I thank the gentle lady for taking her time to allow me and

my colleagues to be able to address the chamber. Thank you very much.

And I appreciate her husband's service to this country both in Congress

and in the Senate.

I am taking this opportunity to talk about the conflict in Iraq, the

war in Iraq, and I want to do it based on my 20 visits to Iraq when I

first was there in April of 2003 to the trip that just concluded last

week. I want to speak very frankly about this war and our presence

there and what I think we should do and why I think we should do what

we need to do.

September 11 clearly was a wakeup call, from hell, that forced us to

address the fact that for such a long time we had a blind eye to what

was happening in the Middle East and what was happening particularly as

it related to the extreme Islamists who were seeking to get the world's

attention by attacking our troops in Lebanon, our Marines, our

Soldiers, and Air Force men and women in Saudi Arabia attacked three

times, our embassy employees in two countries in Africa, the Cole where

we lost 17 Navy personnel and 33 injured.

I was somewhat surprised that, in spite of all this, that we would

keep turning the other cheek and ignoring what was confronting us. So

when September 11 happened, it was a huge wakeup call. And the issue

is, did we respond in the right way?

We created a Department of Homeland Security. Before September 11,

when we talked about such a department, people said, ``What are we,

Great Britain?'' It was difficult for Americans to conceive that we

should do that. We passed the Patriot Act; and clearly we could have

given it some other name, but we wanted to make sure that we had

modernized our capability to infiltrate cells that needed to be

infiltrated. We created a much stronger intelligence structure by

establishing a Director of Intelligence that would coordinate these 16

agencies. And we also went into Afghanistan, where there was uniformed

consensus that we should do it. But we also went into Iraq, and that

obviously was very controversial.

I remember, as I tried to debate whether we should do this, visiting

with the Brits, the French, the Turks, the Israelis, and the

Jordanians. They all said Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. But

the French said, he has them, but won't use them. And we discounted the

French because we knew even then, about the Oil for Food Program, that

they had been pretty much bought off, and we knew that they would

probably not support using the U.N. as the instrument to remove Saddam

from power. So we went in. And, we made sure our troops had the one

thing that we felt they needed: Protective chemical gear. We really

believed that Saddam had both a nuclear program and a chemical program,

and we were very adamant that we shouldn't go in before our troops had

that protective chemical gear.

But it became very clear early on that Saddam not only didn't have an

active chemical weapons program that he could readily use, and there

was no nuclear program. So, the very basis for going into Iraq proved

to be false.

I voted to go into Iraq based on what I believed was the right thing

to do. I am struck by some Members who somehow blame their decision on

someone else. I did what I thought was due diligence. I was impressed

by Iraq's neighbors. I was impressed by, frankly, Bill Clinton and

Hillary Clinton and others who had reason to be skeptical but believed

as well that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction.

But what surprises me most, and I want to make this point. I remember

when George Romney, the former governor of Michigan, not Massachusetts,

Governor Romney from Massachusetts's dad, said: I believed we needed to

go into Vietnam, but I was brainwashed by the generals. And there was

instant ridicule, and he was forced to drop out of the race for

President because he wasn't taking ownership for his own decision, and

was blaming someone else.

I blame no one for my vote. It was my vote based on my best

conclusions. And I would like to think that every Member would own up

to their own vote, but somehow some who voted to go into Iraq now act

like they didn't, and blame others for their vote. And I think that is

wrong. So the question is, we are there, and we were there under false

pretenses but very much believed to be true. So what do we do now?

When you go to Israel, Israel had the best intelligence in the

region, and they were wrong and they empanelled a commission to try to

determine how they could be wrong. They didn't blame their political

leaders, they didn't say people lied. What they concluded was that,

based on the knowledge that they had, it was reasonable to assume that

Saddam had these weapons. That was their conclusion.

It is a fact that even his own troops, his generals, in December were

stunned, as we learned from the debriefing of Tariq Aziz and others of

the Iraqi politicians, that Saddam told his own generals in December of

2002: We don't have a nuclear program and we don't have a viable

chemical program. And they were stunned.

I was so troubled by this that I went to see Hans Blix in Stockholm

and I said, ``Why would Saddam want us to think he had weapons of mass

destruction?'' And he said, because Saddam thought it was a deterrent

to his neighbors, and that he believed there was no consequence because

he thought there would be no way the United States would seek to remove

him from power if the French and the Russians and the Chinese would not

allow the U.N. to be involved.

Well, the fact is that Saddam misread us the first time in Kuwait.

Because of Vietnam, he thought we would never go in because of that

experience,

and we did, and he misunderstood our intentions a second time, which is

an incredible lesson about making sure that our adversaries know our

true intent and believe our true intent.

We were wrong. But being wrong does not mean we need to get out, get

out right away because of our original purpose for being there.

The fact is once we disbanded the Army, the police and the border

patrol, we owned Iraq; and there is no way of getting around it. There

is no way to say that we can get rid of all Iraqi police, border patrol

and Army, and then say, well, you know, we achieved our objective,

good-bye. That would be a cruelty to the Iraqis that they don't

deserve, and it would be a huge invitation to the Iranians to just walk

right in. We can't allow that to happen.

In my first visit to Iraq, I went just as the war was ending. I

actually had to get in with the help of the State Department because

the Defense Department said I couldn't go in. I remember speaking to

Muhammed Abdul-Assan. He was telling me the things that we were doing

that troubled him, like throwing candy on the ground. He said, Our

children are not chickens; they are not animals.

He talked about how our troops seemed to be offended when they

extended a hand, and an Iraqi woman put her hand to her heart and would

not shake the soldier's hand. She was saying, thank you for honoring

me, but we don't shake hands with strangers.

He basically put his hands on my shoulders and said, You don't know

us, and we don't know you. He told me an incredible story. He told me a

story that he had been in an Iranian prison and hadn't made the first

exchange of prisoners because the Iranians had more Iraqis than the

Iraqis had Iranians in their war with each other. I said to him, You

have had an incredibly difficult life, and I started to go on. And he

looked at me and said, No different than any other Iraqi.

Well, after my first visit I couldn't get back soon enough to say we

need Arabic speakers and we need to understand their culture. These are

tough people.

The second time I went in, I went to Basra and I went again outside

the umbrella of the military and spent two nights in Basra with Save

the Children. I began to hear things like why are you putting my son,

my uncle, my brother, my cousin, my nephew, my husband, my father, out

of work? Why can't they at least guard the hospitals? He was talking

about the fact that we put a half a million men out of work, and

basically said you have no future in this new government.

And so I couldn't wait to get back home and say: Why are we doing

this? And the poignant thing to this is the very first death in the 4th

Congressional District Connecticut was Wilfredo Perez. He was guarding

a hospital.

Try to imagine what we did when we disbanded their Army, their police

and their border patrol. We left them totally and completely

defenseless. It is a country of 24-plus million people left with no

security.

Let's take New York State. New York State has 19 million people. It

is two-thirds the size of Iraq or maybe even smaller. It has 19 million

versus 24 million. Imagine New York State with no police, no police in

New York City, no police in the subways, no police in Albany,

Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, no police in any of the towns in between,

no security whatsoever. Oh, and by the way, to be consistent with what

Saddam Hussein did, he released all his prisoners. We are going to

release the prisoners from Attica and Riker's Island and make sure that

they are in the community, and then say don't worry, we are going to

bring 150,000 Iraqis who speak Arabic to keep the peace throughout all

of New York State.

Well, you don't have to be a genius to realize we had created a huge

problem. We were basically saying we would provide all of the security

in Iraq, but we didn't have enough men and women to do it. We didn't

speak their language or know their culture. Are we surprised that

militias were formed? Are we surprised that when we put half a million

people out of work, that they would go to the other side?

And then there is the looting. They were dumbfounded. Iraqis love

their antiquities. They love their history. If you go to an Iraqi and

somehow suggest it is not a real country, they will look at you and

say, Let me get this straight. You did not learn in your school, about

the Fertile Crescent where the two rivers met, the cradle of

civilization? You never studied about us Iraqis? They are stunned that

we would think them not a country, and they were particularly stunned,

when the Senate voted to divide Iraq into three parts, they said aha,

it just goes to show what we have been saying. You want to divide and

conquer us, and then take our oil.

We made huge mistakes and we didn't correct them and we didn't deal

with the reality on the ground. The reality is that we needed to train

more Iraqi troops than we were, and we needed to have more American

troops there given we had gotten rid of a half million security forces

for all of Iraq.

When you go to an Iraqi and you ask, Are you a Sunni? They will say,

I am a Sunni but I am married to a Shia.

I will go to a Shia and say are you a Shia, to try to understand

their perspective, and they will say, I am a Shia, but my tribe is

Sunni.

I will go to someone I suspect to be a Kurd, and ask, Are you a Kurd?

They will say, Yes, I am a Kurd; but you do know Kurds are Sunnis? They

are constantly lecturing me about understanding what they are and the

significance of what they are.

We have the fear of sectarian violence in Iraq, and it is often

compared to Bosnia. In Bosnia, you had fathers who literally raped

their child's best friend. So a father is raping a 14- or 12-year-old

child because she happens to be Christian and he is Muslim or she is

Muslim and he is a Christian. I remember going to Bosnia and seeing a

house filled with garbage, garbage filled all of the way to the top. It

was a message, don't come back to your home, you are not wanted.

That kind of violence is not what has happened in Iraq. What has

happened in Iraq is when there were Sunnis and Shias living together,

they were not kicked out by their neighbors, they were kicked out by

outsiders who came in and tried to have it be one ethnic group, which

is very different than Bosnia.

Now that is not to suggest that Sunnis and Shias will agree on

everything. But again, it is not like Saudi Arabia where Sunnis there

don't like Sunnis in other countries if they are not Wahhabbis. We

sometimes tend to judge the Middle East, I think, on what we see in

Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is another issue we are going to have to

have a frank conversation about. It is not Iraq.

When I go to Turkey, the Turks say to me, We used to run this place

for 402 years; why don't you pay attention to us?

When I go to Egypt, they say, We have been a country for 4,000 years,

why don't you pay attention to us?

When I go to Jordan they say, We are direct descendants of Mohammed,

why don't you pay attention to us?

When I go to Iraq, they say, We are the cradle of civilization, why

don't you pay attention to us?

So we are starting to. We are starting to pay more attention to them.

We are certainly paying attention to the ambassadors that come from

countries near Iraq. And they say, we may not have wanted you to go in,

are there, for you to leave now would be an outrage. And they are

right.

Now that we stirred everything up and we created significant

dislocation in Iraq, we have a moral obligation to set Iraqis in a

place where they can govern themselves; or failing to govern

themselves, it will be their failure. But they need the security to do

it.

So what do I see and what have I seen over the course of 20 times in

Iraq?

If this is April 2003, we could have gone in an upward direction. It

could have been an amazing experience. We could have kept their

military. We could have listened to them. We could have had Arabic

speakers. We could have found that rather than digging a deep ditch, we

could have gone in the other direction. But as soon as we allowed the

looting, as I made reference to earlier, they really believed that was

our message to them that we had only contempt for them. That is what

they believed. They thought, You could have stopped it and you didn't.

The thing we cherished the most, our antiquities, you allowed those

looters to

just desecrate, and you were the security.

We then put them out of work and left them with no security. We dug a

deep hole.

I began to feel, though, that we were turning the situation around

when we transferred power in June of 2004. Mr. Bremer left, and Iraqis

were being invited to make some major decisions. And they did something

extraordinary. I was there for the first election. They put our

elections to shame.

What did they do? They had far more people who voted, and they were

honest votes. The U.N. will tell you, these elections were very well

run. I was in Arbil for the first election, and I saw men following

their wives because their wives were determined to vote, dressed up

with their kids in their arms or following them. I was there as an

observer, and I saw them come and vote for local, regional and national

elections. They came and got all three ballots and filled them out in a

protected area, and then they came and put them in the ballot box. But

before they could do that, they had to stick their finger in the ink

jar. I watched that for awhile, and then I went and quietly asked, as

an observer, Do you mind if I put my finger in that ink jar? I wanted

to bond with them; and I, frankly, wanted to come home and show people

that there was something pretty monumental going on in Iraq.

The woman looked up at me, looked down, and then she said, No! you're

not an Iraqi! Everybody looked at me. I clearly wasn't an Iraqi. I was

first embarrassed, and then I thought this was amazing. I was in a

Kurdish area. And she didn't say, No, you're not a Kurd. She said,

You're not an Iraqi.

Well, that election established a government that then created a

constitution. And in October of 2005, they voted on that constitution.

And more people came out to vote, including Sunnis that had not

participated the first time. They had establish a constitution, and

then they had an election in December of 2005. I thought in 2003 we had

dug a deep hole, but now we and the Iraq's were getting back up there.

Things are looking much better.

And they had an election in December, and then nothing happened.

January, no leader was chosen. February, no leader was chosen. March,

no leader was chosen. By April they had decided on a very slim vote

that Mr. Maliki would be the prime minister.

And so, they had literally delayed for 4 months choosing a leader.

And when you're swimming upstream and you stop swimming, you go way

downstream. And they dug a deep hole again. You had the Samarra

bombings; that was horrific. That was a Shi'a Mosque that was bombed

and destroyed, intended to bring out the Shi'as in a total civil war

with Sunnis. That almost happened, but didn't happen.

When I came back to Iraq and met with Mr. Maliki after 6 weeks in

office, there was a sense on my part that he wasn't going to do any

heavy lifting. And so I decided, rather than come back 3 months from

now as I usually did, I came back 6 weeks later. And one ambassador

told me then, it was in June, he said to me, ``I fear that Prime

Minister Maliki does not have the political will to do what he needs to

do.''

So, I went back in August. There were 6 more weeks that had passed.

Now he had been in office about 12 weeks, and I didn't see hardly any

positive change. I concluded that the only thing that would get him to

move was to have a timeline. And I demanded to see him. I said, I've

been here more than anyone else, I want to meet with Mr. Maliki. And I

said it can be a stand-up meeting, but I want to meet him. I want him

to look me in the face and tell him what I believe after being in Iraq

so often.

So, a meeting was set up. He was meeting with others and we went to a

side of the room, and I said, take a good look at me, you're not going

to see me after November, and you're not going to see a majority of

Republicans that had been supporting our presence in Iraq. You're going

to see a change in government because you aren't doing the heavy

lifting you need to. You need timelines like you had in '05, where you

had one election, then the constitution, then another election, to

select a government. He said, no, we moved too quickly; we can't move

that quickly.

I came home believing we need a timeline, and I believe that to this

day. But it's a timeline that doesn't say we get out tomorrow. It's a

timeline that says we leave when the Iraqis can be ready, and we can

pretty much predict when that is. And we know it's going to take more

Iraqis troops to do it. We know they have to be trained.

With all due respect to my colleagues in the majority who sincerely

believe this was a mistake and we need to get out, a timeline that gets

us out sooner than we can replace their army, police and border patrol

and leaves them in a place where they can protect themselves is a

timeline that makes no sense. But a timeline that says we're there

forever in this capacity makes no sense either. We need a logical

timeline.

Now, one thing I never argued for that turned out to be very

important, I never argued that we needed a surge. That was the one area

where I didn't feel I had the expertise. So, after that election, I

went to Iraq in December of 2006, and frankly, things were worse than

ever. The generals told me that they had given up on Anbar Province,

the largest Sunni province. In fact, they said it's almost like a mini

Afghanistan within Iraq, no one is in charge except al Qaeda. And that

was a pretty disappointing bit of news to be told.

When I went back in April of '07 they said we're winning Anbar

Province. Now, this was after we started to begin the surge, but that

hadn't really taken effect yet. They were doing something that I had

argued for a long time, and that was, we were engaging the Iraqi

tribes. The Sunni Iraqi tribes had become totally fed up with al Qaeda

for all the reasons that most people know. They wanted to set up the

kind of shari'a government that Iraqis want no part of, and they were

killing the young Sunni tribal leaders who were not cooperating. And

so, the leaders came to us and said, we want to be with you.

So, I went in April, and we're winning Anbar Province. I go back 2

months later and they say, we've really won Anbar Province. I go back

in August, and we're starting to win other areas. We're starting to

clean out other areas.

And we've started to have al Qaeda be in small little enclaves. And

why? Because before the surge they struck us at will. After the surge,

they can't get above the water line to take a breath because our

daytime troops went after them, and our nighttime troops went after

them, and then our daytime troops went after them. They never have a

chance to regroup. The surge has enabled us to clean out areas and

bring the Iraqi police, which aren't the best of Iraq, but they are

good enough to do what police do, and that is, once an area is clean,

keep the peace.

This past year, I've been able to go without armor into so many

different marketplaces, places they would never have taken me before.

And I come back and I say things are getting better, and then people

say yes, but there were the rockets on the Green Zone. Well, there are

going to be rockets on the Green Zone and there are going to be men and

women who wear vests that basically are filled with explosives and

they're going to blow themselves up. There are women who have lost

their husbands who see no future. There is obviously al Qaeda, that

still has some influence. There will be those kinds of attacks, but

there are going to be different kinds of attacks than has existed in

the past.

So, I have seen the surge is working. The tribal leaders have made a

huge difference. We are now going into other areas. We've cleaned up

our two-thirds of Iraq. Mosul is going to be a very difficult area.

It's a very mixed community of Sunnis, Shias, Turkmen, and others.

The other reason why we're seeing an improvement beside the surge and

support of tribal leaders is the Iraqi troops have become competent, in

some cases very competent. And I'm sure there may be some who will

criticize me for saying it, but I believe the Iraqis are actually

beginning to like us, or at least respect us, and in some cases trust

us. And why would that be? Well, they were raised for 30 years to hate

Americans and love the Russians. So, in comes this government,

Americans,

and we attack them, and we put a lot of their loved ones out of work.

And they were convinced that we would take their oil. But it's been 5

years, and they've come to realize that there is a country so good that

it would spend nearly a half a trillion dollars, have more than 20,000

of its American forces wounded, some very severely, have 4,000 of its

troops killed and not take a drop of its oil, not a drop of its oil.

We're beginning to gain credibility that we actually meant what we said

and that there is a country so good in the world that it would do that

for something far more important.

We want a world of peace. We want a world where people can live their

lives as they want to. We want a world where commerce can flow back and

forth freely. And we're willing to give a lot and spend a lot to do

that.

Now, I want to say something to my colleagues that may not believe we

should ever have been in Iraq. I fear that there are some in this

Chamber who fear that if we ultimately win in Iraq, and by winning, I

mean restore a security force of Iraqis that can fend for themselves

and where they can govern for themselves and where there is a

significant movement towards a more democratic form of government, and

a government that, unlike its neighbors, allows its women to be

educated, allows its women to be part of commerce, if we do that, it

justifies the war.

We may say at the end, we spent a trillion dollars, we lost 4,000 to

5,000 men and women, and we have this result which is pretty

spectacular, but in the end, it may not justify what we have done. But

where we all should be united, it seems to me, is that we leave Iraq in

a place that the void is not filled up by the Iranians.

Now, we haven't taken a drop of their oil, but one thing is very

clear, Iraq has a lot of oil and gas. In fact, Bunker Hunt came to my

office, rolled out a map that would cover this desk, and he said, I

believe Iraq has more energy than exists in Saudi Arabia. The world

says it has 10 percent. He told, I believe it may have as much as 20

percent of the world's reserves. And then he showed me this map with

markings throughout Iraq indicated a real potential for either gas or

oil. He said, to an oil man, this is a candy store of opportunity.

Well, it belongs to the Iraqis. And my hope and prayer is that they

will someday be able to enjoy it and share it with the rest of the

world.

And the thing that's stunning is, it's not just in Sunni areas, it's

not just in Shi'a areas and it's not just in Kurdish areas, it's

throughout Iraq. This is a nation that doesn't believe in shari'a law.

It's a nation that is very secular. It's a nation where Sunni and

Shi'as have, in particular, gotten along with each other. It's a nation

that has so much oil as a resource, and gas, but almost as importantly,

it has so much water. When I fly over it, you see these magnificent

rivers, not just the Tigris and Euphrates, but the others that join it,

but all the canals and the irrigation that exists. This is a country

that will be able to export and feed parts of the world.

This is a country that will educate both its men and women. This is a

country that has significant resources. This is a country we hope to be

friends with for a long, long time. And this is a country that deserves

some patience from Americans. We need to understand that they didn't

have the head start we had in the United States. And even then, think

about it, we knew democracy before we became these United States. We

had democracy in our colonies.

We had the Declaration of Independence in 1776. And it took us 13

years to have the Constitution of the United States, 13 years. And even

then, as perfect as we would like to think our Constitution is, but in

our Constitution as Condoleezza Rice points out, she was three-fifths a

person, and a slave. So, we certainly didn't get it all right.

I'll conclude by saying, we've seen the most progress on the part of

the military. We've seen not the kind of progress we want to see from

the politicians. But even then, we need to give them credit. They have

voted out retirement for ba'athists, Saddamists. That was hugely

important. While they don't have an oil law that formally distributes

the oil to the different regions of Iraq, they are doing it in spite of

that without the formal agreement.

They have a de-Baathification law that's coming into place so that

they're hiring people that, in the past were told they couldn't be part

of this new Iraqi government.

And they're going to have provincial elections. The significance of

that is the local elections were the first of the three elections, and

Sunnis didn't participate, so we have some Shiias who run Sunni areas.

This means that these leaders are willing, and know that they have to

give up power to the predominant group within their regime of Iraq.

No one knows how history is going to judge our involvement in Iraq.

But the one thing I do know is that we finally have the kind of

leadership in Iraq that I've been hungry for, some real honest talk

from Mr. Petraeus. He'll tell you what's going right and what's going

wrong. We've had, I think, good military leaders, but I think he's

learned a lot, and I think he's clearly the best.

We needed to make a change with Secretary of Defense, and since then

I've seen significant progress. It took Abraham Lincoln 9 generals

before he got the generals that finally started to win some battles,

Sherman and Grant.

We're starting to see a difference in Iraq because of this

leadership. We're even starting to see Mr. Maliki show some guts by

confronting his own political base, Shiias, in Basra.

They haven't been given the opportunity that we had of having 13

years before a true government was established under our Constitution.

They've had five.

We have American time. We want them to act more quickly. But, at the

same time, in terms of Middle East culture, they're moving a lot faster

than some people give them credit.

Madam Speaker, I really appreciate your willingness to allow me this

opportunity, and I want to just repeat that everyone in this chamber

loves our troops. I'm addicted when I go back to Iraq, to meet with the

men and women who serve, those who are content we're there, those who

would go back and again and again, and some who wish they weren't

there. But every one of our troops are real patriots. I can't tell you

what an honor it is to interact with them. And with that, Madam

Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.