

attending a town meeting, I can say with confidence that despite the insurgents' bombs and threats, democracy is on the way.

During our time in Iraq, my Senate colleagues and I were in a meeting with Prime Minister Allawi. In the middle of that meeting, he asked if we would be willing to go around the block or a few hundred yards away at a townhall meeting that he was conducting. We said yes. It was spontaneous, and we did not know what to expect.

We went with him in the middle of our meeting, and it was a meeting he had been holding over the course of the day. We walked into a room about the size of this Chamber, and it was packed. It was packed with more than 150 Sunni sheiks who were from the Sunni triangle area, the area where most of the terrorist activity has been occurring.

We walked into the room, and it was embroiled in activity. It was embroiled in debate. People were scrambling. Sheiks were scrambling for the microphone so they could express themselves. There was controversy, disagreement. It was orderly in the sense that one person talked at a time. This was really democracy at its best. It was spontaneous, not planned by us. The Prime Minister, in meeting with the sheiks, spent most of the day listening very patiently.

The presentations were passionate, and for me it captured the real contrast on that day when we saw free speech and full expression. Some were saying postpone the elections; others were saying, no, don't postpone the elections. This is the first step toward democracy. Others said America has done things perfectly, knowing we were in the room, and others said we should have done this or done that.

The point is, everybody was expressing themselves, and the Prime Minister was sitting before them listening patiently, taking the opportunity to comment. It was a striking contrast to the decades under Saddam where disagreement could lead, and frequently did lead, to torture and, in many cases, as we know, ultimately death.

So progress is being made. The will of the Iraqi people is, for the first time in decades, being heard. These elections will give an element of legitimacy of expression of the Iraqi people that heretofore has not been there to the degree that it should be and that it will be in the future. It is through the ballot box, the power of that ballot box that the Iraqis will begin this journey.

I need to comment again very briefly on a Tennessee angle to these elections because the Tennessee population of Iraqis is quite high and, therefore, Nashville, TN, has been chosen as one of the polling sites so that Iraqis, mainly a Kurdish community that has come to the United States, can express themselves in this election.

It was in 1977 that a professor named Franklin Jones agreed to sponsor the first Kurdish family in Nashville, al-

most 30 years ago. Now Nashville boasts the largest Kurdish community in the United States of America. Referred to by some as "Little Kurdistan," there are 5,000 to 8,000 Kurdish families living in Nashville, and on Sunday, 3,700 Iraqi Americans living in the Nashville region will go out to our Tennessee State fairgrounds where they will cast their vote. It is an out-of-country voting site that has been established. They will be participating in creating this new and free Iraqi government.

The story of Nashville's Kurdish community is a special one. After that first Kurdish family arrived in 1977, more and more Kurds came to Nashville. A number of our community and church organizations focused on the Kurds' plight and helped refugees adjust, settle in, and be assimilated into our wonderful city, Nashville.

During the 1980s, a small Kurdish community began to develop. You ask why. A lot of it is serendipity, but one of the answers you get is the climate in Nashville reminded them of the climate back home.

In 1991, during Desert Storm, a large contingent of Kurds fled to the United States, and many of them joined their brethren in Tennessee. Job opportunities were high, cost of living was low, and Nashville's unparalleled hospitality welcomed them and made them feel safe.

On Sunday, when millions of Iraqis go to the polls to vote for the first time in Iraq, they will be joined by their compatriots in Nashville. And among them, as an aside, will be Samir, the Iraqi-American translator who found Saddam Hussein down in his spider hole.

I am proud that early on the people of Tennessee welcomed Iraqis into their homes, into their communities, and gave them shelter and hope. I am honored the city of Nashville and the State of Tennessee will provide Iraqis across the region with the opportunity to express themselves on January 30.

It is a historic day for them and a historic day for the coalition that has invested so much in the Iraqi people, and a historic day for democracy. We will see young men and women going to the polls expressing themselves. People have been waiting a long time for this day.

In closing, we were all abuzz last week with the activities surrounding the 55th inaugural. It was a wonderful event for those of us who participated here in the Capitol and for those who watched it across America—the glowing lights, the banners. To have that peaceful transfer of the election process be realized is clearly remarkable for us all. But at its core, the inauguration was not for a party and not for a particular person. It was a celebration of the blessing of democracy and the freedoms we enjoy, freedoms I am confident one day will be ever much as common in Iraq as it is in the United States.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transition of morning business until 10:30 a.m., with the first half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee, and the second half of the time under the control of the Senator from Kansas, Mr. BROWNBACK, or his designee.

Who yields time? The Senator from Washington.

KEEPING AMERICA'S PROMISES TO ITS VETERANS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, this morning I rise to speak about one of the issues that is facing our country, an issue we need to understand and live up to, a promise that we made to the young men and women who serve us overseas. Since this election, we have heard a lot about the crises that are facing our country and what our obligation is and the discussions that will occur in the Senate and around the country about those as we move forward.

Next week, we will hear from the President on the State of the Union. I will be listening very carefully to hear if he addresses the issue that I think is clearly one of the most important issues our country needs to address, and that is how we treat the young men and women who are coming home, who have served us in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the globe, and that we have the services available for them to keep the promise we made to them when they went to serve all of us. I am talking about the veterans who have come home to our country throughout our time, who have served us well, who fought for our freedom, who have been there for every one of us, and who are now facing severe shortages of services. I am talking about the promises we made to them for their health care, to make sure they are reintegrated into society in the United States and given what we have promised them when they went to serve all of us.

This morning we woke up to the news of 30-some Marines who have been tragically lost in an accident. Our hearts go out to their families, to their loved ones, and to all who know them, and we owe them and their families a sincere debt of gratitude. It is a reminder to all of us today of the service that these men and women give us, of the ultimate sacrifice, so we can have the freedoms that are so important to us at home.

It is a reminder to all of us that we owe them more than rhetoric on this floor or promises when they leave but fulfillment of those promises when they come home. We need to fulfill the promise of services available so their health care needs are met and that they are given the full support of this country when they return.

I was involved in working with our veterans many years ago. My own father was a veteran. He served us in World War II. He was one of the first soldiers into Okinawa. He was injured there when they went in. He went to Hawaii for a time, was in a hospital, and then went back to Okinawa to continue his services. He was an injured and disabled veteran all of his life.

I never knew of the sacrifices he gave or what his life story was until he died. We found his journals and read the day-to-day transcripts of what he as a young man, barely 20, did for our country overseas, the injuries he sustained, what he saw on the battlefield. He never talked about that when he came home.

As I read through those diaries day by day, I realized what a tremendous service he and thousands of other men and women have given to all of us so that we have the freedoms we have today, so that my grandson who is growing up in this country today has the freedoms his grandfather fought for.

Today, as I go home and talk to our veterans in Tacoma, Vancouver, and Walla Walla, our veterans who are struggling to get health care in north central Washington, I hear them begging us to help them get the health care services they were promised. We need to step up to the plate.

As I talk to the Army and to our Guard and Reserve members at home, they tell me about the thousands of soldiers who are now returning to Washington State and around the country who will face long lines, who will not have the services they need, particularly mental health and posttraumatic stress syndrome. I am deeply concerned that we are not putting in place the resources these veterans need to be there for them.

In 1972, I served my country in a unique way when I was in college. It was a time of war for our country, the Vietnam War. I volunteered to do my internship at WSU, Washington State University, at the veterans hospital in Seattle, WA. I served on the psychiatric ward. I worked day in and day out with our young men and women who were my age at the time returning from Vietnam. I saw the mental health scars they had.

What I saw inside the VA system was people who understood what they had gone through, who were willing to work with them day in and day out, but as I left that VA hospital every afternoon to go home, I was out on the street with people who did not understand and were not there to support these veterans.

I am committed at this time when our men and women come home from Iraq and Afghanistan and the missions we have sent them to around the world to make sure we are there for them and the support is there to reintegrate them into America.

I look at our budgets today and I see that is not the case. Later this after-

noon Ambassador Nicholson, a very fine man, will be confirmed, most likely, on the Senate floor. I have met with him. I have talked with him about the tremendous backlog of services, about my concerns about the members of the services who are coming home today and the services that are not available. I know he is committed to doing the right thing.

What I will be listening to is the State of the Union next week, and the President's budget, more importantly, when it comes to Congress, to see if indeed it has the support we need for our veterans, for the services they so rightfully deserve and need to have in order to be able to reintegrate into this country and to be able to continue to have full and promising lives at home once they return.

I fear we are not going to see a VA budget that has those services. Today in Washington State we are hearing the commitments that have already been made in north central Washington for a clinic in Bellingham may not be able to happen because the budget moneys have been so severely cut back. That is wrong. These are promises these veterans have been given and that they need.

Veterans who live in Wenatchee, WA, should not have to travel 8 hours on icy mountain roads to be able to get the health care services they need. When I go up there and I talk to a wife of a veteran who has health problems and she tells me her husband cannot get to the doctor, I think our country has not fulfilled a promise we made. We have to keep those promises, and where those promises will be seen is in the budget and in the appropriations process this year, whether we put our money behind the rhetoric we hear every day from people who thank the people who serve us overseas.

The Democratic Senators have put forward an excellent bill that I will be talking about in the days and months to come. S. 13 is a bill that will keep our promise to American veterans. It is very important legislation, and I hope we get bipartisan support for it—I hope we get support across the country—and Members sign on to be a sponsor of this legislation to push this forward so we keep our promise to veterans.

S. 13, the bill that has been introduced, begins by expanding mental health care to all of our VA hospitals by 2006. This is extremely important. When I talk to our veterans organizations, they tell me as many as 20 percent or more of our men and women who are serving will come home with posttraumatic stress syndrome or mental health conditions, that we need to make sure they get the help and support they need to deal with that. So the first part of the bill will expand mental health care to all of our VA hospitals by 2006.

Secondly, it will make prescription drugs readily available to veterans. Under current regulations, a veteran who receives a prescription from a pri-

vate doctor has to complete a physical with a VA physician before the VA will honor their prescription. That kind of redtape costs the VA an estimated billion dollars or more each year. So our bill will overturn that regulation and provide veterans with a quick and easy access to prescription drugs. This will save us money and it will help our veterans who so desperately need it.

This bill will also ensure that no veteran is forced to choose between their disability compensation and their retirement pay by 2006. This is an issue I hear about in every corner of my State from all veterans. Those who served our country should not have to choose between their disability payments and their retirement pay. The Senate has addressed this issue before. In conference, we were not able to move it as far as we needed to. This bill fixes it so veterans no longer face that difficult choice.

This bill also creates a seamless transition from the military to the VA. Many of our veterans who have returned home have encountered obstacles to getting the services they deserve when they leave their active-duty status. While the Defense and Veterans Departments have been trying to iron out the kinks by preventing a seamless transition from military life to the VA system, the agencies have not completed any of the seven recommendations for this that have been offered by the President's task force.

S. 13 will enact each of these seven recommendations, including requiring prepreparation medical examinations and disability benefits counseling, removing information-sharing barriers, and requiring greater cooperation between the VA and the DOD in tracking disabilities resulting from occupational exposure to hazardous materials.

Finally, the S. 13 that has been introduced will enact a new GI bill for the 21st century. I hope again all of our colleagues will sign on to this legislation so we can put our words and our reality behind a promise that has been made to the men and women who serve us in this country.

I think this is an extremely critical area and a crisis when we look out across the country at the thousands of men and women who are serving who are going to be facing already long lines at VA hospitals, already decreased services, for whom we need to make sure of mental health services as quickly and efficiently as possible so we do not see later complications in their families, in their communities, or in their own worklife.

Yesterday, the President put out his \$80 billion supplemental for the Iraq war. I will, of course, support that supplemental. It is absolutely critical that we make sure those who are serving us have the training, the equipment, and the supplies they need to do what we have asked them to do abroad for all of us, but it is equally important that we keep the promise to them when they

come home. So when that supplemental comes before the Senate I intend to offer an amendment, along with Senator AKAKA, the ranking member on the Veterans' Committee, to add \$2 billion to the supplemental to make sure our veterans get the services they need.

We cannot rely on rhetoric. We cannot rely on empty promises. We need to make sure that the part of the commitment we have when we go to war includes taking care of those men and women when they return home.

These proposals are not about growing the size of the Government. They are not about expanding what we owe. It is about keeping a promise. It is about living up to the promises we have made to those who have given so much to all of us. Our veterans deserve the best from us. S. 13, this legislation I just talked about, works to make sure those goals become a reality. We have a tremendous responsibility and we have a great opportunity in this Congress to keep the promise President Abraham Lincoln made 140 years ago, and that is to care for the veteran who has borne the battle, his widow and his orphan. Those words ring as true today as they did 140 years ago, and I intend in every way I can, both in my work on the Veterans Committee, my work on the Appropriations Committee, and my work on the floor, to keep the promise we gave to those who are serving us to make sure they are taken care of when they return home.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, what is the parliamentary situation?

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority has 8½ minutes. The majority has 22½ minutes. We are in morning business.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 4 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. We are in morning business.

NOMINATION OF CONDOLEEZZA RICE

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I rise to support the nomination of Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State. Dr. Rice has served the President with distinction over the past 4 years as National Security Adviser, and I have complete confidence she will bring the same talents, energy, and vision we have witnessed thus far to her new job at the State Department's helm.

In many of her recent remarks and those of President Bush, Dr. Rice has emphasized the promotion of freedom and democracy as a hallmark of American foreign policy. Not only has Dr. Rice made democracy a centerpiece of her time at the White House, but also her life itself illustrates the final triumph of true democracy at home.

Dr. Rice grew up in Birmingham, AL, in the heart of the segregated South.

She has spoken movingly about her memory of the 1963 church bombing in her hometown. One of the innocent little girls who died there was a friend of hers.

Dr. Rice grew up in a time and place where America's founding ideals had not yet become reality for all of our citizens. The United States, a country built on the idea of freedom, was not yet a full democracy.

Perhaps it was this experience that led Dr. Rice to make the study and practice of political systems her life's work. After receiving her Ph.D. at the University of Denver, she joined Stanford University and quickly became identified as one of the world's leading scholars of the Soviet Union. We all know of her distinguished career since then.

Dr. Rice has the confidence of the President of the United States. Dr. Rice has the confidence of the majority of this Senate. We know, as many of her critics have admitted on this floor, she will be easily confirmed.

So I wonder why we are starting this new Congress with a protracted debate about a foregone conclusion. It cannot be for a lack of priorities because we surely have enough on our legislative plate this year. It can't be because Dr. Rice has suggested she has some flaw so fundamental that the Senate must block the President's choice. I can only conclude we are doing this for no other reason than because of lingering bitterness at the outcome of the elections.

We need to move on. The people of the United States made their choice last November and they expect their elected officials to govern accordingly.

When President Clinton was re-elected for his second term, I didn't share the policy views of some of the officials he nominated, but I do not recall going through protracted battles such as this. We all have varying policy views, but the President, in my view, has a clear right to put into place the team he believes will serve him best.

I believe this Nation is honored by the presence of Dr. Rice, by what she represents, by what she has achieved, and I believe she will be an enduring role model to all Americans, particularly Americans who are not of the majority in race in our country.

I believe Dr. Rice is a living example of what can happen in America. From a beginning in a segregated South to the Secretary of State of the most powerful nation in the world is a great American success story. I hope all my colleagues, at the completion of this overwhelming vote in favor of her confirmation, will celebrate this great American success story and all of us will look forward to her leadership of the Department of State, and working with her here in the Halls of Congress.

I yield the remainder of my time. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VITTER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I understand we are in morning business and I have about 18 minutes; is that accurate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 17 minutes 15 seconds.

OUR LOSS IN IRAQ TODAY

Mr. BROWNBACK. I have an introduction of a bill I wish to talk about, but first I want to express our sympathy to the families of those who were lost in Iraq within the last 24 hours. There was a helicopter crash that took place. As I understand from the early news, 31 marines were killed in that helicopter crash. There were several other deaths in the last 24 hours leading up to this election in Iraq that takes place on Sunday. If we recall, there has been an increased level of violence taking place. We don't know the cause of this helicopter crash that took place, but we do know there was significant loss of life.

Our hearts and our prayers go out to the lost soldiers who stand in harm's way as we seek democracy, liberty, and freedom for the people of Iraq. Our heartfelt sympathies to the families, and our deepest dedication and devotion to those who continue to serve who are in harm's way.

I ask unanimous consent, Mr. President, that it be in order for us to take a moment of silence and prayer for those who have just lost their lives in Iraq.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, we will have a moment of silence.

(Moment of silence.)

UNBORN CHILD PAIN AWARENESS ACT

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, these are difficult times but they are also times of opportunity. We will face on Sunday, with the vote in Iraq, difficulty, but also a time of opportunity for people to know democracy and freedom who have never known it before. Freedom, however, always comes at a price. We are paying for this opportunity for freedom with loss of life from our own country. Yet democracy and freedom is something for which we have fought for over 200 years.

I rise today to speak about something else we need to fight for. I speak of one of the most difficult debates we have had to discuss in this country: it is the debate on the issue of life and the moment that life begins. I am introducing today, with over 30 cosponsors, a bill that speaks to this critical issue. It is S. 51, the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act. It has 31 cosponsors. This legislation, I believe, is strongly pro-woman, pro-child and pro-life, and