

S. government civilians studying here. And I thank those who wear the uniform. You know, one of the great things about being the Commander-in-Chief is to be the Commander-in-Chief of people who have volunteered to serve our country in a time of danger. I'm incredibly impressed by our military, and I am thankful to our military families.

You know, last week, a remarkable event took place in Iraq. At a ceremony in the city of Ramadi, responsibility for security in Anbar Province was transferred to Iraqi civilian authorities. Iraqi forces are now leading security operations across Anbar, with American troops in an "overwatch" role. With this transfer of responsibility, the people of Anbar took charge of their own security and their own destiny. It's a moment of pride for all Iraqis -- and it was a moment of success in the war on terror.

Two years ago, such a moment was unimaginable to most. Anbar was one of the most dangerous provinces in Iraq. Al Qaeda was in control of almost every major population center. They had largely succeeded in turning the region into a safe haven, which brought them closer to one of their goals -- a place from which to launch new attacks against America, our allies, and our interests in the region. In 2006, a military intelligence report concluded that the province was lost -- and Anbar was held up as proof of America's failure in Iraq.

Yet something remarkable was happening. The tribes in Anbar were growing tired of al Qaeda's brutality. They wanted to live a normal life. And this presented us with an opportunity to defeat al Qaeda in Anbar. Last year we sent 4,000 additional Marines to Anbar as part of the surge. The surge showed America's commitment to security. It showed we were committed to helping the average citizen in Anbar live a normal life. And it helped renew the confidence of local leaders, the tribal sheiks, who then led an uprising to take Anbar back from the terrorists. And together, local tribes, Iraqi troops, and American forces systematically dismantled al Qaeda control across the province.

Today, Anbar is a province transformed. Attacks in the province have dropped by more than 90 percent. Casualties are down dramatically. Virtually every city and town in Anbar now has a mayor and a functioning municipal council. Provincial Reconstruction Teams are helping local leaders create jobs and economic opportunity. As security has improved, reconciliation is taking place across the province. Today, Anbar is no longer lost to al Qaeda -- it has been reclaimed by the Iraqi people.

We're seeing similar gains in other parts of Iraq. Earlier this year, the Iraqi government launched a successful military operation against Shia extremist groups in places like Basra, and Baghdad, and al-Amarah. Iraqi forces are staying on the offense. They are pressing the advantage against those who would bring harm and danger to their citizens. They're conducting operations in and around the northern city of Mosul, where al Qaeda terrorists seek refuge. The Iraqi Army recently launched a new offensive against al Qaeda in Diyala Province. All these operations are Iraqi-led, with American forces playing a supporting role.

As a result of these and other operations in Iraq, violence is down to its lowest point since the spring of 2004. Civilian deaths are down, sectarian killings are down, suicide bombings are down, and normal life is returning to communities across the country. Provincial reconciliation is moving forward. The Iraqi government has passed budgets and major pieces of legislation. Our diplomatic -- diplomats report that markets once shuttered by terrorist violence are now open for business. Yesterday,