Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, several of my colleagues

and I journeyed to Baghdad and returned, and I would just like to make

a few observations. Obviously, this is a very intense time in Iraq as

the elections approaches, but I had three observations that I think

were somewhat meaningful.

Number one, we were tremendously impressed by the morale and the

attitude of our soldiers. One would say, well, how in the world could

that be? It is 110, 115 degrees every day, body armor, helmets, very

difficult work, some danger, considerable distance from family. I guess

the main reason that we felt we were observing this was there seemed to

be a very strong sense of mission, a very strong sense of purpose and

accomplishment.

One thing that I often heard from the soldiers was this: they said,

you know, it seems like there are two wars over here. There is the one

that we see on CNN: we see the IEDs, individual explosive devices; we

see the car bombs; we see the beheadings.

But the part of the story that we think is meaningful is not being

told. They said, the thing that we see is that in education, 2,500

schools have been renovated, 30,000 teachers have been trained, there

is an 80 percent increase in attendance in schools, and most of that is

girls who have not been going to school at all under Saddam Hussein.

Health care, 240 hospitals operating, 1,000 clinics, 90 percent of the

children are currently vaccinated, and this again is something that had

not occurred before.

So health care has improved. Infrastructure is getting better. Water

supply, power, sewage. It still needs improvement, but it is doing

better, and of course the provisional government and the June 30 hand-

off. So what they were saying is please make sure the people in the

United States understand that there is more going on than what many

times they are hearing about.

The second thing that I thought was somewhat optimistic is that the

Iraqis are providing more and more security. The goal is to train

270,000 Iraqis; 135,000 police; 100,000 Army and National Guard; and

then 32,000 border guards. Right now we are a little bit more than

halfway there. We are making excellent progress.

So in Najef, not long ago, Iraqi troops led the charge and, along

with Ayatola Sustani, calmed a very dangerous situation. So we see

progressively more and more operations with Iraqis taking the lead.

The third thing that I would say that was very encouraging to me is

that in talking to the Iraqis, they very much want the elections. If

the Iraqis do not care or if they do not want elections, then obviously

the whole thing that we are doing is for naught. I talked to an Iraqi

woman today and I asked her, I said, are the Iraqis willing to line up

and take the risk on Election Day, and she said, without question we

will have a tremendous turnout.

So Prime Minister Allawi told us last week, and this was confirmed on

our trip, that roughly 15 out of 18 provinces are sufficiently secure

right now to maintain elections, and the other two or three are coming

around. Splinter groups who have been primarily terrorist-oriented in

the past are now becoming politically active. They are beginning to

realize that if they do not become part of the political process, they

are going to be left out. So a lot of things are changing very rapidly.

Iraqi women will tell you this, that they see their future as being

much brighter. So when there is hope, I think there is a good chance.

So if we pull out, as many are currently advising, we will tell the

families of the 1,000 soldiers we have lost that they have died in

vain, and I do not think we can afford to do that. Secondly, we will

have broken our promise to the Iraqis. We have told them that we will

absolutely not do that, and many of them have trusted us. So if we pull

out now, literally tens of thousands of Iraqis are going to lose their

lives and will be sacrificed because of our duplicity.

Thirdly, I think if we show vulnerability as a Nation; and if we show

that we do not have resolve and that we will not see something through,

and if terrorists can steer our agenda here, we become more and more

vulnerable to terrorist activities. So I do not think that we can

afford to do this.

So at this point, as I see it, and I think some of those who were on

the trip would also say that the only viable exit strategy is to win.

When we say to win, we mean that we will stay the course until the

Iraqis themselves are able to secure their country and be able to

govern their country. This is not going to be easy, but we think it is

doable. We were encouraged by what we saw.