

majority and minority staff have worked as one rather than as two competing staff. That is one of the reasons we have been able to clear as many amendments as we have as expeditiously as we have.

I once again want to thank my ranking member not only for his professionalism but for his friendship as we have gone throughout this process.

Mr. KOHL. Mr. President, I thank Senator BENNETT very much for the sentiments expressed, which are felt similarly by myself and people who are working with me.

On the question of Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator CRAIG and others in specialty crops, as you have indicated, we all understand how important this program is across the country, not only in California and in Idaho but in other States, as well. I am aware the House bill includes funding.

I will join with Senator BENNETT and we will do everything we can to adopt the House level in conference.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I now ask unanimous consent there be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

HISTORIC AFGHAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I rise to share great news with all of our colleagues. Last Sunday, an estimated 6 million people in Afghanistan voted in that country's historic first legislative election in over three decades. This is a tremendous achievement for the citizens of Afghanistan, for the people of the broader Middle East, and for obviously the United States because of America's interest in seeing peace and democracy flourish around the world. And, of course, it is a victory in the war on terror.

Afghans turned out, despite threats of violence, and despite unfamiliarity with the parliamentary system, to vote in great numbers for a 249-member lower parliamentary house and the members of 34 provincial councils. Those councils, along with President Hamid Karzai, will help select the 51 members of the upper parliamentary house, and the Afghan Parliament will convene for the first time this coming December.

Four years ago, the ruthless Taliban regime ruled Afghanistan with an unyielding, murderous intolerance, and they laid down that country's welcome mat to terrorists. Al-Qaida called the Afghan deserts their home, and they plotted the deaths of Americans. Well, no more. Today a democratically elected President and Parliament chart a new course for that country.

The turnout rate in this historic parliamentary election is estimated to exceed the typical turnout rate in our own country for our so-called off-year congressional elections, that is, when there is no Presidential election on the ballot. This follows the remarkable trend set last October when Afghanistan elected Hamid Karzai in its first Presidential election ever, also with a higher turnout rate than we had in this country a month later. I do not think Americans have to worry about terrorist threats or deadly bombing attacks on their way to the polls, but obviously the people in Afghanistan were certainly concerned that that might happen.

In fact, though there was some scattered violence, the Afghan police and army did an excellent job on the whole of securing the polls and thwarting these would-be terrorists. For instance, the police defused a large cache of explosives in Mazar-i-Sharif. In the western town of Helmand, an attack on a polling station ended with the deaths of two men suspected to be remnant Taliban members. Police even caught two terrorists attempting to smuggle explosives hidden in a pen into a polling station.

Turnout among women was high as well. We do not have the official results yet, but President Karzai claims it should account for about 40 to 60 percent of the total turnout. This is Afghanistan we are talking about. Forty to 60 percent of the total turnout in the legislative elections were women. This Afghan election is a huge success story, despite the deafening silence about it in the mainstream media. I continue to be disappointed at the media's refusal to cover the good news taking place in the broader Middle East.

I would like to read the beginning of a commendable editorial from the September 19, 2005, edition of the Wall Street Journal. I ask unanimous consent to have the entirety of that article printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Wall Street Journal, Sept. 19, 2005]

THE AFGHAN SUCCESS

Who would have thought that free and successful elections in Afghanistan would so quickly become a non-story? We sure didn't, but that seems to be the case judging from the paucity of news coverage of yesterday's historic Afghan vote for a national parliament and provincial assemblies. Success is apparently boring.

Taliban terrorists were unable to fulfill their pledge to disrupt the vote, not that they didn't try. They killed five candidates and four election workers leading up to the election, and yesterday another 15 people died in violence, including a Frenchman who was part of the international force helping to provide security. Despite such dangers, turnout was said to be heavy, though perhaps not up to the eight million who voted in last October's presidential election.

The vote was also another milestone for Afghan women, with 580-some female can-

didates, or 10% of the total. The Taliban had threatened female candidates in particular, much as they had turned women into second-class citizens during their time in power. For a country that hadn't chosen a legislature in decades, and was thought too benighted to support democracy by many Western sages, this is worth celebrating.

About 20,000 U.S. soldiers remain on the ground in the country, providing security while Afghan police and army forces continue to build. American and NATO forces will need to be there for some time, notably special forces who can pursue Taliban fighters who use terrorist tactics. But a legitimate new legislature will make it that much harder for the Taliban and its foreign recruits to find popular sympathy or sanctuary.

It's worth recalling how perilous for U.S. interests this corner of Southwest Asia was only four years ago. With the Taliban running Afghanistan, and Pakistan intelligence helping them, an Islamist takeover in Islamabad was not out of the question. But now with the Taliban routed and Hamid Karzai governing in Kabul, the region is no longer an al Qaeda sanctuary. This is one battle in the war on terror that we're clearly winning.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Here is how it begins:

Who would have thought that free and successful elections in Afghanistan would so quickly become a non-story? We sure didn't, but that seems to be the case judging from the paucity of news coverage of yesterday's historic Afghan vote for a national parliament and provincial assemblies. Success is apparently boring.

I think they must teach them in journalism school that only bad news is news. Let me repeat that last part. As President Bush and our armed forces continue to defend and spread freedom in the broader Middle East, if there is bad news, setbacks or casualties to report, the mainstream media will gladly hold the front page. But reporting success is apparently boring. Well, tell that to any one of the millions who cast their cherished ballot last Sunday.

I think the American people deserve to know the progress we are making in expanding freedom in countries that until now have known only terror. That is among one of the best ways of ensuring that terror does not strike our shores again, as it did on September 11, 2001. But it appears that the mainstream media is not that interested in good news. There is only one way to report this story: as a victory in the war on terror.

I ask all of our colleagues to join me in congratulating the Afghan people for taking this giant step toward becoming a free democratic state, justly governed under the rule of law. I ask them to join me in pledging the full support of the United States as Afghanistan continues to root out the last vestiges of its extremist terrorist element and moves forward into its democratic future. And I ask them to join me in declaring that whatever the final outcome of the elections, the true winners are the Afghan people, and the people of the region who can look to the Afghan exercise in democracy this past weekend as a model of success.