Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for giving me an

opportunity to share this time with her.

Mr. Speaker, I have been to Iraq twice, December of 2003, shortly

after Saddam's capture, then again in February of this year. On each of

those trips, they are bipartisan trips, many of the Members, of course,

that have been to Iraq and Afghanistan and the theater of operations

are members of the Armed Services Committee. But I think many other

Members, of course, have been as well.

One of the best opportunities, Mr. Speaker, is to meet with troops,

soldiers, men and women from your own State, indeed when possible from

your own congressional district, and to have an opportunity to talk

with them and, more importantly, that they have an opportunity to talk

with us.

The one thing that I can tell you that I never heard was,

Congressman, it is too hot over here. It is too dry over here. It is

too dusty. It is too cold. I cannot sleep. I do not like the food.

Congressman, can you not use your political influence somehow to get me

out of here.

Of course, many of those soldiers, as we heard from the gentlewoman

from Virginia (Mrs. Drake) about the corporal who was serving his third

rotation in Iraq, had that premonition in harm's way, knowing that they

possibly could be paying the ultimate sacrifice. None of them are

asking us to get them home.

Last week, when the gentleman from California (Mr. Hunter) had an

hour, just as we are doing tonight, I had an opportunity then as well

to say a few words. I made a feeble attempt to recite that famous poem,

In Flanders Fields. I will not try to do that again tonight for my

colleagues, because I think all of you know it maybe even better than I

do.

But in the last stanza, though, it says, take up our quarrel with the

foe, to you from failing falling hands we pass the torch. Be yours to

hold it high, for if you break faith with us who die, we shall not

sleep though poppies grow in Flanders Field.

What they are saying, and our colleagues tonight, Mr. Speaker, have

said this repeatedly, we cannot break faith with these men and women,

2,000 plus who have lost their lives, maybe 8,000 or so who have been

injured, some, yes, severely. The worst possible thing that we could do

would be to pack up and come home, literally bring them home against

their wishes.

They would have no choice in that matter, if we listened to our

colleagues on the other side of the aisle. You know, you hear them, Mr.

Speaker, talking about how much they support the troops and all of

that. I do not doubt that. I am not going to stand up here and suggest

that they are not patriots themselves and that they do not care for our

troops and they do not want to arm them and make sure that they have

the equipment they need. I do not doubt for a minute that they support

that.

But they are using our soldiers, our brave men and women, these

youngsters that we are talking about here tonight, as pawns really to

continually criticize and undermine the Commander in Chief, the coach,

the Vice President, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State,

indirectly the gentleman from California (Chairman Hunter), because

they want to undermine this team so that they, in the next election,

are in charge.

Really, Mr. Speaker, I think we all need to realize that, that there

is a lot of politics here; and it is a dirty rotten shame that our

soldiers, our brave men and women, are being used as pawns in this

political process. God forgive them.

We owe more to these troops than that. And I feel very strongly as a

member on leave of absence from the Armed Services Committee to come at

any opportunity I have got to take a few minutes and to stand up before

my colleagues in this body and say, no, we will not forget you, you

soldiers, you men and women who maybe in high school were not the

football or track stars, cheerleaders, many of you decided to put off

going to college and enjoying the football weekends so you could serve

your country. Some of you may have been pushed around, kicked around by

the schoolyard bully who does not know anything about a fair fight, but

you had the courage to go and to serve this country as an all-volunteer

military, whether you are active duty, Guard or Reserve; and I have

seen them all in the theatre of operations at the tip of the spear. We

owe them so much, and I am proud to stand up here as part of this team

tonight.

I really compliment the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. Drake) for

leading this team and for the gentleman from California (Mr. Hunter)

and my other colleagues that we have heard from and others who are

going to speak. I am proud to be a part of this.