Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to

address my colleagues and the opportunity to raise some issues before

the American people as we deliberate in this great body, the United

States House of Representatives.

During the period of time that the House is not in session during

August, commonly referred to as the August break, seldom is it a break

for any of us, except that it changes our rhythm and we go do some

other things. Generally, we do things to reach out and serve the people

that we have the privilege and honor to represent.

This August was no exception. There were many Members who went out

across the country and across the world and went on CODELs and traveled

on their own accord and visited different places and brought back that

breadth of knowledge. It occurred to me sometime in, I will say late

May or early June, that it had been some time since I had been to the

Middle East and been back to Iraq. I had been there twice in the past,

but 12 months or more had gone by, and I had not been back there since.

As I listened to the mainstream media and began to get a picture of

what was going on over in Iraq, it was a pessimistic one. As I talked

to the troops who were coming back, particularly in Iowa, I got a

different picture. As I listened to the briefings that came from the

Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

General Myers, I got a picture that was consistent with the picture of

our military that was serving on the ground in Iraq and in Kuwait and

in supporting roles around that theater.

Yet you can listen to all the information you want to listen to, you

can read all the documents you like, you can read The New York Times

and watch the mainstream television stations, and you can surf the

Internet, but the perspective does not come until you go and put your

own boots on the ground and look the soldiers in the eye that are

serving there in that theater; those that have been there; those that

have put their lives on the line; those who have risked their lives

willingly in order to protect and preserve the freedoms that we have

here and advance those freedoms to the people who live there.

So we began to organize a trip to go during the month of August over

to Iraq. I wanted to go also to Afghanistan at the same time. I was not

able to add Afghanistan to this trip because there was an election

coming up which just took place over in Afghanistan, so they were not

going to allow Members of Congress in there to make their situation, in

preparing for those elections, more difficult.

But Iraq was still an open area that we could go into. As I looked at

the map of Iraq and the places that I had been, and in talking to the

Members of this Congress who have made, some of them, as many as four

trips or more over into that region, there were some places that we did

not have a lot of experience with, some places we had not looked at.

In fact, this Congress appropriated $18.4 billion for the

reconstruction in Iraq that included roads, sewers, bridges, electrical

generation and transmission, and the oil distribution system; to

upgrade the ports and upgrade the schools and hospitals, the kinds of

things that would put Iraq up into maybe the last quarter of the 20th

century or, if all goes well, at some time they will be into the first

quarter of the 21st century.

But, Mr. Speaker, in spite of all of the things that we have done

over there, the disaster that Iraq has been from the perspective of

allowing their infrastructure to erode over the last 35 years and a

dictator that had his power as his God, and his people at his feet, a

person who took his death and destruction to many wings of Iraq, and

starved them and kept them from getting medicine and education and

health care, and sometimes shut off their water, as he did in the

southern part of Iraq.

But we invested in their infrastructure. The American people put

$18.4 billion up front. And we said at the time it was about a $100

billion project to try to get Iraq up into the last quarter of the 20th

century, a more modern world.

And if they cannot get their country more modernized, it is going to

be significantly more difficult for them to be able to sustain the type

of government that I pray will become a constitutional republic that

represents the people in Iraq and the will of the people in Iraq.

And so the $18.4 billion was invested. And most of it was committed

to projects, and we knew that in this Congress. And we committed to the

support of that. But no one had really been over there to follow and

track the projects. And in fact I was not aware of a single Member of

Congress that had gone into Basra in the south, in the British region.

So we put that on our schedule.

And the wetland area where the swamp Arabs lived, they were over

800,000 strong. And when Saddam was finished putting down their

insurrection that began about in about 1991 or 1992, he had killed

approximately 120,000 of them and run off maybe 450,000 and there

remained maybe 200,000 of the 800,000 swamp Arabs that lived in an area

that was a wetland twice the size of the Everglades, Saddam drained it,

turned the water away from it, and forced many of them out and changed

their life.

So we went to Basra and looked at that region in the south, and the

oil region there. We went to the wetlands and flew over that in a

British helicopter and looked at that, and we went up to Kirkuk in the

north, another area that many Members had not seen.

And in that process we came back down through Baghdad, and we did

meet with a significant number of people who had been involved in the

reconstruction of Iraq. We saw project after project that was there. We

saw places where the money went. And along with that on that trip

myself, and also the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Burgess) who was on his

fourth trip, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Cuellar) from Laredo, who

was elected to this Congress and sworn in here in early January of this

year, and did not take him very long, he has made his trip to Iraq to

start things out, and I appreciate your company along on that trip.

Also

the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Dent).

And the four of us were the compadres that visited that area. And we

had an intense 5-day trip that compressed a lot of hours in Iraq and

very quickly saw a lot of the country and met a lot of the people,

including soldiers from our own districts in almost every stop,

although there were a few Texans along almost everywhere we went.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Dent).

I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for his

presentation as well as his participation. It was an honor for me to

have the privilege to go there with my colleagues and an honor

certainly to look our soldiers in the eye and the nonuniformed

people that are over there, especially the Americans but all of our

coalition people that are sacrificing and committing to make that

region a better place.

Before you step away from the podium, one thing I would like to

comment upon and that is your second picture over there to the left

that shows yourself and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Cuellar) meeting

some of the Iraqi navy. As you said, it is an 800-man navy. We don't

expect the Iraqis to have a Navy, but there is, and trained by the

Royal Marines, as you said. What impressed me as we went down that

line, they were all lined up in rank order. As I went down that path

and shook each one of their hands, and maybe there were 20 to 25 of

them altogether, every single one of them looked me in the eye and

every single one of them had some word of English that they must have

practiced all night long that they could greet me and thank us for

being there. We truly have partners and they are part of the coalition.

When we say coalition troops, we mean American troops, all the troops

that are part of that, and we mean the Iraqis. That picture brings that

memory back. It was, I think, an unusual and unique situation that had

taken place over there with our delegation that probably had not been

the case in any of the others that had traveled over there. I wanted to

point that out while I had the opportunity and I appreciate the

gentleman from Pennsylvania’s presentation.

Also, you made remarks with regard to the fact that we ran into

people from our prospective States. We sat down in the mess hall and

broke bread with Pennsylvanians and with Texans and with Iowans and

with many of the States in the union. We walked into a room one

evening, though, and everybody in that room was from Texas except you

and me. So the next time I climbed aboard a C-130 that was full of

soldiers, I walked back over there and I hollered out, is there anybody

here not from Texas? About half of them gleefully raised their hands.

You are well represented over there. I bring this up in a humorous

way to recognize that. At this point I would like to recognize the

gentleman from Laredo, Texas (Mr. Cuellar) who joined us on that trip.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman from Texas

(Mr. Cuellar) willingness to join us in that travel across to that

other side of the world, along with the gentleman from Pennsylvania

(Mr. Dent) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Burgess) and those kind of

trips build bonds that will help us reach across the aisle and work in

a bipartisan fashion beyond this subject matter and into many others, I

hope. That is one of the residual benefits of those long and grueling

days over there. It did get a little warm I understood, 128-degrees, I

know we saw that, and looking back on the pictures, did it get a little

warmer than that?

Mr. Speaker, I have seen over there on different

occasions when the temperature cooled off down to 106, I have seen the

Marines go out at three o'clock in the afternoon and play basketball in

106 temperature because it has cooled off.

I got an e-mail from a lieutenant colonel that we met over there at

Camp Arifjan, Lieutenant Colonel Gary Ace, and he happens to be an

individual that helped set up a trip a year ago last 4th of July for my

staff and their families to take a bus and go up to Gettysburg for the

4th of July with the Army historian, to travel throughout all

Gettysburg and review that on the historical day with the Army

historian.

Lieutenant Colonel Gary Ace, who was deployed to the Middle East and

met us there at Camp Arifjan at really our first stop, it was quite

ironic. He sent me an e-mail a couple of days ago that said it has

cooled off down to about 110 or 112, and it seems ironic to say so, but

it is a relief from the heat.

I would just like to go through a number of the things that I

reflected upon as I listened to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr.

Dent) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Cuellar) speak on this issue

and refer back to a colloquy, if I might.

You brought a number of things to mind that I would like to embellish

a little bit. One of them has to do with the heat and the water, and

the gentleman from Pennsylvania's (Mr. Dent) remarks in particular,

when he said bone-dry ditches. Certainly they are there and the

fighting positions that have been dug for the tanks and armor, we see

that from the air, especially in the north around the Kirkuk region,

where we were.

Yet, in the south, there are irrigation ditches down there that have

been hand dug and have been maintained for centuries. The water stands

near the top of the ditch because it is the water that comes down the

Tigress and Euphrates and it fans out in that delta. It is not sand. It

is soil. It should be productive soil, and I looked at that from the

air I do not know how many times. We finally got down on the ground and

got a chance to look, and I could never understand why you could not

see anything growing next to those ditches full of water, in the

summertime, from the air, nothing green to be seen from the air.

That is because nothing grows there in those particular regions. So

my old farm boys unlocked the key to that inadvertently when they stuck

a thermometer in the soil. We plant corn in the spring in Iowa after

the frost goes out and soil temperature gets up to 54 degrees. The soil

temperature there, about that far down in the soil, was 154 degrees,

and I am sure the broccoli I had a couple of days ago had not reached

that temperature when they served it to me in the restaurant.

So that is some sense of what kind of heat there is, that relentless

sun, and how that builds up in the soil. It would sterilize most sees.

So they have to have a different kind of agriculture than I am used to,

but maybe in Laredo, they could figure that out.

The American-Iraqi Chamber of Commerce, and the gentleman from

Pennsylvania (Mr. Dent) referenced that and I think both of my

colleagues did. It was an interesting surprise to me. It never occurred

to me that there was a chamber of commerce in Iraq, and yet to find out

that the Americans that were there teamed up with the Iraqis that are

there, and they are seeking to build a free enterprise, retail

organization that can help develop the kind of commerce that they need

to grow that city and grow every city in that country.

To walk in there and have them ask, well, we would like to have you

give a speech to the Baghdad Chamber of Commerce, now there is an

ironic twist of fate in this life that this fellow from the cornfield

never anticipated.

I looked around, and went, well, where is my interpreter; I guess I

will be willing to do that. They said you do not need an interpreter,

sir; they speak English here in Baghdad. So they set the microphone up

and gave an introduction, and we all came and sat at the table, and my

colleagues actually mixed around with them at their tables and gathered

together afterwards. I gave a little speech there in English.

I could tell they understood me. They responded, smiled and laughed

and clapped and frowned all at the right times. It occurred to me that

if they could pull that off in Baghdad, we can pull that off in the

United States of America, that English speech to the Chamber of

Commerce in many of our major cities, but just a little bit of life's

irony there.

They were open, they were welcome and curious. When that was over,

all of us had a cluster of Iraqi Chamber of Commerce members around us

with their business cards. They want to do business and trade cards and

do commerce, and they are eager. In fact, we were in the Al Rasheed

hotel. That was in the green zone, but that is the hotel that Deputy

Security Wolfowitz was in when it was rocketed a year or more or so

ago. That is one of those little ironies.

The other one that the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Cuellar) mentioned,

the odd request, and I was very curious about the judicial branch of

the Iraqi government. I had, I will say, a friend and colleague from

Iowa, the U.S. Attorney, Charles Larson, Senior, who served over there

for more than a year, and I believe it was 15 to 16 months, trying to

get the Iraqi judicial branch up to speed and trying to teach them what

we know from our rule of law in the United States. He served over there

intently and in a very dedicated way, along with his son, Major Chuck

Larson, Junior, who served as a Army Reservist in the same area.

I have seen pictures of them together, and Chuck Larson, Senior, the

U.S. Attorney, brought me back, an Iraqi flag, that flew over Baghdad

the day of their first election they had when we saw those fingers

dipped in purple. These gentlemen convinced me that we should take a

look at the judicial branch of government in Iraq. That is what

precipitated the request.

We wanted to go over to the courtroom. I wanted to sit in the

courtroom where Saddam would be tried for his crimes. I sat in two of

his thrones, and that was kind of good, kind of fitting, but I really

wanted to go sit in the chair where he was going to be, really sit in

the witness chair where people would testify against him. Because of

security reasons we could not go out of the zone, across the street and

into that building. So they brought the three judges to us.

We sat down and talked with them, and these people, they risk their

lives. They are dedicated to the rule of law. They want the politicians

out of that decision-making process. They do not want them leveraging

the rule of law decision.

I am going to shift into my interpretation of what I heard that day,

and I am not going to represent it as being a verbatim transcript of

what came out of their mouths but how I sort it

through because we're working through interpreters, but it works like.

I was curious. I wanted to know was Saddam Hussein up for the death

penalty. Could they sustain the death penalty? Was there law in Iraq in

the face of the changing situation of the Constitution and the

ratification that is pending for October 15, when he is queued up to go

on trial October 19.

I asked the question directly: Will Saddam face the death penalty?

The answer was, well, Mr. Congressman, we could not be commenting on a

case that could come before this court. It sounded like an American

judge, and it was the right answer.

Then I had to ask this long, convoluted, hypothetical question, and

when I got all the way around the Horn, it might have been a double

figure eight before I got back with my hypothetical, and then the

answer was, if someone who might not be related to this case, that

could have committed a crime similar to the one you have described that

was similar to the one we may think Saddam has committed, could be up

against a charge that would start the way they do in the United States

with death first and then life in prison and then the penalty goes on

down from there.

One of the other judges was eagerly shaking his pencil. He wanted the

floor, and as I understood this and interpreted this, it was the

paragraph that applied in that case to the crimes that I had described

only provided for one penalty and that was the ultimate penalty. At

that point, I volunteered if they could not find someone in Iraq to

carry that out, I would be willing to do so provided he had been faced

with the rule of law and had a just trial.

So I look forward eagerly for that trial to ensue, but it was an

interesting and a unique experience to have that. It presented us also

with a very neat, octagonal box of dates, that high class, and that is

one of the things that Iraq does export. They export some oil, and they

export quite a lot of dates, and those are about the only two products

that leave that country to bring cash flow back in.

The areas around Basra have a tremendous amount of oil reserves yet,

and the wells, the pipelines, the distribution system, the refineries

are not in the most modern of conditions. They need capital investment

from outside, and it needs to be upgraded into the modern and efficient

world. That is a factor of the depreciation that comes from the years

of neglect, in addition to some of the sabotage that has taken place,

but the years of neglect would debilitate that system anyway. All that

oil that they have is not coming to market as quickly as it should, Mr.

Speaker.

Then we went up to the Kirkuk area, and I think we pointed this out

in the helicopter, but we did not have very good audio there. There

were areas where there was pooled oil that was not oil spilled. It was

oil that had seeped to the top of the ground. There was that much

concentration up there.

I am told that the oil reserves down south by Basra are larger and

greater than those up by Kirkuk, but there is where I saw the oil that

had seeped to the top of the ground. There is where I saw the most

need, I think, for new drilling, new pipelines, new distribution

systems, new refineries, and up there is where they had nine pipelines

that crossed the Tigress River on a bridge.

During the operations in March of 2003, our air force went in and

appropriately cut off that transportation route by blowing the bridge.

When they did, nine pipelines, of course, were severed at the same

time. They have all been reconnected, except for a 40-inch line that

each time that they tried to lay that across the river, it would get

sabotaged.

So they awarded a contract to lay it under the river, a 40-inch

pipeline, 40 inches in diameter, so 3 feet and 4 inches in diameter.

They have been trying to bore underneath there. Now, they are going to

put it underneath in an open cut. I guess that is the kind of thing

that I am interested in in my business, but to lay that pipeline 25

feet under the bed of the Tigress River, a 40-inch line, so that if the

insurgents, or enemy, seeks to come along and detonate that, I suspect

they will not have the ability to get down there 25 feet below the

bottom of the Tigress River to blow up that 40-inch line. When it is

running, it will help the cash flow of Iraq.

Speaking of that cash flow, the things that are missing, one thing

that is missing from this discussion tonight. We have not talked about

tactics, military security. We have referenced the bravery of our

troops, the dedication, the sacrifice of our troops but not the tactics

because, and I will just say this, is that as we looked at the

condition of security in the country, as we listen to our military, our

officers and our regular soldiers that come from our regions, that look

us in the eye and speak with our accent and we know they tell us the

truth, were not concerned about whether we could hang on to that

country from a military tactical standpoint. It was never raised as an

issue. They are doing their job, and they know they are doing the best

they can with the security, and they feel in control of the situation.

It also was the case with the generals that briefed us, including

General Dutton of the British, who said I can think of no alternative

but optimism, and what would you do if you were not optimistic, if you

did not think there was a positive solution, then what would your

alternative be? Of course, there is no rational answer to that. He is

right in kind of a clear, succinct, British way.

General Casey and General Abizaid briefed us. He said the enemy

cannot win, if the politicians stay in the fight, and we had a

discussion on the way back. The question was, did he mean American

politicians or did he mean Iraqi politicians. We were kind of split

down the line on that. It was a really good, healthy discussion, and I

have just come to the point that I do not want to resolve that

question. I want that to stand out there that he meant both. The Iraqi

politicians and the American politicians must stay in the fight.

If we do that, if we send a consistent, solid message that we stick

with this till the end, that America stands with the Iraqis until the

Iraqis stand on their own, and by the way, they also advised us that a

base would be turned over to the Iraqis for their control, and that has

happened, and it has happened more than once since we have been back. I

saw the clip a couple of days ago. Several bases now are Iraqi-run

bases that we have.

Americans are stepping back. Iraqis are stepping forward. When it was

America leading operations, the combat operations, it was Americans

with Iraqis trying to lead them into combat in the early stages.

Now it is the Iraqis leading with American support, and sometimes it

is Iraqis only. And you will see they have not cracked. They have not

run. They have held together.

Far different than that first operation of sending Iraqis in April of

2004 into Fallujah. Those Iraqis were undertrained and underequipped,

and we sent those Iraqis in there with berets and pistols on their

belts and no radios and no armor, to fight alongside Marines that were

trained and equipped and had communications. We should not have been

surprised if they did not stand and fight. They were not ready. But

they are getting ready.

It is not easy to establish a military tradition. I believe, though,

that that security is coming. And when General Casey says that the

enemy cannot win if the politicians stay in the fight, that means he

has confidence in the security situation and the military situation

that is there. I do too. I believe that in the history of this country,

and probably in the history of the world, there has never been a nation

go to war with a higher class of people that are in uniform on the

ground in Iraq and in Afghanistan today.

And I say that for a number of reasons. One of them is that it is an

all-volunteer military force. I do not know if we have ever done that

before to this scale and for this duration to this scale. And we also

have so many National Guard and so many reservists that add to our

Active-Duty personnel that are extraordinarily professional. And these

Guard and reservists have other professions that they bring in that add

to the level of technical abilities, training and professionalism in a

technical age, when if it goes beyond picking up an M-16 and putting on

a

pair of boots, these guys are professionals in a lot of ways and are

specialists in a lot of ways. And I think it is the best quality that

has ever gone to the war. And every time I look them in the eye, they

convince me of that. And certainly they did over there.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot more to say about this, and I will probably

take a shot at it, but I want to take a moment to bounce this back over

to my colleagues, who certainly have their minds on what we are talking

about here, and surely there is a gap or two that my colleague from

Pennsylvania may want to fill, and so I yield to him.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues. I appreciate

their willingness to do this travel, along with my other colleague, the

gentleman from Texas (Mr. Burgess). I said when we got off that plane

that I would go make that trip all over again with you, and I mean that

sincerely. It is not always the case.

There are a couple of things that need to be fixed over there, and

one of them is the constitution. Get it ratified, have the legitimate

election, get the sovereignty established with legitimacy in Iraq so

that they can sign contracts, and get that oil developed with foreign

capital so that that capital can grow and flow and they can do business

across the world. When that happens, the enemy will have to give up and

recognize that they have lost.

While that is going on, the Iraqis are taking care of their own

security. There is light at the end of this tunnel. There is a bright

spot. And the least concern we have is whether our military is doing

their job. They are doing their job. And now free enterprise needs to

take hold to lift that burden off our military.

So I appreciate my colleagues' involvement here, and my hat's off to

the United States military and their efforts over there and all around

the world.