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NEWS RELEASE

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Turkeys and Donkeys
by Senator Larry Craig

Last week, even though I showed up fairly early in the day, I had to wait quite a while to cast my vote in the elections. As the wait stretched on and on, I talked a little with my fellow citizens who stood beside me in line. One woman made a comment about how frustrating it was to have such long delays. Really, I couldn't blame her, because the day was young and there were plenty of things to get done. But I also couldn't help but feel how lucky we were.

For one thing, in many places across the state, the later in the day you went to vote, the longer it took. Some waited in line for four hours or more. Some couldn't wait that long, and had to leave before voting. I was happy to be out of the local polling place before 10 a.m. But that's not really what I was getting at.

It goes without saying how privileged we are to be able to vote. So many millions of people around the world have never had the opportunity to vote in a democratic election, not once. Americans vote so often that we now consider it a "good turnout" for an election when about 1/3 of us don't even bother to show up. But even that wasn't what was going through my head at the time.

What amazed me about our system was this: I stood in line waiting to vote for nearly an hour, and not once was I in danger. None of the people in line threatened or tried to intimidate me. My fellow citizens and I were never shot at. Nobody threatened to bomb the polling place.

When we cast our ballots, they were not read by the poll workers, and we weren't punished for the way we voted. When we returned to our homes, we didn't have to dodge sniper fire. We didn't find our families or our loved ones had been attacked or destroyed when we arrived. The day after the election, when the results were well-known, I and my Republican colleagues were not imprisoned or executed for being members of the opposition party in Washington, D.C.

As sensational as this all sounds, these very things happen in other parts of the world. While they are not uncommon elsewhere, they are practically unheard of here.

In January, when the new Members of Congress are sworn in, and the terms of the defeated Members expire, the transition will be unremarkable in how orderly it will be. The practice has become so familiar to Americans, we hardly even think about it any longer.

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By the time you read this, President Bush will likely have participated in another familiar Thanksgiving tradition, issuing a pardon to a turkey destined for the butcher's block. But I doubt he'll be issuing any pardons to the turkeys who will soon be in control of Capitol Hill!

Regardless of what you think about Democrats or Republicans, though, I hope you will take a moment to reflect on how blessed we are to live in the United States of America. The Pilgrims who came to this land and celebrated the first Thanksgiving sought freedom from persecution and retribution for their beliefs. Largely because of their bravery in crossing the Atlantic Ocean and establishing a settlement in the New World, we became what we are today – a nation founded on the rule of law and respect for individual rights.

This year, Thanksgiving came a little bit early for me – on November 7. That's not to suggest I was happy with which party came out on top, but rather, the smooth and peaceful way it happened. The guardians in Congress may have changed, but our Constitution and the Bill of Rights remain the same. Almost 400 years after Jamestown and Plymouth Rock, I think our forefathers would be proud. For that, we ought to give thanks.

Happy Thanksgiving!