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President Bush Calls Iraq Elections Turning Point in History

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President Bush says Sunday's election in Iraq marks a turning point in that country's history. The president used his weekly radio address to highlight the importance of the Iraqi election in the spread of democracy and freedom. The opposition Democrats used their radio address to criticize the administration's pre- and post-war planning in Iraq.

President Bush says Sunday's election in Iraq is the latest step in that country's journey to democracy and peace. He praises Iraqis for standing firm, despite insurgents' threats of death against those who vote in Sunday's election. He says every Iraqi who casts a ballot deserves the world's admiration.

"All throughout Iraq, these friends of freedom understand the stakes," said Mr. Bush. "In the face of assassination, brutal violence and calculated intimidation, Iraqis continue to prepare for the elections and to campaign for their candidates. They know what democracy will mean for their country: a future of peace, stability, prosperity and justice for themselves and for their children."

The president warned Americans and Iraqis to be prepared for more violence in Iraq, but, ultimately, he said, the foreign terrorists and Iraqi insurgents would fail.

"Terrorist violence will not end with the election," he added. "Yet the terrorists will fail, because the Iraqi people reject their ideology of murder."

About 150,000 U.S. forces are serving in Iraq. In his weekly radio address, Mr. Bush said the United States would continue to help the newly elected

government stabilize the country. The president says Iraq's success is important to the United States.

"And there is not a democratic nation in our world that threatens the security of the United States," noted Mr. Bush. "The best way to ensure the success of democracy is through the advance of democracy."

In the Democratic radio address, Congressman Ike Skelton of Missouri praised U.S. forces and Iraqi civilians. But the senior Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee questioned the administration's strategy in Iraq. He criticized the Bush administration's pre- and post-war planning, particularly the decision to invade without more troops and failure to distribute more reconstruction funds.

"These are critical questions," said Mr. Skelton. "Ones the administration should have considered before involving us so deeply in Iraq. But now, we must use the elections as a building block for a permanent representative form of government in Iraq. These elections are only the next step toward that goal."

President Bush said Sunday's election in Iraq follows successful votes in other parts of the world.

"Over the past year, the world has seen successful elections in Afghanistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Georgia, Ukraine and the Palestinian territories," said Mr. Bush. "In countries across the broader Middle East, from Morocco to Bahrain, governments are enacting new reforms and increasing participation for their people. Tomorrow's election will add to the momentum of democracy."

Final results in Iraq are not expected until 10-14 days after the election.

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Authorities in Iraq have imposed an unprecedented security clampdown during the last hours before the country's landmark election. Multi-national troops and Iraqi security forces are preparing for the worst. As VOA's Challiss McDonough reports from a windblown military tent in Basra, tensions are high even in areas where the violence has been relatively low. British troops are distributing hand-held metal detectors to police units charged with...

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The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad has been hit in an apparent rocket or mortar attack, and U.S. officials confirm two Americans have been killed and at least four others wounded. Initial reports say indirect fire hit the south side of the embassy, killing a civilian and a member of the military. The embassy is housed in Saddam Hussein's former Republican Palace, inside the heavily guarded Green Zone. The attack comes just hours before...

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As Iraqis prepare to head to the polls Sunday, many observers are asking what will happen next. Will Iraqi politicians put aside ethnic and religious differences and work towards a more stable Iraq? Or will the country spiral into further violence and bloodshed? The vote in Iraq Sunday will be the country's first free and democratic election in 50 years. Top Bush administration officials acknowledge their dismay with the Sunni Muslim election boycott and the...

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Other US Polling Sites**

Iraqi expatriates around the United States have been voting since Friday in Iraq's first democratic election in decades. Iraqis are voting in Chicago, Detroit, Nashville, suburban Washington DC, and here in Irvine, just south of Los Angeles. Salman Al-Barkawi made the 14-hour drive from Salt Lake City, Utah, saying he wants a voice in his country's future. "And for the new generation to have a new freedom, and we pave the road for our children in the future, and..."