I thank the gentleman for yielding, and the notation

made of the exception of the last 3 or 4 minutes, and I will do my best

to accommodate that.

I get asked by a lot of people, why in the world did you make this

sixth trip to Iraq in July. You knew what was going on there. What did

you expect to see that was going to be different? But I knew we had

today's hearing coming up. I knew it was coming down the pike at us

fairly fast. I knew the news hadn't been good out of the country of

Iraq for about the 10 months before July. I had been in Iraq in July of

2006, had thought there was some measure of success that was beginning

to be felt then, but then we had August, September and October, pretty

rough months by anyone's estimation. And so I will admit, I was

significantly pessimistic when we made that trip back in July.

But I knew we were going to hear from General Petraeus today. And I

knew that every time I had been to Iraq before I came away learning

something that I hadn't seen on CNN or even Fox News. There was

information that can only be available to you by going for yourself and

looking for yourself, feeling, touching, smelling the situation on the

ground.

Now, I get a lot of concern from people when I go back home in the

district who say, yeah, that's all great what we're doing for Iraq, but

we don't know that we care that much about the Iraqis. I will tell the

citizens of this country, it is in America's best interest that we

succeed. Where we cannot be successful in Iraq, and you've heard other

people talk about it this evening, let's be honest, it's not a

political party that loses a car, it's not a Congress that loses a war,

it's not a President that loses a war, it is a country that loses a

war.

And again, I reiterate, it is in America's best interests that we be

successful because an Iraq that is stable, an Iraq that is able to

participate in its own security, an Iraq that is able to act as an ally

or partner for peace in

the Middle East, what a difference 20 years from now looks like with

that scenario compared with an Iraq where we leave prematurely,

descends into chaos, is enveloped by Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, you

name it. And the chaos that has been evident in Iraq in the past

suddenly envelopes the entire Middle East, with a country like Iran

emerging as the victor.

Now, the surge or the reinforcements that we talked about really

since January of this year, I think it's probably worthwhile to just

touch on the timeline that we've been through this year. Remember, it

was January 26, not that long ago, that General Petraeus was

unanimously confirmed by the Senate, sent off with a pat on the back

out the door, and no sooner had the door closed behind him when the

Senate began sniping and criticizing his activity. He hadn't even

gotten into the country yet.

Ambassador Crocker. You heard my friend from Georgia talk about the

wonderful resume of Ambassador Crocker. Many of us who were here in the

spring of 2003 remember Ambassador Crocker as one of those stalwarts

who came at 10:30 every morning and briefed us in the Armed Services

Committee room, whether we were members of the committee or not, came

with General McCrystal and briefed us every morning as to what was

going on on the ground in Iraq. And I was really very grateful to

Ambassador Crocker for having taken the time to do that so meticulously

when the active combat phase was going on.

On May 26, we finally passed the emergency funding and Bush signed it

into law. Mid-July, we took a trip over to Iraq. Again, I didn't know

what I was going to see. I was prepared to accept bad news if bad news

was all we were going to find. But the reality was the city of Ramadi,

which was absolutely off limits to me in July 2006, that's the first

place we went. After we landed in Baghdad, we got on the Black Hawk

helicopter and immediately went to the city of Ramadi, had a briefing

by the Second Marine Expeditionary Force, had a briefing by Colonel

Jacobsen there on the ground. After the briefing, instead of just

shaking hands and parting ways, we went downtown. We went to the

market. We walked through the market. We talked to children in the

market. We saw things for sale in the market. We talked to a man who

was concerned that one of our JDAMs fell on his building. And I will

tell you, it doesn't do much to drive up a deal if that happens to your

building.

But nevertheless, we had a very one-on-one, close-up discussion with

Iraqis on the street in Ramadi. And a year ago, no one in their right

mind would have taken a Member of Congress to Ramadi; it was far too

dangerous.

Now, you can imagine how gratified I was. We got back. We got a call

from the White House, and we were invited down to present our findings.

I even tried to downplay it a little bit; well, there's some good news,

but we've got to be careful because we've had nothing but bad news out

of Iraq. And then a week later, two guys from the Brookings

Institution, a place that I don't normally agree with, two guys from

the Brookings Institution come up with an op-ed that says, this is a

war we just might win.

Throughout all of that, for the last week we have seen the steady

drumbeat of efforts to undermine the credibility of General Petraeus

and Ambassador Crocker prior to their hearing today.

Today, we did have the House hearing, tomorrow there is going to be

the Senate hearing. Arguably, there was not a whole lot new that was

discussed because everything had been leaked in the New York Times in

the weeks leading up to the hearing. And General Petraeus did say that

he expected there was a possibility he would bring one of the Marine

units home before the end of September, and that there was reason to be

optimistic if things continued on this course, there was reason to be

optimistic that other troops could be brought home early, beginning in

December, much prior to fulfilling the 15-month rotation that was

originally posed to them.

That would be good news. I hope he is correct in that. I hope he is

successful.

The data collection that went on leading up to this briefing, always

for the last year you can pick data points out of the air wherever you

want to make them. But the discipline to evaluate the trend lines is

what is so critical. Today we saw those trend lines established and the

data meticulously collected before those trend lines were established.

Not all of them showed good news. But a preponderance of them show a

positive effect that has happened in Iraq since our reinforcements

arrived.

None of us can predict what is going to happen beyond the end of this

year. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, as we sit here tonight on the eve

of the anniversary of 9/11, I am terribly concerned about what might

even happen tomorrow. None of us knows what tomorrow holds. Didn't we

learn that lesson Monday, September 10 in 2001 when it seemed like

there just wasn't much happening in the world? We have another tape

from Osama bin Laden. We are told there is another one out there. What

does all this mean? None of us knows for sure. But I reiterate that we

are living in a very dangerous time. Now is the time for us not to show

weakness and retreat from Iraq. Now is the time for us to redouble our

resolve, make certain that we are successful, and for every one of us

to give thanks that we have leaders like General Petraeus and Ryan

Crocker to lead us in this perilous time.