I thank the gentleman for yielding. It was a

remarkable trip. My second trip, also. As I was going over there, I was

wondering what was going to be different or if things were going to be

different from the first time I was there and kind of two historic

events took place.

As the gentleman from Nebraska will remember, we were on our way to

Iraq the first time and Afghanistan. We were eating in Ramstein Air

Force Base in Germany and it was the day that they caught Saddam

Hussein. Then, of course, the second time we were sitting in Baghdad

and got to have, I guess, one of the first delegations to meet with the

new Prime Minister Jafari. What a historic event that was. I, too, was

struck, as the gentleman from Colorado was, by his enthusiasm and his

passion for his new responsibility. I thought about the weight that is

on his shoulders as he begins to lead the Iraqi people into uncharted

territory for them.

Someone said the other day, and one of the things I wanted to talk

about was General Patraeus was briefing us. I think the first thing he

started off with was a little video or slide show that he had prepared

for us to kick off the meeting. It was about the election. He talked

about the great impact that that election had not only on our young men

and women that are over there providing this opportunity for a free

Iraq and a democracy but the impact that it had on the Iraqi people.

They were a little bit skeptical as to how many of the people would

brave to come out with all of the threats that the terrorists, the

insurgents, were going to be out on the streets and there would be a

lot of people killed. As we were watching that video, I remembered

seeing the thousands and thousands of Iraqi people that were standing

in lines for what they said were hours and hours for that first

opportunity to experience what our young men and women had gone over

and provided for them. Of course, the famous holding up their index

finger to signify that they had voted, that they had gotten to exercise

that wonderful freedom.

I also was thinking about what General Patraeus was saying about how

they are now teaching the Iraqi people how to defend their own country

and how that is an integral part of bringing our young men and women

home and how now, though, in many areas, Iraqi soldiers are primarily

providing security forces in parts of that country and we in some cases

take a secondary role but in many cases we are working alongside the

Iraqi people and how important that is.

One of the things that I tell the people back home about

understanding what is going on in Iraq, I use the analogy that if you

can imagine if you were blind and deaf at birth, you had never been

able to hear, you had never been able to see, but on your 30th

birthday, you woke up and you could hear and you could see. Imagine all

of the adjustments that you would have to go through in your life. You

would have to really learn how to live your life in a new way. That is

very much similar to what the Iraqi people are learning how to do. They

have been oppressed for most all of their lives and all of a sudden one

day they are a free people, beginning a journey of becoming a

democracy, much like this country did over 200 years ago.

I think also, as the gentleman mentioned, about that historic meeting

of these Iraqi women that had come from all over Iraq and many of them,

we sat at various tables and had lunch. They wanted to interface with

us, we wanted to hear from them, but them telling their stories of the

peril, the risks that they took coming to that meeting, that meeting to

learn how to begin to be a part of this process. I think about a third

of the people in the parliament are women. They wanted to come and

learn how do we participate. And watching them go through those

exercises of how to go to a city council or how to deal with the media

or how to introduce legislation, how to run for office, all of the

things that make this democracy great.

I think one of the things that I did go back home and say to the

people in my district as I was sitting at lunch on that day, I had

probably nine, 10 women at that table with me. And so the big question

I finally got around to, and I think it is a question that probably

some of your constituents back home ask, So do the Iraqi people really

appreciate what the Americans are doing for them? A smile came on the

faces of many, but I looked over and I will never forget this one lady,

I believe she was a Kurdish lady, and tears were rolling down her eyes.

She said, Oh, yes, Congressman, we appreciate that very much. Because,

you see, we are mothers, we are sisters, we are wives, we are aunts,

and we know there are mothers and wives and sisters and aunts in

America that have paid the ultimate price for freeing our people. She

looked me right square in the eye and said, And we will never forget.

That made a huge impression on me, because I needed to hear that and I

wanted to convey that to the American people. When I told that story

back home, they said, You know, we didn't get to hear that on the

evening news.

One of the things I think is so important as we have Military

Appreciation Month, I think the thing that as I come back and I look at

the big picture and I think the gentlemen that are in the Chamber with

us tonight that traveled, is that we understand a couple of concepts

about our military today. Number one, it is an all-volunteer force.

Everyone that we ran into in that theater was there because they chose

to be. I am overwhelmed at the dedication, the commitment, the quality

of young men and women that we have defending our country, our Nation

and helping liberate Iraq and Afghanistan.

I think one of the real treats for many of us was that we tried to

eat about every meal with the troops that we could while we were there.

Sometimes we were eating meals on the go, but many times we had an

opportunity to meet with the troops and we tried to eat with people

from our State or from our area. Of course, you know for sure that the

people from Nebraska certainly recognize the former head coach of the

Nebraska Cornhuskers. It was like traveling around with a rock star

actually, because everybody wanted his autograph and wanted his

picture. The rest of us kind of felt like we were part of the groupies

that were following him along.

One of the things that I thought was so significant, we let those

young men and women talk nonattribution, tell us kind of what is going

on, how do you feel about what you are doing, your job. I never heard

one soldier say, Congressman, we shouldn't be here. Congressman, get me

home as quick as you can. What they wanted to talk about is how they

are helping the Iraqi people and how they were proud that those Iraqi

people got to exercise that right to vote and when they saw them with

those index fingers stained, that they say, hey, you know, I was a part

of that. I helped make that happen for the Iraqi people.

One of the things, it was an idea I think I got from the gentleman

from Colorado (Mr. Beauprez), was that many of us, I think, got names

of loved ones back home. I know that I got about 30 or 40 names of

young men and women that gave me their loved ones back home, and so

they gave me those numbers. It was so fun to call back and say, I was

with your son, I was with your husband and talked and tell them how

proud that we are of them.

But what it did remind me, and I think it reminds everyone, is that

when these young men and women are serving our Nation, their families

are serving right alongside them. I had been over to thank their

husband or their wife or their brother or their sister or their son or

their daughter, but it also gave us an opportunity to thank the parents

and the wives and the husbands of those young men and women serving. It

was a great trip. I enjoyed it so much. I thank the gentleman from

Nebraska for including me. I look forward to going back with him soon.