

**By Don Walton - Lincoln Journal Star**

Politics, rather than violence, is "now the name of the game in Iraq," a ranking U.S. diplomat told law students in Lincoln Monday.

"The people have chosen the political process," said Michael Corbin, deputy assistant secretary of state for Iraq issues.

Once a negative force in the Mideast and Near East, Iraq can turn itself into a positive force in the region if it successfully manages its transition, Corbin said.

Critical parliamentary elections will be held in Iraq on Sunday.

Corbin spoke at the University of Nebraska College of Law with Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, his Lincoln host, at his side.

Fortenberry is a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and serves on its subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia.

While in Lincoln at the invitation of the congressman, Corbin met with members of the Iraqi community who live here, including Sunni, Shia and Yazidi groups.

Iraq faces enormous challenges as it attempts to reinvent itself following Saddam Hussein's long, autocratic rule, Corbin said.

"The politics will be messy," he said. "It won't be Jeffersonian democracy."

But Iraq potentially can have a bright future, Corbin said. Already, it has moved beyond what appeared to be the likelihood of civil war, he said.

"The Iraqis clearly have moved away from sectarian violence," Corbin said.

Among the challenges ahead are the historic Kurd-Arab divide, official corruption and the need to protect the rights of minorities, he said.

Corbin said he believes Iraq will seek a long-term security agreement with the United States in the wake of withdrawal of U.S. troops.

The phased withdrawal ordered by President Barack Obama calls for a reduction to 50,000 U.S. troops by Sept. 1 and total withdrawal by the end of 2011.

Asked whether the Iraq war has justified its cost in terms of lives lost on both sides and more than \$700 billion in U.S. expenditures thus far, Corbin said: "This is something history will have to determine."

Fortenberry told students the war has been "tremendously costly and painful."

But, he said, the result of democratic change in Iraq could "hopefully lead to new modes of government that would transform the entire region" in a more peaceful fashion.

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