Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from

Nebraska (Mr. Osborne) for organizing this important hour tonight. I

concur with the remarks of the gentleman from Colorado and we enjoyed

your leadership. I would duly note that it took two Coloradans to take

care of one Nebraskan, but that is usually the situation we face out

West.

This, too, was my second trip to Iraq. We were there last September

as well. I have to say as we left Iraq, we had a feeling that although

the armed services personnel and the great civilians and the State

Department are always optimistic, there was a greater sense of

optimism, particularly on the heels of the election that was held at

the end of January.

I would also say, this is kind of unusual to have both Democrats and

Republicans in a special order. I am here to listen as much to my

colleagues' perspectives on our very fascinating time spent in Iraq and

Jordan, and I am eager to hear all of my colleagues' impressions.

I have a couple of things to add. The gentleman from Nebraska (Mr.

Osborne) covered many of the important interactions we had in Iraq, and

particularly when we were on the shores of the Dead Sea with the 150

Iraqi women who had traveled 2 and 3 days across Iraq. A number had

been robbed and detained along the way, but they were there because

they wanted to have a say in the future of their country.

We were also joined by the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. Jo Ann

Davis) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. Granger), and they added a

very important perspective to the conference itself. But you cannot

come home and not feel a connection to those brave women, very brave

women who were risking their lives every day.

The gentleman from Colorado (Mr. Beauprez) mentioned our trip through

Ramstein Air Base on our way home, and what a facility that is, along

with the world-class Landstuhl Hospital. We had an opportunity to see

the jointness that we hear so much about within DOD. It was seamless.

You could not tell whether the personnel in a particular setting was a

Marine, sailor, airman, or soldier. For that, the DOD is to be

commended because we are creating this synergy that in the end

continues to put us on the cutting edge.

I think it is notable also to acknowledge the important role the

Jordanians are playing in the Middle East. We were staged out of

Jordan. We spent time in Amman. We received important briefings from

our embassy staff. And King Abdullah and his government and the people

of Jordan are a key part of the efforts in the Middle East.

On the flight over and then on the flight back, as you peer out the

windows of the jet, we looked down over Israel for that short time

frame that it takes to fly over Israel, and you understand the

importance of the geography and the strategic and special relationship

we have with Israel. They are, of course, a key player in this effort

that we are all involved to stabilize and create free and democratic

systems in the Middle East.

If I could just at this point conclude, I think it is important to

acknowledge that there were different points of view in our delegation.

You have to number me as one who had misgivings about the war in Iraq

and the approach that we took. But now that we are there, my attitude

is that we have to find a way clear to stabilize the situation and make

good on our promises to the Iraqi people. In that undertaking, I think

we are neither Democrats nor Republicans nor members of other political

parties; we are Americans with a commitment to that part of the world.

The strategy to all of us is clear. It has three sections. As we have

done, we have to hold the elections and support the standing up of this

new government and it still has a ways to travel. That is well under

way.

The second, and we heard a great deal about this from General Casey,

General Petraeus and other military leaders, is to support the Iraqi

security forces, the police and the military.

The third part of the strategy is to create a more stable environment

in Iraq, which means providing jobs and electricity and clean water.

These three parts are all interactive. We have to stay committed and

support our men and women in uniform.

I would just conclude by sharing, the men and women there are

performing magnificently. Their commitment to each other, the mission,

and to the United States of America and to the world at large is

exemplary. I think we all came back the better for those interactions

with the men and women in uniform in Iraq. For that, I am deeply

grateful.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Nebraska for convening all of

us, and I look forward to hearing what my colleagues have to say.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, I

thank the gentleman.

I wanted to also acknowledge that the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs.

Biggert) joined us there, along with the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms.

Granger) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. Davis).

The other insight I had, and we shared this with General Casey and

Dr. Jafari, local governments are going to be crucial to success in

Iraq. After I returned, we had Baghdad city council members visit

Denver, and I know the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. Beauprez) met with

them. They are the people who are in charge of making sure the lights

are on, the garbage is collected and the potholes are filled and that

local services are delivered. If we do that and they do that, then the

local Iraqi people will see the benefits of self-government.

We pay a lot of attention to the national government, and it is

important, because they will be charged with the defense of the Nation

and they will present the face of Iraq to the world, but those local

governments are crucial. The civil affairs officers in our military and

the civilian non-government organizations that are there, we need to

remember that we have to support them in every way possible.