And I appreciate the gentleman for yielding.

Indeed, I did take my sixth trip to Iraq in July, a weekend trip. And

believe it or not, it is possible to make a weekend trip to Baghdad.

I've got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I was concerned. The 10 months

prior to my going, we've had just a litany of one bad story after

another come out of Iraq, and I was concerned about what I was going to

find.

The story is a mixed story. I suspect next week when we do hear the

report from General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, we'll get a mixed

report.

But I've just got to tell you, it was a vastly different condition on

the ground that I saw than what I had been led to believe I would

encounter with reading the stories in the paper.

Now, just over a year ago I was there. There's a lot that's changed

in Iraq. There's a lot that's changed here at home since that year's

time. Concerned about what I would find, and again, made the trip over

a relatively condensed time frame, we left for Baghdad really early in

the morning out of Kuwait City on a C-130.

And Mr. Speaker, you always hear people criticize us on these trips.

They say, well, you just saw what they wanted you to see. They just

trotted out the dog-and-pony show for you and you bought it.

But the reality is you get on a C-130, 3 or 4 or in the morning, it's

already 90,

95 degrees. You're put in the back of a C-130 with troops being moved

into one theater or another. And they don't pick the guys that happen

to show up at the airport that morning. You go with whoever is going in

or out of the country.

Now, when you're on the plane, it's just too noisy and hot and dark

to talk. But as the plane landed when we got to Baghdad and they bring

the engines down and you can actually hear again, the soldiers that

were around became anxious to talk to me when they found out who I was

and why I was there.

Most of them, it was their second or third rotation. Their

deployments had been extended to 15 months, and most of the guys that

were on that plane wouldn't see home again for almost a year.

Since February, there's been a big change in how they do their job.

They're placed alongside Iraqi soldiers in smaller groups, both in

Baghdad and out in the provinces, and they're no longer attached to

this larger and more protected military base. And clearly, they're

seeing a greater amount of activity and, to a large degree, that

concerned them.

The fellow that was just right across from me I actually spoke with

in some depth, and he'd been reading a book all during this hot plane

ride for 2 hours from Kuwait City into Baghdad.

He obviously voiced a concern. He wondered if the General Officer

Corps even knew what they were up to, even knew what they were doing.

He wondered if they knew what they were up against. He did complain

about the long hours. He complained about the heat. He complained about

being separated from his family.

Mr. Speaker, he'd been reading a book intently while we were on the

plane. And I asked him about this. I said, What book are you reading?

And he said it was a book about philosophy. So I naturally assumed that

at the end of his deployment he'd be coming home to perhaps finish

school, or maybe he had a job waiting for him, and I asked him about

this. And he looked at me very strangely and said, I just signed up for

five more years.

You know, it's that kind of ambiguity, it's that kind of enigma that

confronts you when you're in Iraq. Things just don't add up the way you

think that they might.

Now, we got off that plane and we all went our separate ways. We were

taken into the town of Ramadi. And a year ago, there would have been no

way to go to Ramadi. We visited with the mayor.

And again, as Mr. Akin just alluded to, the good news story coming of

out of Iraq is the building up of those institutions of local

government just like we have here in this country, county governments,

city governments that are doing the really hard work. They're doing

reconciliation at the city level, at the provincial level. If it takes

the central government a while longer to catch up with them, I've got a

lot of hope based on what I saw on the ground.

But what really gives me hope is what I saw in the market in Ramadi.

Look at the faces on these two young guys. We were just out there

walking in the market just in an area that a year ago it had been so

dangerous no one in their right mind would have taken us there.

Let me just show you this other picture that gives you some idea of

the types of thing for sale in the market. Again, it looks like a

typical marketplace anywhere you'd find in the Middle East, Jordan or

Saudi Arabia. A lot of stuff for sale. I don't know where the stuff

comes from, but a lot of stuff for sale. And again, clearly the people

who were there did not look to be particularly stressed or aggrieved.

They looked half curious and happy to see us. In fact, the kids were

starting school in a couple of weeks and would come up to us and ask us

for pens and quarters. Apparently our military had given them a good

deal of coaching on the kinds of things you can get from a codel as it

walks through town.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude here and leave the remaining time to my

friend from Texas. I will say I do believe it is in America's interest

that we finish the job. The next 30 years will look starkly different

if we're successful versus if we're a failure.

I will yield back to the gentleman from Tennessee.