

history, our mission once again became clear. On that day 4 years ago, Islamic fanatics killed 3,000 souls, but would have delighted in killing 10 or 100 times that number. Our shores and subsequently those of our allies were attacked.

Collectively, we resolved to root out and eliminate the scourge of evil responsible for these threats. And as a global leader, refusing to be victimized and surrender to those who seek our destruction, the United States assumed the responsibility, as it has done many times before, to protect not just our homeland but, in the words of Woodrow Wilson, to make the world safe for democracy.

And so it is that for freedom's sake we must fulfill our mission in Iraq.

I am proud that my stepson, Douglas Lehtinen, and his fiancée, Lindsay Nelson, are serving as marine officers in Iraq, flying F-18s. The men and women in their squadron are proud of their mission of victory in Iraq.

Vice President DICK CHENEY summed things up quite appropriately on Tuesday of this week when he addressed our troops in Fort Drum, New York. He said, "Were we to leave, Iraq would return to the rule of tyrants and become a massive source of instability in the Middle East."

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Our mission is not easy. But our efforts and the noble sacrifice of our fine troops are yielding results. The naysayers and the fatalistic, those who question the ability of our U.S. forces to succeed refuse to acknowledge the political and psychological transformation that is taking place in Iraq, and the long-term positive impact that our efforts in Iraq will have in helping to curtail the spread of Islamic extremist and jihadist activities.

Today, Saddam Hussein is on trial for his crimes against humanity. And most of the villainous heirs to his legacy have been neutralized. Together with our Iraqi allies, we are prevailing against a brutal insurgency and assisting the people of Iraq in their efforts to create a truly representative free market Arab democracy in a region polluted with despotic regimes.

Tangible examples of success include, in January, the people of Iraq held their first free democratic election for the transitional national assembly. The turnout for this election was astonishing. Roughly 8.5 million Iraqis risked their lives to participate.

This was followed by the drafting of a new constitution. The debate on the various provisions in the Constitution was a perfect example of how the Iraqi people are exercising those fundamental freedoms protected from a Democratic society.

Today, the Iraqi people prepare for elections next week that will continue Iraq's transformation from a brutal totalitarian state to a free and Democratic Nation. But it is not just our observations that tell the story of the

progress that we are making and the need to forge ahead.

Iraqis themselves are expressing optimism as shown by a survey last month by the International Republican Institute. This survey indicated that 56 percent of Iraqis thought that things would be better in 6 months. Just the other day, The Washington Post quoted an Egyptian democracy advocate who was an early opponent of the war in Iraq, admitting that any way you look at it, toppling Saddam Hussein has unfrozen the Middle East he said, just as Napoleon's 1798 expedition did. Elections in Iraq forced the theocrats and the autocrats to put democracy on the agenda, he said.

Not least significantly, Mr. Speaker, Iraq's quest for liberty has had an interesting ripple effect throughout the region. For example the Syrians have been significantly pushed back in Lebanon, and Assad's tyrannical regime has been impressively weakened.

To those who claim that we need to pack up and depart, mission incomplete, who demand the need for benchmarks and the transfer of authority, I say open your eyes. For 2 years, we have been doing just that. Setting benchmarks and meeting them.

Benchmarks relating to the transfer of authority. Benchmarks for Iraqis to take helm of leadership positions, for elections to choose a national assembly. Benchmarks to select a constitution. My colleagues, let us recall the words of former President Ronald Reagan, who said, the ultimate determinant in the struggle now going on for the world will be but a test of wills and ideals, a trial of spiritual resolve for the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish, and the ideals to which we are dedicated. With freedom on our side, we cannot fail.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCCAUL of Texas). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. FILNER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

PROGRESS IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, Iraq's final general election will be held a week from tomorrow, December 15. Iraqis have paid a great price to get to this point. 30 years under Saddam Hussein, the last 2½ years, thousands of Iraqi have died in a conflict.

The United States has paid a great price. Over 2,000 of our finest soldiers have been killed, many more have been wounded, billions of dollars have been spent, some have said this is a quagmire, some have compared it to Vietnam. And yet, I think it is appropriate

to mention at this time that progress has been made.

Now I will mention several areas in which considerable progress has been made. First of all, in the area of education, 774 schools have been built or renovated since the conflict began. We see an 80 percent increase in attendance in schools in Iraq. Most of these increases are due to young women who have never attended school previously.

We have had 36,000 teachers trained in Iraq since the conflict began. In the area of health care, 17 hospitals either have been built or are currently under construction. 142 health clinics are under construction today or have been completed. And 3.2 million children under the age of 5 have been vaccinated. This is roughly 97 to 98 percent of that population.

As far as the economy is concerned, we see many small business starting to spring up. Cell phones, satellite dishes, newspapers, television stations are apparent at every turn. And there are 1 million more automobiles today in Iraq than prior to the conflict. So the economy is not perfect, but it is getting better.

As far as the government, we have mentioned many times that the constitution, of course, has been written out, approved October 15 by more than 70 percent of the people. The Sunnis voted in large numbers. And now the election is December 15.

As far as the plan to get out of Iraq, the exit strategy, we often hear that there is no plan. The plan has been very clear from almost day one to train and equip 270,000 Iraqis. To date we are at 211,000 Iraqis trained and equipped. There are many areas of Iraq that are totally under Iraqi control with no U.S. forces present or even as back-ups.

This is something that oft times is not reported. So this is a critical time. We often hear people say, well, the Iraqis want us to leave. I think that is true. They would like to see us out of there. But if you ask them, they will tell you, not yet. Not at this point. Not at this turning point.

So I think that we have all of this discussion now going on about our pulling out. And this discussion to the effect that we are losing, that we cannot win. These comments go world-wide, and they are made by policy makers, often here in Washington. And they certainly carry weight in the Middle East. And I would like to make an observation from the world of athletics, something I know a little bit about. There are some principles of competition that I think apply, not just to athletics, but to military conflict as well.

And I would say, first of all, number 1, never tell your team that you cannot win. You would not tell them that before the game, you would not tell them at half time, you would not tell them in the fourth quarter that they cannot win and that they are not winning, because there is such a thing as self-fulfilling prophecy.

This is something that no coach would do, nobody who is responsible