Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a tribute

to the leadership of the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. Osborne) that we

would be joined tonight with Members of the other side of the aisle. We

went to Iraq not as Republicans, not as Democrats, but as Americans who

are interested in our troops and interested in the fate of that

country. It is certainly a tribute to both the gentleman from Tennessee

(Mr. Davis) and the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. Udall) that they are

joining us tonight. There is precious little of this type of bipartisan

cooperation and certainly it is a pleasure for me to participate in it

tonight. It is important that when we think about the ongoing

hostilities in Iraq, that we see both sides of the picture. I think we

had the opportunity 6 weeks ago to see an awful lot of positive

developments in Iraq.

Since then, I think we all have seen the news on the television and

the spate of bombings and the threat that the insurgents are trying to

bring down a newly elected government. That is horrifying, especially

after the reaction that I think all six of us got in Iraq, which was

positive, which is that we are starting to see light at the end of the

tunnel, that the Iraqi security forces are doing much better in their

ability to operate. Yes, they have a ways to go. We need more of them.

There are about 152,000. We need about 300,000. But they are doing

better. They still have to be able to operate independently, with a

command and control structure, but General Patraeus explained to us how

that is on its way, that it cannot happen overnight.

The Iraqi women that we met, and perhaps this was the most telling

thing when they talked about the Iraqi security forces, said that the

Iraqi people are beginning to be able to trust the Iraqi security

forces much more. That was so important to me, to be able to hear it

straight from the horse's mouth, the Iraqi women. These are women that

had endured so much, not only to be there but they had endured 30 years

of horrifying events. I will touch on that in a moment.

As the others who have spoken tonight have said, we also had the

chance to talk to the new leadership, Dr. Ibrahim Jafari, the newly

elected Shiite prime minister. One of the most important things he

stressed to us is the need for a permanent constitution. The Shiites

are a majority in Iraq, but Dr. Jafari recognized that in order for

this experiment in Iraqi democracy to be successful, they will have to

reach out to the Sunnis and to the Kurds. He promised us that they

would do that. That is occurring now as we speak. Unfortunately, we are

also seeing the resistance coming from some disaffected Sunnis that are

trying to bring down the government. That is unfortunate.

But most Sunnis, working with the majority party, the Shiites in

Iraq, I believe will be able to bridge these differences working with

the Kurdish people and the new president who is also a Kurd, Jalal

Talabani. It was a good experience in meeting with Dr. Jafari.

One thing that needs to be stressed, and I think we have all touched

upon this, is the morale of our forces. We all had the opportunity. The

gentleman from Texas (Mr. Neugebauer) met people from Texas, the

Colorado contingent, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. Davis),

certainly from Nebraska, I from New Hampshire, we all had an

opportunity to meet troops from our home State. I was struck by their

commitment to their mission, by the fact that they said their living

accommodations were getting better, not just the food and the housing

but that they felt as American soldiers, men and women, that they were

making progress, and they saw the progress, they saw the fact that the

vote had gone off successfully, that a government had been formed, and

they felt part of this historic change in Iraq, and they reflected that

to all of us.

One thing that as we approach Memorial Day that I think is critically

important for all Americans to realize regardless of how we may feel

about the policy of the Iraq war, it was highlighted by a wall that was

at the base in al Ansar that we saw. That wall, as I recall, had about

40 letters from a second grade class in Texas.

These were letters from American school children thanking, thanking,

our troops for their sacrifice. And I asked the captain, What does this

mean to the men and women that are here in Iraq? And he said, It

inspires us every day to get out and do our job; every day we know that

the American people are behind us.

So whether it is school children throughout our country, whether it

is supporting the families who are still here, the spouses, the

children, the parents of our soldiers, we can never forget the

sacrifice that our families are making; and certainly this second grade

class from Texas and millions of other classes from around the country

that have sent letters to our troops, not just in Iraq, but Afghanistan

and all of the countries where our troops are fighting and winning the

war on terrorism, how important our show of support is for their

efforts.

And, lastly, let me, like others, touch on the experience that we all

had in meeting with the Iraqi women leaders, members of parliament, the

new ambassador to Egypt, the acting health minister, and many others.

They were Shiites, they were Kurds, they were Sunnis. But they were

Iraqi women who had endured so much, unspeakable horrors.

At one point in the lunch we were having, we were asking questions of

each other. And finally they asked me to introduce myself after about

45 minutes. And I talked a little bit about my family and my situation

in New Hampshire, and I said that I was from the ``Live Free or Die''

State, and I think my colleagues all remember that every time I

repeated my State motto, this really resonated with the Iraqi people

because ``Live free or die'' means something in New Hampshire, it means

something in America, and it means something in Iraq.

So then I went on to tell them about my first experience in Iraq

where I had gone to the Abu Ghraib prison. We have all heard about the

abuses there, and we are dealing with those abuses as a country, as

well we should. But what I saw, and perhaps some of my colleagues have

seen, was what happened to 80,000 Iraqis who were executed in that

prison.

And I was describing this to the Iraqi women, and I realized that

they were all starting to cry. I did not really know what to do because

it had been such a horrifying experience to me. And then one of them

said, My husband was executed in that prison. And another one said to

me, My brother was executed in that prison. And I knew at that point

how much they had endured on a personal level of the suffering, of the

depravity, of the barbaric nature of that regime.

The most important thing, I think, for Americans to realize and the

whole world to realize is the tenacity and the singleness of their

purpose, that they will rebuild a country if the world will support

them in that effort. And that is important for us to remember as we

approach Memorial Day, that they have the will to succeed if we have

the will to persevere with them.

I thank the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. Osborne) for yielding to me.