Mr. Speaker, I came today to talk about the great

privilege I had just 2 weeks ago to lead a congressional delegation to

Iraq. It was my very first trip. I did not know what to expect. But as

we approached the airport and you could look down, all you saw was very

brown, very barren, very flat land. I realized as we were coming into

Kuwait City that we had done a very, very poor job as elected leaders

to tell the American people what our military men and women are doing

in Iraq, why they are doing it, the incredible progress that they are

making and the consequences not only to Iraq and to the Middle East, to

the U.S. but to the entire world if they were to fail.

Since this was an armed services trip, our mission was to meet with

the troops, to meet with their commanders, to learn more about their

mission, to see some of the technology that they are able to use to

help them, to hear of their successes and to hear of the problems or

things that we as Members of Congress could help them with.

The very first person that I met was a young man on that airstrip in

Kuwait City as we were waiting to board a C-130. As I was talking to

him, he looked up to me and he said,

And he

walked away. What an overwhelming feeling that that was from somebody

probably in their very, very early twenties.

That same evening as we had dinner with troops from Virginia, and I

would like to take a moment and thank the Peterson Foundation and AT&T

who provided us with telephone cards to give to our very brave men and

women so that they could call home, but there was a young woman from

Virginia who looked me straight in the eye and I already knew this, I

had already sensed it and felt it, but she looked at me and said,

I had no

answer for her, except to make the commitment to her that we would do

that.

Please understand that there are very huge successes that have been

made in Iraq. We hear the stories, and any story is one too many, about

our men and women who are injured or killed by the IEDs. The stories

that we do not hear are about how successful our military men and women

have been at finding these devices, at exploding them or disarming them

before someone is hurt.

We watched the Predator land on film as it has been patrolling around

Iraq and certainly been a great asset to the military. We talked about

civil things, such as the need for electricity, the talk about

blackouts, and what we learned is that, yes, there are blackouts in

Iraq but the biggest reason is because of increased demand for

electricity. I did not know that Iraqis were out buying TV sets and

refrigerators and other appliances and have greatly increased it. I was

not aware of the condition that Saddam Hussein put his own country in

and that for 6 years prior to this conflict that he was allowing raw

sewage from Baghdad to flow into the Tigris River.

During Saddam Hussein's reign, there were no independent TV stations.

Today, there are 44. No independent commercial radio stations. Today,

there are 72. No independent newspapers and magazines. Today, there are

100. We also do not talk about the huge successes of the Iraqi security

force and the fact that we as Americans have turned over 24 fully

operational bases to the Iraqi government.

We flew from Baghdad to Balad air base by helicopter. We flew very

low and very fast. I was surprised, first of all, to see how green the

nation was in that area, and more surprised to see the people who were

working those agricultural fields who waved to that helicopter as it

went by. When we landed

in Balad, I talked to General Frank Gorenc, who used to be the

commander at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia and whom I know, and I

said, They laughed and they said,

I believe that these young men and women who are serving in Iraq are

true American heroes. I believe that history will give them a name,

just as they named my father's generation during World War II. I do not

know what that name will be, but I can assure you that these young men

and women understand the threat to our world but they need to know that

America supports them and that America understands their mission.

I told them stories from back home about a presentation at Sea World,

about what a great job they were doing and about how Americans stood

and clapped. And how in Ireland on our way back Marines entered that

airport and they stood and clapped.