Mr. Speaker, most of our Nation's students are on summer

vacation right now. They are enjoying camp, swimming, playing, or just

hanging out and relaxing. Some are even earning a few dollars at a

summer job.

For their counterparts in Iraq, the school break is just now

beginning. Iraqi students have just wrapped up their final exams. This

year we learned was very different from last year's exam period.

According to reports from relief organizations and a recent article in

the Christian Science Monitor, last year's tests were marred by

unprecedented incidents of mass cheating, bribe-taking, and sheer

lawlessness. In many places, Mr. Speaker, last year we heard that

militiamen and insurgents strolled casually into exam centers and

forced officials, often at gun point, to allow cheating.

Parents feared sending their children to exams. The challenges of

just getting to school, making it past militia roadblocks and suicide

attackers was one thing; making it through a day full of cheating,

intimidation and violence was quite another. One test proctor

overseeing a geography high school exam at Baghdad University told the

Christian Science Monitor,

Another Iraqi reported that militiamen stormed into an exam hall to

force proctors to let students cheat. When one headmaster objected, he

was briefly kidnapped and threatened by the militiamen until he

relented.

Students were woefully underprepared for their exams, Mr. Speaker.

One observer told the media that anguished-looking girls came out of

the exam room complaining not only about how difficult the questions

were, but also about their preparation. They said it is not fair, we

didn't even have a chemistry teacher all year, and we are being tested

on chemistry.

This year, thankfully, it appears that the neighborhoods are much

more secure. An overwhelming presence of military and law enforcement

appears to have kept interfering forces at bay during the testing. The

situation is still not ideal, however, because many students have to

travel great distances daily. But generally, the situation is somewhat,

if not a great deal, better.

Iraq has a rich educational history, Mr. Speaker. Until the years of

the first Gulf War, Iraq led the region in academics and produced

internationally recognized leaders in the fields of law, medicine and

theology. But the challenges are still great.

The Ministry of Human Rights reported at the end of June that 340

academics were killed in and around Iraq from 2005 to 2007. And

according to the Ministry of Education, 28 percent of Iraq's 17 year

olds in the center and southern part of the country took their final

exams in the year 2007, but only 40 percent passed. That was a decrease

from 2006 when the figure was 60 percent passing.

We already know that this administration gets a failing grade on its

Iraq policy. However, we don't need to condemn a generation of Iraq's

future leaders. We should be investing in schools, not in tanks and

guns. We must redeploy our troops and military contractors from Iraq,

and we must work peacefully to help with their reconciliation. Mr.

Speaker, let's send the children to school, not to war.