have there, they are proud of what they are doing. They feel patriotic about what they have helped to do there.

Then, yesterday, they saw this begin to bear fruit. It doesn't mean the Iraqi people are free from terrorism. It doesn't mean everything has been done perfectly. It doesn't mean it is going to be perfect from here on. We don't know yet who won their election. It was a very complicated process. They had to figure out who to vote for or what list of people to vote for, and what number to identify. They still have a long way to go in cultivating their democracy. But for me, it was an inspiration. I was thrilled by what I saw, what I witnessed through the media. Not just one network or one station, all the different ones that were there in the country, showing democracy at work.

But also I believe credit has to go to our own Congress and the American people for showing patience and forbearance and giving of their treasure and American blood for a distant place, for people you don't really know. Many wonder, I am sure, sometimes, is it worth it? Why are we there? How long are we going to be there? All those questions come forward. But what struck me again yesterday was how people react to freedom, how people react to democracy, being able to go and cast their vote. It is liberating.

The President was right when he talked about the power of freedom and

democracy and how it is a flame that is igniting a fire all around the world over the last 20 years. We have gone from about 20 democracies in the world to 118 countries all over the world, in every continent, in places where you would not have thought it would be possible: Mongolia, elections in Ukraine, elections by the Palestinians. There is something very special going on here. I do believe it is contagious and that it will continue to grow, and not only the American people but the people of the world will benefit.

The odds of having an attack from people in a country where there is a democracy are much less than those who come from places where there is an oppressive government, dictatorship, or authoritarianism. Democracy is not perfect; it is evolutionary. We know that from what we experienced. But yesterday was a special moment. I hope the American people saw it, felt proud of what they were witnessing and the part we have played in making that day possible.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the future of Social Security. In recent weeks we have heard a lot about the President's intent to establish private accounts under the program. While no details have been shared with Members of Congress regarding his proposal, the limited information we have does indicate that the administration will only push and support a long-term solvency fix if it is married with a plan to divert payroll taxes to individual private accounts.

Beyond the private account issue, it is unclear what the other details of the Bush plan will include. I am willing to work with the President and Members of Congress to improve the long-term outlook of this program, but the American people need to be clear in their understanding of the facts. The fact is, Social Security is not in crisis and private accounts will do nothing to help with the program's solvency. Yes, we do need to think about the future of this program. I am willing to hear the President's thoughts and work with him on this issue, but I will not support any efforts to dismantle a program that has protected millions in this country from poverty, and provided a guaranteed benefit for our most vulnerable citizens in their time of need.

Social Security is the most important social insurance program ever created by this great nation, and it has provided seniors with the assurances they need in old age.

In South Dakota, one in five people count on this program to put food on their table, buy their prescription drugs, and keep the heat running during the long cold winters. The program

protects millions from poverty, and without it, the number of seniors living in poverty would rise from 10 percent to 50 percent. This is the mark of a strong safety net program and we must fight to ensure its longevity.

While in the long-term we do need to find a sound solution to protect the solvency of the Social Security program, one thing must be protected now—the guarantee to retirees that they do not have to worry about living in poverty in old age, no matter what they made during their working years or how long they live. Seniors must be given the security to know to the dime what they will receive under this program, rather than having to worry about the climate on Wall Street.

Since President Bush began his campaign for private accounts under Social Security, he has tried to convince the American people that the program is in crisis. This manufactured crisis is merely fiction and when you begin to look at the real numbers, you learn very quickly that his numbers just do not add up.

The administration has been trying to tell an alarming story in which the program is broke in 2019. Reality tells us that in 2019 we will just begin to dip into the \$3.7 trillion dollar trust fund to pay the Social Security bills and we will be able to draw on that fund for a long time—until 2052 according to the Congressional Budget Office.

At that point in time, seniors will still receive 80 percent of projected benefits, and still more in dollars adjusted for inflation than what beneficiaries get today.

The real fiscal crisis facing our Government today is not in the Social Security program, but rather in the Federal budget, which according to the administration will reach a deficit of \$427 billion dollars in 2005. This is the result of the irresponsible decisions of the administration that has pushed tax cuts for the wealthy during time of war and continued to fight to make those tax cuts permanent. I was alarmed to learn that in fact the entire Social Security shortfall over the next 75 years is about one-fifth the cost of the Bush tax cuts if made permanent. Beyond these problems, the rising costs of our health care programs will continue to threaten our budget stability. This is the real crisis we are facing right now.

At the end of the day, when you look at the numbers and the financial outlook for Social Security, we are in good shape for at least the next 50 years if not longer. When I look at the budget deficit today and a potential crisis 50 years from now, I am more concerned about ensuring that our Government can continue to pay its bills now and restore fiscal sanity to the Federal Government so we can honor our commitments in the near term—for soldiers in Iraq, for insurance coverage for the poor and for prescription drugs for seniors.