Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman and commend him for

leading a wonderful delegation to Iraq. It was my second visit. I know

it was your third, but it was my second visit. The first one was in

November of 2003. And I was taken by several things, of course, but one

that really sticks out in my mind.

As the gentleman will recall, the day we were in Baghdad, Camp

Victory, and took the helicopter rides, the Blackhawks, and flew over

the city, I think you, myself, all of our colleagues were struck by how

much normalcy, and we have to put that in the appropriate context of

course, because it is still Baghdad and it is obviously still very much

a zone of much conflict, but how normal it looked by comparison to when

I was there last in November of 2003. Then, it was obviously in

considerable turmoil, and that is probably an understatement.

But as we flew over the city that day, I remember seeing cars going

up and down the streets in the residential areas. We saw people walking

in and out of their homes. We saw the market areas that looked fairly

busy and life going on, much as you would think to see in many other

cities.

What really caught me even more later on that day was that when we

got back to our rooms that night and turned on the TV, we realized that

was the day there were these demonstrations in Baghdad. And watching TV

that night, I thought, goodness, the entire city was somehow under

siege and we missed it.

As you will recall, that was the day we sat with the generals,

Petraeus, Casey, Vines, and we were also with the new Prime Minister

Jafari, and I thought what did we miss? Because we did not see anything

really of significance and nobody brought it to our attention.

The next day we were with the Iraqi women, as the gentleman from

Nebraska pointed out, at their conference, and I recall bringing that

up to a group that I was talking to, and some that were actually from

Baghdad, and they were remarkably dismissive.

Now, Baghdad is a city, as I recall, roughly the population of

Chicago. It is a big city. And when we mentioned what about the

demonstration yesterday, it was kind of an, oh, that was Muqtada al-

Sadr's bunch. They do not amount to much. It was almost like there was

a demonstration in a Safeway parking lot back home. It was kind of, oh,

well.

I mention that not to make light of the struggles they have, because

the gentleman from Nebraska put it in an appropriate context, it is

still very much a dicey place. It is very troubled.

Security is their number one issue, and will remain their number one

issue for quite awhile.

I think what we struggle with back here at home is watching the 6

p.m. news or reading the morning paper and trying to put in the

appropriate context what the rest of Iraq is dealing with on a daily

basis. And I saw evidence in relative terms, they are starting to

experience some degree of normalcy. Life is coming back. Choices are

becoming theirs. They have some opportunity. They have that wonderful

four-letter word, hope. I do not think we can underestimate how

powerful that is.

We have all wondered at our own moment in time, are we on the right

course, maybe even the right mission. But I at least came home feeling,

because we heard it again, that this is worth it, that we do have a

plan now.

The security mission has changed, or is in the process of changing

rather dramatically from us doing it for them and them looking over our

shoulder, to them now taking, day by day, an increasingly larger role

in their own security, taking care of their own neighborhoods and their

own security, and us being more the observer and the counselor.

That is a dramatic shift in the paradigm and that is critical to our

exit strategy. If we are going to get out of there, they need to take

care of their own security operations.

A couple of other observations. When we sat by coincidence with their

new prime minister, Ibrahim Jaafari, he was in his second day of

office. I was so taken by him sitting there and invoking the beginnings

of a nation.

Remember, this is the Fertile Crescent. This is where civilization

began. This is humanity's beginnings, and we are the upstarts by

comparison. Here he is talking to us about how he would like to be the

kind of nation, Iraq would like to be the kind of nation that Thomas

Jefferson wrote about that honored life, liberty and the pursuit of

happiness. That was a humbling moment for me.

He spoke with great eloquence in his native language through an

interpreter. He spoke with tremendous courage and inspiring vision, and

asked us all to bring back a message to the American people. He told

us, We realize you did not have to send your daughters and sons over

here to do as they have done, spill their blood for us to give us a

chance at liberty, but they did. And he told us again, That is the kind

of nation we would like to be. He said, Please take home a message to

the American people from me. He said, It is a message of love, a

message of love to the American people.

That is a powerful thing, Mr. Speaker. It is a powerful thing.

I remember I asked him, Mr. Prime Minister, it seems we are at a

point where the history of the world might actually change. And he

said, We realize in Iraq that we are a bit of a candle in the darkness,

and as goes Iraq, very well may go the entire Middle East.

We do not know for sure. There is a great deal of uncertainty ahead

of us. But I submit tonight as we approach Memorial Day weekend, and

last week I was home and helped celebrate Armed Forces Day at one of

our cemeteries where Civil War veterans are buried, especially tonight

as we think about our troops still there in harm's way, as we think

about this weekend thanking those who put on the uniform, both current

as well as in the past, as we think about how different even our

opportunity is simply because they answered the call, they put on the

uniform, they went into harm's way, they took the risk, and they are

making a difference. I hold in my heart of hope that it is a dramatic

difference.

I would say to the gentleman, I remember as well our last stop on the

way home was in Germany at Landstuhl, the military hospital. We stopped

in that room with those two soldiers that the very day before had

encountered an IED, an improvised explosive device. It went off under

their Humvee and literally lifted that armed Humvee up in the air and

turned it upside down and dropped it on its top. They were lying in

their hospital beds. And I said, in my naiveté, Boy, I bet you are

looking forward to when you heal up enough and get sent back home to

the United States.

They looked at me like I must be the dumbest person in the world.

Finally one of them spoke and said, No, sir, we want to get released

from this hospital so we can go back and be with our buddies and finish

the job we were sent here to do.

It is very inspiring to go over there and witness not only the

progress that is being made, but especially the patriotism of our young

men and women.

I want to thank the gentleman from Nebraska especially because I

recall the first trip I took over there, and I asked a colonel from

Grand Junction, Colorado, what I could possibly do for him. He said, I

am committed to this mission and I can sleep at night. I know we are in

control, but please go home and tell the truth because, he said, My

wife has trouble sleeping.

So I think it is important while we recognize the challenges in front

of us and the tough days still ahead of us, we also recognize the good

that is being done and the progress that is very much being made.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for this opportunity to share

tonight and thank the gentleman for leading a wonderful trip to Iraq.