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Presenter: Ambassador L. Paul Bremer

February 23, 2004

Ambassador Bremer Media Availability with Traveling Press

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Bremer: You come at a good time in the political transition which is really gaining quite a lot of momentum now. We're in the process of working with the Governing Council to finish up the transition law which we'll finish by Saturday.

It's one of a series of major steps towards full Iraqi sovereignty and democracy over the next year and a half as laid out in the September 15th agreement which provides for this transition law to get finished up the end of February, sovereignty will be returned to an Iraqi transitional government on June 30th, and we will then have at least three elections next year according to the November 15th agreement. An election for a constituent assembly, ratification of the constitution that assembly writes, and then elections by the end of next year.

My sense is there's a lot of momentum behind this desire for democracy here. We have had town hall meetings, selections of provincial councils, meetings of women's associations, human rights associations, NGOs, going on all over this country. There's a real thirst for democracy out there.

I had a very interesting meeting with the Baghdad City Council yesterday and you could just hear how much people are anxious to move forward. They're curious about it, they don't understand all what we mean by democracy, but there's a real interest in it. I think it's an important message that this thrust is really very strong right now.

Anyway, you're here at an interesting time.

Questions?

Q: Do they know what democracy is, and what are you doing to try to explain it to them? It's kind of a messy thing, sort of not working as planned.

Bremer: Democracy is messy. I mean, at the Baghdad City Council yesterday. What's tidy is dictatorship. We did that here, and that's gone and they're glad it's gone. Now we have democracy and it's untidy, it's complicated. When you have a process of finding a transitional government by June 30th and you can't do elections as the U.N. has concluded, you're thrown back on a variety of different complicated ways to get that transitional government chosen.