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ST. LOUIS - President Bush said Saturday that the voting in Afghanistan was a remarkable achievement due in some part to his administration. "A marvelous thing is happening in Afghanistan," Bush told a breakfast fund-raiser for local Republican candidates. "Freedom is powerful. Think about a society in which young girls couldn't go to school, and their mothers were whipped in the public square, and today they're holding a presidential election."

In his remarks, Bush mentioned nothing of political chaos that marred the elections. Later, White House press secretary Scott McClellan played down the difficulties and proclaimed it "a great day for the people of Afghanistan."

Voting day passed relatively peacefully, but it ended in political turmoil as the 15 candidates opposing interim President Hamid Karzai threatened to boycott its result because of alleged widespread fraud. All 15 charged that many voters cast multiple ballots because supposedly indelible ink used to identify those who had voted was removed easily.

Officials of the independent United Nations-Afghan election body refused to stop the voting to avoid denying many Afghans the right to cast their first vote ever.