Madam Speaker, I take the floor tonight with my

colleagues to talk about the values of freedom and the men and women

who have, in very difficult places around the world, but especially in

the warfighting theaters in Afghanistan and Iraq, have fought to change

the world for freedom and, in doing so, to secure the United States of

America, and to make us a more secure Nation, and to accrue to the

benefit of generations over the next 10, 20 or 30 years.

I thought to talk a little bit about, especially following the

speakers who have deplored our policy and condemned our policy in Iraq

and Afghanistan, I thought it might be important to remind ourselves

why we are in those theaters.

Madam Speaker, I brought tonight some of the citations for gallantry,

gallantry that was carried out by American soldiers and sailors and

airmen and marines in Iraq. I wanted to read one of those. Then I

wanted to talk about what these soldiers and sailors and airmen and

marines have purchased for the United States of America. I want to talk

about the value of what they have done for our country.

This individual is Lance Corporal Aaron C. Austin. This is a

commendation, a copy of a commendation, and a posthumous Silver Star

medal, the Nation's third highest award for valor that was sent over to

our office by the Secretary of the Navy. It talks about the incredible

job that this young lance corporal, one of the guys who makes the

Marine Corps work, that is an enlisted man just a couple of ranks up

from private, but somebody who has taken a leadership position, who

leads a fire team or a squad in places like Fallujah or Ramadi.

For conspicuous gallantry and bravery in action against the enemy as

a Machine Gun Team Leader, Company

E, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, Regimental Combat Team-1, 1st Marine

Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force. That is a force that takes a

very dangerous difficult area west of Baghdad.

This great lance corporal, in an incredible firefight in which they

were attacked from many different directions, by dozens of rocket-

propelled grenades, RPGs, attacked by thousands of machine gun rounds,

and then assaulted to within 20 meters of their position, Lance

Corporal Austin supported his fellow marines, 16 of whom were wounded

in this firefight, ensured that they receive medical treatment, and

then rallied the few remaining members of his platoon and rushed to the

critical rooftop defensive position to withstand the attack. I am

quoting, ``Braving withering enemy machine gun and rocket-propelled

grenade fire, he reached the rooftop and prepared to throw a hand

grenade. As he moved into a position from which to launch or throw this

grenade, enemy machine gunfire struck Lance Corporal Austin multiple

times in the chest. Undaunted by his injuries, and with heroic effort,

Lance Corporal Austin threw his grenade which exploded amidst the

enemy, halting their furious attack.''

He did that with the last efforts of his body before he succumbed to

that mortal wound.

By his bold leadership, wise judgment and complete dedication to

duty, Lance Corporal Austin reflected great credit upon himself and

upheld the highest tradition of the Marine Corps and the United States

naval service. That is what Gordon England, Secretary of the Navy, said

in this posthumous award of the Silver Star medal to this lance

corporal, one of thousands of about 140,000 personnel who have been in

the theater consistently over the last several years, accomplishing

their mission in Iraq.

So we know that this lance corporal had incredible bravery, and I

think following especially the speakers who have criticized this

mission and said it is without value, I think it is important to talk

about the value for this Nation that this lance corporal and the other

hundreds of thousands of men and women who wear the uniform of the

United States have delivered to us through their service to our

country.

To hear the speakers who have criticized this mission talk, we

somehow have created a terrorist enemy and an insurgent enemy that,

because of our own fault, attacks America, and the way for us to hold

off these attacks, to dampen these attacks, is to be suppliant and to

do nothing and to be compliant, and somehow we have agitated and upset

the enemy who otherwise would not be intending to hurt Americans.

I am reminded that when those planes hit the United States in 9/11,

it was following two major military operations that this country

undertook. Interestingly, we took them both on behalf of Muslim

nations, protecting them from neighboring nations, from the attacks of

neighboring nations.

One good question to ask the speakers who just finished was what did

the United States do to deserve those attacks?

They further said, well, we did not find any nuclear weapons, other

weapons of mass destruction, in Iraq, and, Madam Speaker, let me tell

you what we did find and what the world found and what history will

reflect to the end of time.

I keep in my desk drawer a picture of Iraqi Kurdish mothers holding

their babies tightly against them as they lie dead where they fell on

the hillsides in northern Iraq where Saddam Hussein killed them with

weapons of mass destruction; that is, chemical weapons; that is, poison

gas; the only leader, to my knowledge, since Adolf Hitler to kill his

own people with poison gas.

Every time I hear a speech about how things would have been better if

the Americans did not show up, I pull that picture out to remind myself

that things only get better when the Americans show up, and sometimes

it is lonely, and sometimes it is tough, and sometimes we only find a

few of our really toughest, closest allies like the Aussies and the

Brits standing side by side with us. Although we now have lots of

people from those countries that we liberated, which Donald Rumsfeld

refers to as the new Europe, people like the Polish troops, who are

securing, taking part in the multinational organization, securing the

southern part of Iraq.

Sometimes we have a difficult mission, but it is very clear to us

since September 11 that if we do not change the world, the world is

going to change us. For Americans who wonder why we have not been

attacked over the last several years, why there has not been another

September 11, one answer is that we have kept the bad guy off balance.

We pursued them in caves, in mountains, at 12,000 feet high where they

thought we would never get to them. We have gotten them in safe houses

where they thought they were totally safe, and we have pursued them to

places where they never dreamed we would be able to find them. Because

of that, we have kept them off balance, and we have kept them in a

position where it has been very difficult for them to organize another

attack against the United States.

The idea that we can somehow pull back into the United States and not

pursue this war against terrorism and everything will be fine is a very

erroneous idea. The men and women of our Armed Forces who are

undertaking this very difficult mission in Iraq are accomplishing the

mission. The mission is of great value because we have discovered in

this century that when we have brought freedom to countries, those

countries have not been a threat to the United States.

We are not worried about the nuclear weapons in Great Britain's

arsenal because Great Britain is a free nation. We are not worried

about the nuclear weapons in the arsenals, for example, of France or

Israel because they are free nations. But we are worried about nuclear

weapons and the possibility of nuclear weapons being obtained by

nations which sponsor terrorism and which are themselves tyrannical to

their people.

Every time we establish a nation which is free, and it does not have

to be a perfect democracy or a perfect republic, but a Nation that has

a modicum of freedom for its own people, and which has a benign

relationship, a good relationship with the United States, and which is

not our enemy, and which will not be a launching point for future

terrorist operations, then we have achieved something of value that

will accrue to the benefit of future generations of Americans. That is

what our troops are doing. Our troops are doing something which is

worthwhile and which is good.

For my friends who read off very solemnly the names of dead

Americans, please do not give the impression that their lives were

given without value, without reason, without cause, because they were

given as a result of a very important mission. They have given great

value to our country, and we owe all of them a great debt of gratitude.

Madam Speaker, I have some other citations that I will read at a

later time. I am just talking a little bit about these great men and

women who serve our country in uniform, who I think agreed with the

proposition that what we are doing in Iraq is the right thing.

What I would like to do right now, though, is yield to the

gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. Blackburn), because she has a few

things to say about this issue, and then we have five or six other

colleagues that I would like to discuss this very important American

mission with. I yield to the gentlewoman from Tennessee.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman, and I

want to thank her for being such a great representative of those men

and women who serve, particularly coming out of her National Guard unit

and the 101st Airborne, a legendary division.

I might say to the gentlewoman that a lot was made of the movie Band

of Brothers, a story of the 101st in World War II. Of course, we have

referred to a lot of those people as the Greatest Generation, and

indeed, they were a great generation. But in reading about the exploits

and meeting with the individuals of the 101st Air Mobile Division,

which today is, in fact, getting ready and going into the northern AO,

a very difficult place, and having already served in Iraq, I think it

can fairly be said they are the greatest generation. They are every bit

as good and great and capable as the people that fought in the Battle

of the Bulge and went up those cliffs at Normandy. We are very proud of

them.

I thank the gentlewoman, and I would like to yield to the gentleman

from New Hampshire (Mr. Bradley), who has been a great supporter of the

troops and worked with us to put together a great defense bill this

year.

Madam Speaker, do not go too far in praising me. My son

did serve a couple of tours in Iraq, but just like lots and lots of

other sons.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman; and I am reminded

also, as I look down through the last several days in October, in fact

starting with October 2, Iraqi Army soldiers captured bombers in

Fallujah; October 5, Iraqi troops found and cleared improvised

explosive devices in Fallujah; October 5, Iraqi soldiers seized a large

weapons cache hidden by anti-Iraq forces in a school in Ramadi; October

8, Iraqi Army forces detained a suspected Iraqi bomber in Fallujah.

As we go down the line, we see the accomplishments of this force,

which is a young new force, because we did not want to use the senior

officers of Saddam Hussein's military. We needed to grow a force from

scratch from this population. It has been tough. It has been rough. But

these great Americans in the 2nd Marine Division, the 101st Airborne,

the 3rd ID, which is going to be replaced shortly by the 4th ID in

Baghdad, and all the rest of these tremendous troops who are serving,

as we realized after New Orleans, are people with great talents, great

ingenuity and great creativity. They can not only carry the day in a

fire fight; they can also carry the day in training other personnel.

The accomplishments of the new Iraqi military as it stands up and

takes over these areas of responsibility, like Najaf, which previously

was a very hot area, that is a reflection on the capability of our

troops, an important capability, which is the capability to train

others. And of course why would others not want to be like American

troops, because they show the greatest characteristics and character of

any troops in the world.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. Davis), who

has a daughter with a birthday today. Because of that, we have moved

him to the front of the queue, but also because he has a great

background in the military himself and really works hard for the men

and women who wear the uniform of the United States.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, I just wanted

to thank the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. Davis) as he goes out the

door because I know he has his beautiful daughter, Hannah, with him

tonight. It was good of Hannah to come over and to watch Dad and delay

her birthday celebration for a little bit.

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman

for a very eloquent statement. And I would just protest to my colleague

that I did absolutely nothing special in Vietnam, and these guys and

women who are serving in Iraq are real heroes and have performed

extraordinarily.

And I thought that was a very fitting recitation of Flanders Fields

because the last line that the gentleman recited where the soldier

says, take up our quarrel with the foe and do not fail us, was

forgotten several times in this last century because we came out of

World War I, the war that was supposed to end all wars, was so horrible

we could not envision having a successor to World War I, and we let our

guard down.

And when we got into World War II, we found that we had neglected our

Armed Forces, and it took an incredible build-up and lots of casualties

before we had the industrial might of the United States and all of our

population working and about half of them under uniform and pushing

back on the Axis powers. And then we demobilized so

quickly after World War II that when somebody asked General George

Marshall how the demobilization was going, he said, It is not a

demobilization; it is a route. We are throwing our weapons away.

And because of that we had a third-rate nation, Korea, push us down

that peninsula in 1950 and almost pushed us into the ocean before we

rallied and came back up to what is now the DMZ.

And we went through other fluctuations where we forgot that the

admonition in that poem from people who gave their lives was to be

strong and to fight for freedom and not to give up what we had. And we

now realize that in this war against terror, we have to be strong, and

we have to be forward-leaning because if we let the terrorists have

safe haven like they had in Afghanistan where they could assemble their

operations, where they could do their training, where they could gather

their allies and have a platform to operate from, then we now know they

could strike into America with that assemblage of capabilities. And

that is what we are trying to deny them.

And if we can have an Iraq that has a modicum of freedom, and we are

not threatened by free nations, and has a good relationship with the

United States, and will not be a springboard for future terrorist

operations, that is going to be good for generations of Americans

especially in this neighborhood.

So it is an important thing that we are fighting for. It is a value.

And the troops who have achieved this for us and are pushing forward

with this mission are of value, and I think that is the essence of what

the gentleman just said very eloquently, and I really appreciate his

statement.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Conaway),

who has been a stalwart on the committee and really cares about the

soldiers.

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman,

and I just want to echo his comments.

I am looking at what our young men and women are doing. The gentleman

mentioned the Greatest Generation, and they did great stuff in Normandy

and Bastone and Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima. And we had wonderful people,

wonderful troops in Vietnam.

The gentleman said I was a combat soldier. Compared to these guys, I

was not a combat soldier. I had an easy tour in Vietnam. And compared

to what these people went through, these young people who drove that

iron spear up into Baghdad, who were told when they were going, and

Tommy Franks testified before us on the Committee on Armed Services,

General Franks testified that they heard on the radio back and forth

between Saddam Hussein's commanders, ``Get ready to use the special

weapon,'' and they thought that was nerve gas, those young people were

moving ahead into what they thought was a nerve gas battlefield, and

they moved ahead.

And this maelstrom of IEDs, these remotely detonated devices, which

are very deadly, very tough, all of the conditions that they have gone

through and fought through, the massive dust storms, the ambushes and

that intense heat that the gentleman from west Texas interestingly

mentioned, that makes them, in my estimation, as good as the Greatest

Generation, and from my point of view, the Greatest Generation are

those folks that are over there right now.

I appreciate the gentleman for his support for these people. We will

keep on working. I know we will finish this mission, and we acknowledge

the value of those men and women who have carried it to date.

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I would like to yield

the balance of my time to the gentlewoman who has organized and led

this Special Order, the great gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. Drake), a

great member of the Committee on Armed Services. She has waited until

last, and she is our cleanup hitter. I yield to the gentlewoman, and I

thank her for her great work and her trips to the warfighting theaters.