

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.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. FRIST. I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

ENERGY POLICY ACT OF 2005

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 6 which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6) to ensure jobs for our future with secure, affordable and reliable energy.

Pending:

Wyden-Dorgan amendment No. 792, to provide for the suspension of Strategic Petroleum Reserve acquisitions.

Reid (for Lautenberg) amendment No. 839, to require any Federal agency that publishes a science-based climate change document that was significantly altered at White House request to make an unaltered final draft of the document publicly available for comparison

Schumer amendment No. 811, to provide for a national tire fuel efficiency program.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 10 a.m. shall be equally divided between the Senator from New Mexico, Mr. DOMENICI, and the Senator from New Mexico, Mr. BINGAMAN, or their designees.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I understand we have 30 minutes; is that correct?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

Mr. KENNEDY. First, I thank my friend and the ranking member, Senator LEAHY, for permitting me to go first so we can attend in an appropriate way the Armed Services Committee and Secretary Rumsfeld. It is typical courtesy on his part.

I yield myself 9 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is recognized.

SUPREME COURT VACANCY

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, as we all know, a major debate may soon be underway in the Senate and the country if there is a vacancy on the Supreme Court. It is clear that the Bush administration is well along in choosing its nominee for the vacancy, and the Senate must be well-prepared as well.