Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman very

much for his leadership of the Committee on Armed Services. It has

certainly been a pleasure to serve with him.

Mr. Chairman, I was in Iraq in November, and there is no question

what I saw. Iraq is a war zone in some places. We saw that when we were

on the ground. We saw the fact that there are challenges and obstacles

that face us. The gut wrenching scenes that we have seen on our TV are

without doubt something that all Americans find very difficult to

endure. But we have also, Mr. Chairman, seen what we are fighting.

I was in the Abu Ghraib prison. I stood in the execution chamber

where 80,000 Iraqis were hung. It is a life altering experience to have

been in a place where so many people were so barbarically killed.

Mr. Speaker, that story was in the

Washington Post just after I returned from Iraq. It was about 40 or 45

young high school students. We all do crazy things when we are young,

but graffiti should not be a reason that one gets executed. But we saw

that when we were in Iraq.

What most Americans are not seeing, which you so correctly note, is

the reconstruction that is taking place, the fact that electricity is

now at pre-war levels and is evenly distributed through the country,

the fact that water systems are coming back online, the fact that there

is adequate food in the country, that there is gasoline, that there is

traffic on the streets, that the major oil refineries are working, that

oil is at pre-war export level.

Mr. Chairman, this is significant success in a short period of time.

And yes, we need to get the security situation under control. Our

soldiers are doing a terrific job in some of the most trying and

difficult circumstances. Over 700 of them have paid the ultimate

sacrifice, and we must be forever thankful and supportive of their

efforts. And I would like to, if I could just have another couple of

moments, read from an e-mail of one of those soldiers because I think

it is certainly far more telling in his words than any of our words.

This is a soldier who is in the U.S. Army serving in the 16th Combat

Engineer Battalion in Baghdad. I will not read the entire e-mail. I

will read excerpts from it but it is very telling. ``The news you are

hearing stateside is awfully depressing and negative. The reality is we

are accomplishing a tremendous amount here, and the Iraqi people are

not only benefiting greatly but are enthusiastically supportive.'' He

goes on to say, ``I am not out of touch with the negative side of

things. In fact, I think my unit has it harder than many other Army

units in this whole operation. That said, despite some attacks, the

overall picture is one of extreme success and much thanks. The various

terrorist enemies we are facing in Iraq are really aiming at you back

in the United States. This is a test of will for our country. We

soldiers of yours are doing great and scoring victories in confronting

the evil terrorists.''

He concludes by saying, ``Yes, there are terrorists who wish to

strike these things down, but this is a test of will. We must win. We

can do this as long as Americans at home keep faith with the soldiers

in this war. We are Americans after all. We can and must win this test.

That is all it is.''

So, Mr. Chairman, let me conclude by saying that based on my

experience of having been in Iraq and what we knew absolutely about

Saddam Hussein, that he had started two wars, that he had territorial

aspirations, that he had used weapons of mass destruction not only

against the Iranians but against the Kurds, as you so aptly noted, that

he was funding suicide bombers, and that over 300,000 people were

killed and laid in mass graves. That is what we know.

Mr. Chairman, our world is a much safer world with Saddam Hussein in

prison, not in power.

Mr. Speaker, there were six of us in

this congressional delegation and all of us had the chance to meet with

various members of the military from our own State. So I met with 12 or

13 New Hampshire soldiers. At that time their morale was extremely

high. We knew that we were asking them to do a very tough and a very

dangerous job and they knew it too. They missed their loved ones. There

is no question about that. They would obviously prefer to be home and

not in a far away land as they are. But they also said to a man that

the reaction that they were getting from the Iraqi people was extremely

positive.

They do not all love us there. That is clear. But the vast majority

of Iraqi people are glad that we have liberated their country and they

are glad for the

fact that these soldiers are helping rebuild schools, get hospitals on

line, improve the water systems, all of the reconstruction projects

that we are asking them to do, and the vast majority of the Iraqi

people are glad that there is now an interim constitution and there is

going to be a successful handover of power on June 30.

Certainly in talking to the New Hampshire soldiers, this is precisely

what they told us and felt that if we stand behind their mission they

will finish the job and they will finish it and have done a great job.