Madam Speaker, in roughly 1 month, general elections

will be held in Iraq. I would like to comment on my perceptions as to

what I have seen as I visited there on three different occasions and

talked to many of our soldiers. Soldiers often comment on the fact that

there are really two wars, apparently, going on in Iraq. There is a war

that they see on CNN, and they watch cable television regularly. Then

there is the war that they are actually fighting.

Apparently, in their minds, at least, there is some discrepancy

between the two versions. They have asked me to come back on occasion

and talk about what they see happening over there.

First of all, in the area of education, 746 schools have been

renovated, and these projects have all been completed; 36,000 teachers

have been trained since the war started; attendance in the schools is

up by 80 percent, and most of these increases are young women, who are

attending school for the first time.

In the area of health care, 17 new hospitals have been built; 3.2

million children under the age of 5 have been vaccinated for the first

time, 97 percent of all children have been vaccinated; 700,000 pregnant

women have been vaccinated; and 142 new clinics are currently under

construction or have been completed. It is certainly not perfect, but

it is an improvement.

As far as the economy is concerned, many small businesses and

entrepreneurial activities are springing up. As you fly over Baghdad at

tree-top level, you see satellite dishes on practically every building.

They were not there under Saddam. Newspapers are springing up. Many

news outlets that were not there are present today. There are 1 million

more automobiles in Iraq today than under Saddam, and Iraqi income, of

course, has increased as well.

As far as a political process, as many people know, the elections for

a constitutional assembly were held last January, and the turnout

exceeded expectations. The constitution was written in August. The

constitution was approved about 2 weeks ago, October 15, with a 78

percent approval rating. A new government will be elected December 15,

and the Sunnis have been kind of a wild card here. They boycotted in

large numbers the first election, and it appears that they will

participate fully in the December 15 elections.

As far as an exit strategy, you often hear that there is none. Yet at

the present time 210,000 Iraqi security forces have been trained and

equipped as of this date. The goal is 270,000 total, so we are more

than three-fourths of the way toward our goal. There is no shortage of

recruits. Every time they put out a call, more people volunteer than

they have room for in the Iraqi army.

Some areas of Iraq are totally controlled at the present time by

Iraqis with no American backup. The intent is to draw down U.S. troops

as Iraqis are prepared to control their own destiny. That is the exit

strategy. We are moving in that direction. It is certainly not done

yet, and we will be there for some time.

The next few weeks will be violent before the elections. It will be a

very difficult time. Some agree and some disagree that we should have

gone into Iraq, but we are there, and this is an irrefutable fact. The

observation from a soldier in Kuwait is something I would like to pass

on at this time. He said this: We pull out and we pull out prematurely,

three things are going to happen.

Number one, every soldier who died or was wounded will have been

sacrificed in vain. Currently the morale of our troops is generally

very good. They do not want to leave prematurely. Many of them have

reenlisted.

Secondly, if we pull out early, Iraqis will die in large numbers.

Tens of thousands and possibly hundreds of thousands will die. We will

have broken a promise, and this is what happened after the first Gulf

War. We cannot let the Iraqi people down at this point.

Thirdly, if we pull out prematurely, at this point terrorists will be

encouraged worldwide. They will be shown that terrorism does work. The

U.S. will become an even bigger target, and our population will be

under a greater threat.

This is a difficult and a dangerous process. Nothing is certain at

this point. It is difficult, but many positive things have happened. I

think it is important that the American people be aware of these

issues.