Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Iowa and the

gentleman from Pennsylvania, also the gentleman from Texas (Mr.

Burgess) who joined us, also. I also want to thank you for your

leadership, taking us, this particular delegation, the delegation that

you took us on took us to different parts of Iraq that other

delegations had not gone to, especially the southern part of Iraq.

I would like to talk about three things that are really what I would

call snapshots of this particular trip that I think are important to

share with us here today. The first one, of course, has to do with the

reconstruction projects. Sometimes I believe the media does not give it

enough time to focus on the reconstruction work, the schools, the

clinics, the hospitals, the electrical plants, the water plants that

are built, those types of projects that really have changed the daily

lives of the Iraqi people. When you are talking about a child that for

the first time sees a board that you can actually get some sort of

stick and write on, the blackboard, it is something they have seen for

the first time, you are changing the lives of those young Iraqi

children that will really make a big difference. I think you would

agree with me that as we are able to get them educated, as we are able

to see them, able to teach them the principles of democracy, the

principles of being able to associate, that we really are making some

changes that will transform not only Iraq but the Middle East and that

will have a ripple effect to the other countries. I think you would

agree with me on that particular point.

The other point that I would like to talk about is also the

commitment of the Iraqi people. I think the gentleman from Pennsylvania

did a great job when he talked about the Iraqi businesspeople, men and

women. All they want to do is they want to be able to have a business,

be able to secure a future for their children and for their families.

They want to be able to send their children without having to worry

about being blown up in some bomb going to school. They just want to

make sure they have a normal life just like you and I and a lot of

folks want to have. I think seeing that in those Iraqi businesspeople,

both men and women, was something that was very enlightening.

The other thing that the gentleman from Pennsylvania touched upon

which I think is important is the commitment of the judiciary. Having

an independent judiciary is extremely important. If you recall when we

were talking to the judges and we talked to three different judges,

what we call the investigating judge, the judge that will do the trial

work and, of course, the appellate judge, that gave us a pretty good

sense of the work, the very difficult work that they have to do. I

remember one of the comments they said. They said, all we want is we

don't want the Iraqi politicians to get involved in our job. We want to

make sure we do our job in an independent manner. That is important,

because think about this. Those judges are probably targeted. They are

people that do not want them to do their job. They do not want them to

try Saddam, the evil dictator. They want to make sure that they don't

do their job. But what they wanted, these jurists, all they wanted to

do was to be free from any influences and do their job. I think that

has to be admired, especially under those very difficult circumstances.

The last point that I want to mention is also the commitment of our

soldiers. When you think about it, when we were at that hospital in

Germany, we had soldiers that had been injured, soldiers that were

hurting. When we asked them what they were thinking about, the first

thing they wanted to say was, I want to get well so I can go back and

take care of my buddies and be with my buddies and my friends. That is

a commitment of the U.S. military, that even when they are down, they

are ready to get back and go back in the field so they can finish their

job and the mission because they believe in what they are doing there.

The last point that I want to bring about is, I have been in

different town hall meetings and people asking us when are our American

soldiers coming back. As I told them, and I think we all realize this,

we need to finish the mission. We need to make sure that that country

is stabilized, because we took out a power structure that was not

taking care of its people, and we cannot leave that vacuum there. We

need to make sure that we put a structure there, a structure of

government, a constitution, the rule of law, the principles of a

constitution so the people can follow the rule and the laws there. Once

we establish that law there, then I think we can start bringing our

soldiers home. I think the constitution and especially that election or

that vote on October 15 is going to be extremely important. The

elections on December 15 when they elect their representatives, that

will be extremely important. But also the building up of the Iraqi

military is important.

I remember when I started back here with the gentleman from

Pennsylvania back in January, we asked the question of the Department

of Defense, how many soldiers do we have, Iraqi soldiers? At that time

I recall it was about 120,000. We were informed last month that they

had about 180,000. Sometime by the end of the year they should have

over 200,000 soldiers, Iraqi soldiers. As one of the generals told us,

when one Iraqi soldier stands up, one American soldier can go ahead and

sit down.

It means that the faster we can build the Iraqi military security

forces then the faster they can start taking care of their homeland,

and that is extremely important.

So I certainly want to thank the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. King) very,

very much for the opportunity that he provided the gentleman from

Pennsylvania (Mr. Dent) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Burgess) to

go down there to see, first of all, the morale of our soldiers, to see

the commitment of the Iraqi business people, the jurists, the people

that want to have normal lives so they can have a future there.

Certainly I want to thank him for giving me an opportunity to see the

reconstruction projects, the schools, the clinics, the hospitals, the

water plants, the electrical plants, to make sure that

they can have the basic utilities that sometimes we take for granted.

I want to thank the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. King) for the

opportunity and certainly the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Dent),

one of my freshmen colleagues, for having an opportunity where we are

able to ask the questions and share our thoughts and ideas in a

bipartisan way. Because, again, we want to do the best thing for our

country, and we certainly want to do the best thing for the Iraqi

country over there, also.

If the gentleman does not mind me interrupting for a

second, I am from Laredo, Texas. It is one of the hottest places in the

country, 104, 105, 107 degrees, but I have to say that being there at a

place where it was 125 degrees, and I think that was a cool day

compared to some of the days, that has to tell us that our soldiers

have to go through very difficult times, but at the same time, the

morale was good. They were doing their job, and they believed in what

they were doing.

Just one minute more, and I thank my colleague for

yielding to me, Mr. Speaker, and then I will let him close after this.

Thanks to my colleague from Iowa and also to the gentleman from

Pennsylvania (Mr. Dent).

And my colleague was right, the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Dean

Popps, we all had different conversations; and if you will recall, one

of the conversations that we had was how do we get the free enterprise

system to work? How do we get foreign investment to come in? It is hard

to attract foreign investment to Iraq if they do not have a

constitution or the basic laws, if they do not have some of the basic

things we take for granted. In other words, who is the owner of the

property? Where is the title to the property? How do you borrow money

if you do not have collateral to go in?

So there is a lot of work that needs to be done. But I have a lot of

faith in the Iraqi people, and especially having had that opportunity

to talk to some of the business people and some of the folks there. It

gave me the optimism and the faith that we are doing the right thing.

And I think once we finish this mission, then we need to do everything

to bring our soldiers back safely to the United States, the men and

women from all across the United States.

And, of course, I have to say that Texas had a large delegation there

from San Antonio, Laredo, a couple of the places, New Braunfels. But

again I do want to say thank you to the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. King)

for this opportunity, and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Dent),

and of course our doctor, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Burgess), who

also went with us.

This is something that allows us to make better decisions here in

Washington, being able to go and see what is happening in Iraq

firsthand. So I thank my colleagues.