Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding to me.

It is an honor to serve with him on the Committee on Armed Services.

Of all the committees in the House, if our country is at war, there is

not a better place to serve if one is too old to do anything else. But

this is a great committee to serve on. He leads this committee well,

and it is a great honor for me to learn this business, working with him

on that committee.

I went to Iraq in July, and I want to talk a little bit about that. I

grew up in west Texas. It is an arid desert. As we drove around some of

the places in Baghdad and Kuwait, the territory, the scenery was

remarkably similar to west Texas. I grew up where summers were hot, and

the weather was bad, and the heat and blowing dirt, dust storms

sometimes so bad that the street lights would come on at 2 o'clock in

the afternoon. So I am a reasonably informed consumer about hot, bad

weather.

I got off the C-130 in Baghdad on that July day and stepped out into

the meanest, nastiest weather I could have ever imagined. It was so

much worse than anything I had ever experienced in west Texas. And we

have got the finest group of young men and women, and some not so

young, leading this country's fight in Iraq against the terrorists,

doing an incredible job.

I found a group of men and women whose morale was incredibly high.

They knew they were doing the right thing. They knew they were well

equipped. They knew they were well led. They knew they were doing a job

that has to be done to protect this country. And they are accomplishing

great things.

The other side, it is almost as if they have got their fingers in

their ears and their hands over their eyes because they do not see this

march to progress that we are doing. The elections last week that we

got the official word yesterday 78 percent of the country voted for

this Constitution, an Iraqi Constitution, not an American Constitution

but an Iraqi Constitution. The march, the votes we have had, the votes

we will have in December. We are making progress.

The stories that are not told is the electricity that is flowing, the

commerce that is going on, the health care system that is reemerging,

the stock market that is reemerging. All these good things that happen

in this country get ignored, and it is partly our fault because we are

not doing a very good job. Ever since I have gotten back from Iraq,

every speech I have made, every talk I have given, I have included a

piece of why it is important that we stay the course. And I hate to use

that phrase. Let me rephrase that: that we finish this job, that we do

not break faith, as our colleague just mentioned, with the young men

and women who have led this fight.

Liberty is not cheap. It comes at an incredibly high price. It is

easy to be a hawk, but we hawks ought to know the cost. Every one of my

colleagues has been with me and others to Walter Reed and to Bethesda

to go out there and hug the necks of those young men and women whose

lives are forever changed, in some instances in a blink of an eyelash,

to hug their necks, to thank them.

I have had three casualties since I have been elected. The first was

a young man that was killed in November of last year, Brian Baker;

another young man killed this summer, Mario Castillo; a young man who

was killed from Odessa. I go see those families. There is nothing one

can say. One cannot make the pain any easier, but I go hug their necks

and tell them thank you, thank you on behalf of the country for their

sacrifice.

I was sitting that evening with young widow Amy Baker, pregnant with

twins who would not see their dad. It is a high price we are paying,

but liberty is not cheap. Through that crushing grief that only a young

widow can feel, she looked at me with tears streaming down our her face

and she said, You make sure you tell President Bush to finish this

fight. Do not let Brian have died in vain. Do not, in effect, break

faith with Brian, because he knew he was doing the right job. He knew

he was there getting something done.

The gentleman mentioned earlier the ``greatest generation,'' and it

was. My dad is in that generation. He fought World War II. He fought in

Korea. And they accomplished great things. But the men and women who

have done this fight in Afghanistan and Iraq can lay claim to having

freed over 50 million people. We can argue about weapons of mass

destruction and why we got where we are and all that kind of stuff, and

there is a place for that. Let us do that. But at its core, they have

freed 50 million people. Twenty-five million people in Afghanistan have

gone to vote, created a democracy there. It is not perfect, but they

are free today. They were under the Taliban, one of the most horrible

regimes we can imagine, where the women were chattel. If I did not like

something my wife did, I would just cut her head off, slit her throat,

and let her die on the side of the road. They are no longer in charge

over there; Karzai is. And a democracy is emerging there.

Twenty-seven million people are free in Iraq today, out from under

the jackboot of Saddam Hussein, arguably the most ruthless, cold-

blooded killer of any generation. He is in jail on trial for his life,

as he should be.

So let us do not lose sight of the fact that we have accomplished

great things, and we will stay in Iraq and get this job finished.

Let me close with a story in Afghanistan. We went from Iraq to

Afghanistan, and we went out to a forward operating base, flew out of

Kabul on a Chinook helicopter for about an hour, across a landscape

where the way of life had not changed in 1,000 years: nomadic herders,

tents, mud huts, sheep, those kinds of things. We landed in this

forward-operating base, and this lieutenant colonel in charge there

told us this story about they were on patrol one day, mounted in

Humvees, and they were going down this dirt path because there are no

paved roads in this part of the world. A young 10-year-old boy comes

running out of a village that they were approaching, waving his arms

and screaming and hollering, trying to get their attention. They

stopped and waited for him to get there. And he breathlessly told them

that the bad guys had come the night before and put a bomb in their

path just ahead of that Humvee.

So our guys dismounted, got out there. Sure enough, there was a bomb,

bad enough that it would have killed everybody in that lead Humvee.

They disarmed it. And as they were getting ready to proceed, the

lieutenant. colonel asked that young man, why did you risk your life to

come tell us this, because obviously you are a marked individual now

for having helped the other

side. The 10-year-old little boy, in that innocence of youth, simply

looked at him and said, well, when the Americans came, I got to start

going to school.

So the anecdotes are full of these types of stories all over the

place, what wonderful things our country has done on behalf of these

people in Afghanistan and Iraq. It has come at a high price, but

liberty always comes at a high price; to get it originally and to keep

it comes at a very, very high price.

I want to thank each one of those moms and dads and husbands and

wives and children tonight who grieve over the loss of a loved one, who

grieve over the injury of a loved one. I thank you. It sounds awful

trite and there is not much more we can do, but each one of us who

expresses it does it from the absolute core of our being, to tell these

families thank you so very much for your sacrifice.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for letting me participate tonight.

I appreciate that. God bless each and every one of our men and women in

uniform tonight, wherever they are serving, whatever their

responsibilities are, and particularly bless their families as they

make sacrifices that most of us do not have to make, that we are not

called upon to make.

So we simply want to make sure that every single day somebody

somewhere thanks them and their loved ones for their service to this

country. God bless each one of them, and God bless this great United

States of America.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield further, let me

say one more thing, if I might, and the gentleman said it already. A

free Iraq, an Iraq that is at peace with its neighbors is no longer a

sanctuary for the bad guys, will make the Middle East a safer place to

be; and by extension, this country will also be a much safer place, as

will the world.

So I agree with the gentleman's assessment, and we will finish the

job.