Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlelady from Tennessee for

yielding to me.

It is kind of ironic. We were here on the floor of this House last

night. The House was full, Members on both sides. We heard the

President deliver his final State of the Union address, and of course,

as is typical for a State of the Union address, he touched on subjects

near and far, went through the domestic agenda, went through the

foreign agenda.

When he got to talking about the conditions on the ground in Iraq, I

don't know about the gentlelady from Tennessee, but I was just

absolutely struck by the scene in this House when he commended the

troops for the activities and the success that they had achieved on the

ground. One-half of the House stood up and applauded; the other half

sat on their hands.

And Mr. Speaker, I don't know if there's been another time in

American history when America goes to war, sends their sons and

daughters to war, America is winning the war, and it's become something

we don't want to talk about. There's other things that command our

attention now, and we'll go on to other things.

The gentlelady was right, it was a year ago that we stood on the

floor of this House and debated for hour after hour after hour on the

efficacy of sending additional troops to Iraq. We were told by the

majority leader over in the Senate, the Democratic majority leader,

that the war was lost; there was no need to send additional men because

we had already made the decision in the Senate, or the other body in

the Capitol of the United States, that the war was over and the war was

indeed lost.

The gentlelady's right, you can pick data points to prove whatever

you want to prove in Iraq. They're all over the map, but if you look at

trend lines over time, you begin to see a story taking shape, and that

is the story that began to take shape in April of last year, perhaps a

little reinforced in June of last year, July of last year.

My most recent trip to Iraq, my sixth trip, I wasn't sure what I was

going to find because when you picked up the papers, the data points

were scattered all over the place, but little by little, the story came

out. And about a week after I was there in July, the New York Times

finally broke the story, hey, there's a war we just might win going on

in the country of Iraq, written by two individuals who, quite frankly,

aren't always on the side of the President of the United States, so it

seems, in their writings in the New York Times. The New York Times

itself is not always on the same page as the President in a lot of

foreign policy issues, but there it was in black and white for all to

see.

Now, I went to Iraq in July of 2007. I very much wanted to go because

I knew that the surge had started. I knew that General Petraeus had

committed to come back and present data to Congress in September of

2007 to talk about the success, or lack thereof, of the additional

reinforcements that were sent into the country of Iraq. And I knew that

this House, I knew myself as a Member of this House, was going to have

to come to some decisions or some conclusions, if it's working it or

it's not working; if it's not working, we will have to rethink the

strategy.

So it was an important trip for me to take because I knew on every

other trip that I had taken to Iraq what I saw on the ground bore no

resemblance to what I was seeing on my television screens on CNN and

CBS and the evening news and the morning shows. You have to go and look

at it for yourselves to be able to understand what is happening.

You know it's not an easy job. It was a brief war, but it's been a

long hard slog to get to where we are today, and history will have to

decide whether the investment in time, the investment in lives, the

investment in families who are deprived of their loved ones during

these long deployments, history will decide the accuracy of the words

that we speak tonight.

But I will tell you from the strength of that last trip in July and

what I have seen reported since that time, I have to believe that this

country going forward is going to be in far better shape in 10 years',

20 years', 30 years' time because we have an Iraq that has an

opportunity now to be a stable partner in a quest for peace in the

Middle East, as opposed to a haven and an outpost for continued

terrorism in that part of the world.

In July of 2006, I took a trip to Iraq. Peter Chiarelli on that trip

said, you know, it's funny, I don't know want to make of it, but in a

part of the country of Iraq that is very, very dangerous, al

Anbar province, a city called Ramadi, we don't know what to make of it

but some insurgents that were in the hospital yesterday turned over all

of their arms to our soldiers, and we'll just have to wait and see what

develops. In fact, he asked me not to talk about it when I got back in

July of 2006 because, again, he was not sure what that meant.

July of 2007, fast forward to that time. We got off the C-130 in

Baghdad International Airport, get on the helicopters and are

immediately taken to Ramadi. Ramadi, that was too dangerous a place to

travel to a year before, was our first stop. We met General Gaston of

the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force there on the ground in Ramadi.

Ramadi is a city about the size of Ft. Worth. Ft. Worth, Texas, is the

largest city in my district back home. It was the provincial capital of

the resurgent caliphate as established by al Qaeda in western Iraq.

The reality, though, was that things had changed enormously over that

past year and in ways that, quite honestly, had not been reported in

the press back here at home. Again, I didn't know what I was going to

find when I went there, but I have to tell you the job that was done by

the Marines in the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force, the job that was

done by the troops on the ground on these long deployments that they

were undertaking, the job was truly phenomenal.

A year before I would not have been able to travel to the city of

Ramadi. Now, not only could I travel to the city of Ramadi, after the

briefing, after the endless Power Point that the military always gives

you when you go over there, we got in vehicles and drove to downtown

Ramadi.

I've got to tell you, I was a little concerned; General Gaston, are

you sure that it's okay for us to go to downtown Ramadi? Last year,

General Chiarelli said it's kind of dangerous out there. He said,

``Let's go.''

We drove downtown. It was a Saturday morning, early on a Saturday

morning. We drove to the market. It looked like a market any other

place in the Middle East. There was a lot of activity. In fact, there

were the typical sights and sounds of a city that has, perhaps, seen

better days. They were working on some sewer pipes. There was, in fact,

a little bit of construction going on.

But this photograph was taken last July 17th in the city of Ramadi.

This shows the shops. I don't know where all this stuff came from. If

this was an American market, I would assume all this stuff came from

China. I'm not sure where it was made. But all of these wares were for

sale, and there was shop after shop after shop lined up and down either

side of the street.

You can see the faces of the young men there; a little bit of

curiosity, all of these Americans showing up and walking through their

streets. I'm sure for them it was a sight that they had not seen too

often. But again, you see on the faces of these young men, these are

not faces that are suspicious, these are not faces that are fearful,

these are faces that are smiling. They were, in fact, glad to see us.

And I found out a few minutes later why they were glad to see us; they

were hoping that we had a pen or a quarter. They had apparently been

well coached by our marines. Their school was going to start in a few

weeks, and because they would be attending their classes, they were

anxious to know if we had a writing instrument that we might part with

that they could have.

Well, I'll be honest, I don't remember the number of

shops. There were many. Perhaps on the side street that we were on, at

least a dozen on one side, and then a similar number on the other side.

And of course I do need to make the point that this was

an area that just a few months before had seen some of the most intense

fighting. And many of the buildings at the front of the street, well,

let's just put it this way, a JDAM doesn't do anything for your drive-

up appeal. And there were several buildings that obviously had suffered

the scars of war. But as you went a little further down the street, you

began to come upon scenes such as this.

And I would simply point out that at the very edge of the photograph

here, and I had forgotten this, we see a brightly colored garment set

that looks like it would be appropriate for a woman to wear. I saw more

women on this trip to Iraq than I can recall seeing at any other trip

where I had been through the country. And it was, to me, reassuring

that the female members of Iraqi society felt comfortable enough to

travel out to the shops on a Saturday morning and be with their

husbands and their children, as you so eloquently point out, as

commerce was breaking out all over on the streets of Ramadi.

Again, I just want to show another picture of some children. These

guys were pretty curious as to what was going on with all of these

strange folks that had shown up and were walking through town. Again,

you can see in the background some additional brightly colored wares

for sale. This fellow turned out to be fairly inquisitive. And he had a

keen interest, again, in writing instruments that I want to assume

that's because his school was starting up in a few weeks' time.

What has been described as ``The Anbar Awakening,'' we heard the

President reference it last night, began in the city of Ramadi where

the Sunnis began to recognize, you know, these guys from al Qaeda;

they're actually not our friends. They refer to the Americans as

occupiers, but maybe it's the al Qaeda guys that are actually the

occupiers. And we do believe that at some point the Americans want to

go home, but we can't say the same for our friends in al Qaeda. And the

Sunni sheiks, the tribal leaders in the towns, rapidly turned it. And

to hear it be described by our marines and our soldiers there, it

literally turned on a few weeks' time, some rather intense fighting as

the surge began to mount its full reinforcement, and then suddenly

things changed dramatically for the better.

And for me, on this trip, the one thing that I saw that was different

from any other trip that I had taken over there on the ground, now, we

can criticize the Baghdad government, and both sides of the aisle I

know will do that with regularity, I may do so before this night is

over, but the local political shift that's taking place on the ground

in Iraq, the county commissioners, the city councilmen, the mayors that

are doing the kinds of work that you want your local government to do,

you know, quite honestly, I go home every weekend and the people are

happy to see me. But if there's a problem at home, most of the time

they're not going to call their Congressman; they'll call their mayor,

they'll call their county commissioner, or they'll call their county

administrator or their county judge because those are the folks that

are closest to the people, and it's up to them to deliver for their

constituents, the same conditions we have here in our districts back

home.

The local political shift really is what, to me, is the fundamental

building block of the return of civil society, a civil society that had

been so badly damaged under the years of Saddam, a civil society that

has been so badly damaged by the war and then the insurgency that

followed is now beginning to take hold. And it is very effective.

Now, the question remains, will the central government in Baghdad

respond to the needs of those local officials with enough dispatch that

they are, in fact, bolstered and supported by the central government in

Baghdad? It is sometimes startling to me to think that a government so

young can already have such an entrenched bureaucracy that is slow to

act. But nevertheless, we hear some stories coming out that there is

more and more of this type of activity occurring. But again, the

stability at the local level was something that I don't think I can

tell you that I had witnessed on any of the five previous trips through

that country. All of those trips more dealt with the security that our

forces were establishing. Now we see the security that is actually

being established by the Iraqis themselves.

They had a job fair, I understand, in this part of town about a week

before and hired everything that showed up. And there were a lot of

people that came. The jobs were fairly labor intensive. Again, there

had been a lot of bombing in the city. There was a lot of concrete

littering the street that had to be picked up. The reinforcing steel

that was embedded in the concrete had to be broken out or dissected

out. There were several groups of men that were straightening out this

rebar to use as reconstruction projects. But again, the work was going

on. And the mood, this was July in western Iraq, it's 10 o'clock in the

morning and probably already 125 degrees, but the mood of the people

was truly something that I will always remember because they were doing

for themselves the types of things that free people want to do for

themselves. And it was a wonderful feeling. And you know the soldiers

could feel it, too, when they walk through these towns.

The ability to give to these young men a life ahead of them that they

wouldn't have had, they would have been conscripted into Saddam's army

and fought a war at someplace or other; they now have a life ahead of

them that really, quite honestly, their parents dared not hope for them

and now it is brought to them courtesy of the United States Marines,

United States Army.

I yield back to the gentlelady from Tennessee, and I want to thank

her for allowing me to participate in the discussion this evening.