Madam Speaker, I come to the floor of the House tonight

having just returned from the country of Iraq yesterday afternoon. And

even given the lateness of the hour, I wanted to come address the House

because there are some issues that are, in fact, very timely and time-

sensitive, and I thought it was important to get them spoken on the

floor of the House.

My intention is to come back with the other Members who were on the

trip with me, Mr. Carter of Texas, Mr. Brady of Texas, Mr. Jordan of

Ohio, Mr. Davis of Tennessee, and talk about this in some depth in the

weeks to come. Mr. King of Iowa was also with us on the trip. But

because of the lateness tonight and the lateness that we are likely to

go tomorrow night and Thursday night, it may be next week before we can

actually do that formal presentation, and there were some things that I

wanted to get on the floor of the House this week.

Madam Speaker, I would report to the House that as of the third week

of July 2007, it is still a very mixed report about the situation in

Iraq. My overall impression from this latest trip is that significant

successes have occurred and are likely to continue to occur as far as

returning control of the country to the Iraqi Government and delivering

it out of the hands of criminals and murderers. At the same time, it is

still a very dangerous situation, and the sacrifice is very real.

Madam Speaker, the future of America is vastly different depending

upon the outcome of what happens in the country of Iraq. A stable

country, a country with a representational government, a country able

to act as a partner for peace in the Middle East would be vastly

preferable to a lawless land ruled by terrorists and criminals

providing a base for training operations and, Madam Speaker, a source

for funding for further enlargement of their activities.

Almost without question, the divergent future was on the minds of

almost everyone I talked with during the 2-day trip. Certainly

America's best interest is going to be served by stability in that

country and with their active participation in stabilizing a very

troubled region.

It has been just over a year since I last traveled to Iraq. A lot has

changed both at home and in Iraq over that time. There is no question

that the news reports coming out of Iraq have almost been universally

pessimistic for about 10 months' time. I was obviously very concerned

about what I would encounter upon my return to that country, but the

trip made over the weekend, a Saturday and Sunday, a very condensed

time frame with a great deal to see, we learned a great deal.

Starting with a 2 a.m. departure from the military airport in Kuwait

City, we loaded on the C-130 for the flight into Baghdad. The plane was

cramped and fully loaded. Already at 2:00 in the morning, it was over

90 degrees. The plane contained a large number of soldiers and marines

who were returning to Baghdad. Because of the very early hour and the

loudness of the aircraft, there was not much time for conversation; but

after the plane landed and the engines were stopped, there was a brief

episode where conversation was possible.

For most, this was their second or third rotation. Their deployments

had been extended through 15 months, and most would not go home for

almost a year from that point. When several who were standing next to

me learned who I was, there was obviously an eagerness for

conversation.

Since February, there has been a change in how they have done their

work. Now most were placed alongside Iraqi soldiers in smaller groups

around town. They were no longer attached to the larger, more protected

bases, and the soldiers were clearly seeing a greater amount of

activity, and it concerned them.

I spoke in some depth with the soldier in front of me. He had 10

months left in his rotation, and sometimes he wondered if the generals

knew what they were up against in this deployment. He complained about

the long hours and the heat. He complained about being separated from

his family. He had been reading a book on the plane, and I asked him

about this. He said it was a book about philosophy, so I naturally

assumed that upon leaving the Army at the end of his deployment, he

would likely return to school, or perhaps he had a job waiting for him,

and I asked him about this. He looked at me strangely.

he said tersely.

We left the plane and parted ways. He got on an armored convoy, and

we were loaded in Blackhawk helicopters for the next leg of our trip

down to Ramadi. It was still very early in the morning, and the sun was

barely breaking through the low dust layer that always seems to hang

over Baghdad in the summer. The temperature was already in excess of

100 degrees, but in many ways my conversation with this soldier

underscored the ambiguities, the inconsistencies, and the incongruous

nature of life in Iraq.

Over the next 48 hours, we would see stories of great heroism and

great hope. At the same time, the frustration of buying time and space

for a young government, sometimes a dysfunctional government, of a war-

torn country was underscored at several junctures.

From a military perspective, success has been made and continues to

be made on a near daily basis. Indeed, the primary enemy, al Qaeda, has

not only been beaten, but vanquished every time there has been an

encounter. And because of the increased military activity, the

encounters have been more frequent. At the same time, a very young

government seems to have already developed entrenched bureaucracies

because of the centralized nature of the government in Iraq. As

military successes are happening around the country, aid from the

central government is slow to be dispatched out to the outlying

communities.

As is probably the case with every other conflict in our Nation's

history, there are widely distributed data points, and one can take one

or two of these and make virtually any argument that one wishes to

make. It takes a more disciplined outlook to analyze the data, look at

the trend lines, but that is a discipline that must be exercised.

Madam Speaker, the city of Ramadi in the al-Anbar Province in Western

Iraq was the first stop for us on Saturday. This is a city the size of

Fort

Worth, Texas, back in my home district. One year ago when I was in

Iraq, Ramadi was held by insurgent representatives of al Qaeda. In July

of 2006, there would have been no way for a congressional delegation to

travel to this city as it would have been seen as too dangerous a

mission.

But things began to change last February. The historic tribal leaders

began to clearly understand that life alongside al Qaeda was not going

to improve; and in a stunning reversal, the town's leaders began to

seek out and embrace American protection. Popular support was now no

longer available to al Qaeda in a city that had been destined to be the

provincial capital of the resurgent Caliphate. This represented a

striking strategic failure for the enemy. Their shadow government which

had intended to establish a capital of a radical Islamic state was

forced out of the city, and, indeed, subsequent armed attempts to

retake control were successfully repelled. People in town began

identifying where the terrorists lived, who was making the bombs, who

was putting the city and their daily lives in jeopardy.

Now, the task of rebuilding a civil society, the municipal government

has certainly significant tasks ahead of it. And, Madam Speaker, I

might add to that it was the additional soldiers and marines provided

by what is called the surge last February, particularly the soldiers of

the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Unit force just north of al-Anbar, that

made a lot of this possible. They intercepted the vehicle-borne

improvised explosive devices as they were on their way down to Ramadi;

they found the factories where these were manufactured, and were able

to provide additional breathing space and additional room as the city

was recontrolled by the Americans.

Because of the distance from Baghdad and the central government,

there has been some isolation, and significant efforts have been made

by the Army to ensure that the local mayor has the ability to provide

for his citizens. And this, Madam Speaker, underscores one of the real

difficulties ahead for this country. As areas are reclaimed and

stabilized, the central government must be able to quickly provide the

financial and security support that will be required to sustain this

early success.

This also underscores one of the important recognized benchmarks,

that of holding the provincial elections. During the electoral process

2 years ago, most of the Sunni population was involved in an electoral

boycott. Now they see the fundamental error of that decision, and they

are eager to see new elections that would permit a more popular

representation.

After 2 or 3 years of serious brutality at the hands of al Qaeda, the

population now sees America as helpers and sees Americans as

protectors. The tribal leaders had originally feared that Americans

were occupiers, that they would stay forever, but now they have come to

understand that the Americans have no such interests. The same could

not be said for al Qaeda's interests. Their clear intent was to hold

the town for their purposes for the foreseeable future.

The point was made during our visit that there are no overnight

solutions to the problems in Iraq. Leadership cannot be bought, and

this has to be an evolutionary change. But this change can occur if the

correct environment is provided.

As if to underscore the recent success in Ramadi, we were taken out

of the military base, down the main street of town, right into the

marketplace. We were permitted to walk freely in the marketplace and

observed many of the items for sale in what appears to be a very normal

Arab market.

Madam Speaker, I did provide a photograph from that visit, and here

you can see again one of the stalls of the market. You can see the

goods for sale, the pots and pans up there, coolers for water or

whatever other beverage one might want to have. You can see the smiles

on the young children. They didn't know we were going to come to town

that day; it just happened that we showed up, and they were apparently

glad to see us. You see the men there bargaining in the background. It

doesn't really look like a street scene of people that are under great

stress or duress. It looks like a normal marketplace with normal people

doing normal Saturday-morning activities.

The vehicle you see just a portion up here at the edge of the

photograph was actually a municipal vehicle, a city vehicle. They were

repairing one of the sewer lines in the street. Many of the sewer lines

and water lines in this town had been broken by improvised explosive

devices that had gone off during the more active and kinetic phases of

the retaking of the city from the al Qaeda groups. But it wasn't

Americans who were out repairing the sewer pipe, it was actually the

municipal government of the city of Ramadi who was taking care of that

task, as they should, as is appropriate for a municipal government, the

appropriate way for a municipal government to behave.

I would also point out some of the clothing that is for sale.

Madam Speaker, I just have to say in this trip to Iraq one of the

things I saw that really struck me as being significantly different

from other trips, not just in Ramadi, but in Baghdad and some of the

other areas we visited, many more women were in evidence out on the

streets and out in public, significantly different from other times

when I have been there. And I take that as a good sign, a good sign as

for the resurgence of civil society.

But there is pretty striking evidence of the prior combat in the town

all around us. But the evidence of active reconstruction and a crew

working on the sewer line in the middle of the street as we walked

through town really again gave me some hope that there was some

stability for these young children.

And let me talk about the future for a moment. That is a future that

these young men now have that actually was going to be denied to them

just a few short months ago. And, again, you can see the look of

curiosity on these boys' faces. This boy is not quite sure whether to

smile or run away. But, nevertheless, these kids were all over in the

marketplace.

And you see back there again some of the brightly colored glass and

things that weren't for sale in the market. I don't know where these

shirts came from; presumably that represents some sort of local sports

team. But, again, a very different scene in Ramadi today than would

have been evident a year ago.

When I returned yesterday, one of the things that I encounter in the

headline in the Washington Times was also of encouragement to me. We

had spent some time during the trip on Saturday at a place called Camp

Taji, which is north of Iraq.

Camp Taji is where a good number of our soldiers are stationed, a lot

of our National Guardsmen are stationed. And again, Camp Taji, the same

situation: they've moved soldiers out the relatively large base.

They've moved out to work with the Iraqi units, to work in the towns.

And one of the things we learned on that trip through there this

weekend, the commander told us that there had just been a meeting with

150 sheiks, both Sunni and Shiia, and the reason for the meeting, the

meeting was called by the sheiks. They wanted to meet with the American

military, and the reason for that meeting was they wanted this same

type of success for their communities. They wanted to ask if the same

type of return to civil society that is going on, that's breaking out

in the country of Ramadi, they wanted to know if it was possible in

their communities. And, again, not just Sunni leaders, Shiia leaders as

well.

And I'll quote from yesterday's, this is the Washington Times from

Monday, July 23, 2007. And it says:

A startling story. We just heard about this on Saturday when we were

there. In fact, I was kind of given the impression that it was so new

that maybe we shouldn't talk about it. But here it is on the front page

of the Washington Times, so I'm going to assume it is okay to bring

that up. Very significant because, of course, in the Sunni areas of

Iraq, al Qaeda's dominant. In the Shiia areas the Mahdi

Army from Maktadar al Sadr was dominant. Neither one of these groups is

seen as really furthering the common interests of the country of Iraq,

and both Sunni and Shiia were asking for help from the Americans.

Another headline that greeted me Monday morning when I woke up in

Germany on the way back, one of the generals, General Mixon, has

proposed a shift in strategy in Iraq. He says, they're so calm up

north, maybe we should be able to bring some of our troops from up

north down to the areas around Baghdad to provide additional security

there because, quite frankly, they're not needed in Nineveh province.

They're not needed in these areas where just a year ago there was

significant terrorist activity occurring and United States troops were

required.

Madam Speaker, you have been very generous with the time. I hope to

be back here next week with the other members of the congressional

delegation that went to Iraq. We'll talk a great deal more about this

subject, but some of these issues were time sensitive and I wanted to

get them on the record while they were still very relevant.