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By **Matt Sober**

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

Ladies and gentlemen, the president of the United States:

"Good evening. I stand here before you tonight to address the state of our union. But I want to begin by first assuring you that I will try to make this as quick as possible, as I realize I'm pre-empting tonight's episode of 'Law & Order.'

"But, like it or not, it's my job as president to offer you a forthright assessment of our country's affairs -- even if only once a year. Just as it's my job as commander in chief to protect the American people.

"And in that regard, I believe my administration has performed admirably. In the past year, there has not been a single attack on the shores of this great country -- neither by al-Qaida nor hurricane. The intelligence we've gathered through my domestic-spying program, as well as 24-hour surveillance of The Weather Channel, has helped keep this country safe.

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"In Iraq, it's been a tough fight. A hard slog, if you will. And, yes, mistakes have been made. But failure in Iraq is not an option.

"Even if success is not possible.

"So I'm sending over more troops, despite the

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recommendations of the Iraq Study Group.

"And the objections

of Congress.

"And the wishes of the American people.

"But despite the bloody chaos -- er, pardon me, setbacks -- let there be no question that democracy is on the march. In fact, the fledgling Iraqi government just recently achieved a historic milestone, when it finally brought Saddam Hussein to justice. And although the hanging wasn't carried out with the kind of dignity we would have hoped, my administration is confident that, given time, the Iraqis will learn to perform executions with the machine-like efficiency we've come to expect here in the United States.

"Speaking of the homefront, we must continue to support the troops -- even if it's just by declaring over and over how much we support the troops. Indeed, it's imperative that the American people have the stomach to continue the fight in Iraq.

"Which shouldn't be a problem as long as there's a new season of 'American Idol' to prevent everyone from paying attention.

"And, finally, I want the American people to know that I am prepared to put politics aside and work with the Democrats in Congress.

"Not that I've got much choice, considering how few Republicans are left.

"Yeah. It's gonna be a long, hard slog."

Matt Sober is a copy editor for the Tribune-Review. E-mail him at msober@tribweb.com, and include the word "story" in the subject line.

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