Madam President, I just want to share with my colleagues

some recent experiences I had in meeting with Kurdish physicians not

too long ago in my office, not too far from here, because it relates so

dramatically to the debate and to the unfolding of many of the

questions that seem to be raised today.

I should really begin by saying in my home State of Tennessee there

are a number of Kurdish residents who live, who reside particularly in

the area of Nashville where I am from. I have had the opportunity to

meet with them and to listen to their concerns and have had the

opportunity to support a project called the Health Partnerships With

Northern Iraq, which is a project that is sponsored by the Meridian

International Center here in the District, with the support of the

State Department. It is a fantastic program, it is a great program, the

purpose of which is to train Kurdish doctors in northern Iraq to do

primary care; that is, basic care. It is probably 90 percent of health

care in terms of responding to individual needs of families and

individuals.

What is interesting is these doctors, for a period of time, spent a

few weeks, and then months, of their training in this country in

primary care, and part of that time was spent in Tennessee at East

Tennessee State University.

Last January, I met with this group of Kurdish doctors in my office,

just down the hall. They came to me as a physician, as a doctor, and

also as majority leader, but they came to me with very specific

concerns. They shared with me that they knew the war to topple Saddam

Hussein was near, and they were concerned--these are Iraqi physicians--

that they would be attacked with chemical and biological weapons. Their

concern, as I will share with my colleagues shortly, was based on

practical experience, experiences they have firsthand knowledge of, in

terms of being with people who had suffered from attacks.

But at the time when they were in my office, they came to me because

they said: We are simply unprepared to be practicing primary care in

our homeland in northern Iraq. They were in a region of about 6 million

individuals, which had 240 primary care centers, but they had very few

supplies. They had only the very most rudimentary needs in terms of

treatment. They had no personal protective equipment in terms of

biological contaminants or chemical weapons. They had no ability to

contain or even treat victims of a chemical or biological attack. They

had little time for the intensive training they knew they would need in

order to respond to such a biological or chemical attack. Yet they came

to my office very specifically asking for help.

Dr. Ali Sindi, the delegation leader, asked for basic supplies. He

asked for medical supplies and some help with acquiring medical

supplies, coming to the majority leader, but also coming to a

physician. He asked for hydrogen peroxide. He asked for bleach.

Hydrogen peroxide and bleach, as most people know today, are used to

decontaminate affected areas from biological or chemical weapons. He

asked for gas masks. He asked for chemical suits. He asked for

antibiotics in the event there was a biological attack.

He noted--and, again, it was a group of Kurdish physicians--he told

me the Kurdish water systems are generally open to the air and, a lot

of times, sitting on the rooftops of the villages there. So he,

concerned about chemical and biological attacks, said: And in addition,

what I need is some kind of protection for these rooftop water systems.

Their fear--these doctors' fear, the doctors from Iraq--was not based

on intelligence briefings. Their fear was based on experience. Their

fear was based on reality. Their fear was based on what they had seen,

and their fear was based on what they had actually treated; that is,

chemical weapons, weapons of mass destruction.

As the Senator from Arizona knows, the Kurds had been attacked by

chemical weapons before, most notably in the city of Halabja. There,

thousands of innocent Kurds were killed with weapons of mass

destruction, these chemical weapons. These doctors from that region had

come to see me. They had treated victims of that particular attack.

They know from that direct experience what chemical weapons, weapons of

mass destruction, can do. These doctors believed, obviously, the Kurds

were going to be attacked with chemical weapons once again. They asked

from me and from our Government, through me, for that help to be

prepared.

At this juncture, I ask the Senator from Arizona, in light of these

doctors' past, direct experience with weapons of mass destruction--

these chemical weapons--does the Senator agree the Kurds were acting

reasonably when they, with this direct experience, believed Saddam

Hussein possessed and intended to use weapons of mass destruction;

namely, the chemical weapons they had seen and had experience with

being used before?

I thank the Senator from Arizona.

Again, these physicians who came to see me from Iraq had seen with

their own eyes these chemical weapons having been used before. They had

come--and this is just last January--to me to say: We need help to

protect ourselves and our communities from the use of these biological

and chemical weapons.

Is the Senator aware many of the critics of the war to topple Saddam

Hussein seem to suggest there was never cause to be concerned with

Saddam Hussein? In fact, if you listen closely to the critics, they go

so far as to imply there was never a threat at all.

Is the Senator from Arizona familiar with the details of one of the

most horrendous examples of Saddam's brutality, the 1988 massacre of

Kurdish civilians in the village of Halabja? Indeed, at the time,

50,000 Kurds lived in the village of Halabja, a city that is very close

to the Iranian border. They had already suffered immeasurably from the

8 years of conventional war between Iraq and Iran. But for Saddam

Hussein, that was not enough.

On March 16, 1988, the Iraqi regime launched an artillery attack

against Halabja, driving the residents of the city there underground.

They went to these underground shelters and to the basements for

protection from this overhead attack. But that is when the real, true

terror began. Iraqi helicopters then came in with planes, and they came

back once again, but this time with chemical weapons. The chemical

weapons were all carefully documented--nerve gas, VX, mustard gas--all

weapons of mass destruction, which were aimed at these buildings, these

cellars, all of a sudden turning these cellars in which the Kurds were

hiding into gas chambers. They fled, of course, gathering their

families, exposed, running for their lives.

Graphic evidence showed the results of Saddam's use of weapons of

mass destruction. The Senator from Arizona just showed that picture

with the question: No weapons of mass destruction?

It reminds me so dramatically of what one survivor relayed at the

scene:

Experts agree over 5,000 innocent citizens died as a result of the

chemical weapons attack. These were weapons of mass destruction used on

Halabja. Again, those physicians in my office told me these stories.

Other survivors had scarring of the lungs, something called fibrosis of

the lung, where the lung becomes nothing but a fibrous scar. Others

were blinded permanently. The consequences of this cruelty continue to

this day, and indeed these physicians continue to treat the residual

effects of people in that Kurdish community. Chemicals contaminated the

food and water supply. The chemicals caused cancer. The chemicals

caused those respiratory diseases like fibrosis. They caused

infertility and high levels of severe abnormalities in Halabja's

children.

Christine Gosden, a British professor of medical genetics, traveled

to northern Iraq in 1998 to study the effects on the Kurdish population

of the poison gas unleashed on them. She founded the Halabja Medical

Institute and discovered the consequences of the chemical weapons

attack were even more damaging than she expected. She wrote in the

Washington Post:

The Halabja Medical Institute, in its research on the attacks,

discovered something even more vicious. Its conclusions noted:

Yes, Saddam's regime conducted experiments using chemical weapons on

innocent Kurdish civilians. These are Kurdish civilians in his own

country. Experimenting. The Kurdish physicians told me--it is to vivid

in my mind--that in buildings like hotels with different wings, single

floors, people would be herded and placed into these rooms; one wing

would be to test VX gas on humans, killing them, and another wing would

be mustard gas, and there would be another gas in a third wing, to see

which was more effective.

Iraqi soldiers even went so far as to return to the town after that

attack in Halabja to study how efficient, how effective those chemicals

weapons were, using the number of people who died as a measure of

success.

I want to ask the Senator from Arizona another question. Does the

Senator from Arizona have any doubt in his mind that Saddam would

continue to develop and use such weapons at the first possible

opportunity?