I appreciate you holding this very important dialogue

about Iraq. I appreciate your taking this Special Order to share what

many of us have seen in Iraq.

I want to say that I go where the truth takes me, even if it counters

something I believed and thought. I just go where the truth takes us.

There is no question that 2003 was not a good year. When we attacked

Iraq, there was tremendous euphoria and then we made mistake after

mistake after mistake. Those have already been discussed. Half of 2004

wasn't particularly good, but when we transferred power to the new

Iraqi Government, the Iraqi people, we began to see noticeable changes.

And then 2005 was a pretty amazing year. They had an election to

create a government that would form a constitutional convention. They

met the deadline to form a constitutional convention. They wrote their

Constitution and adopted it in a plebiscite throughout Iraq, and then

they elected a government under that new Constitution. So 2005 was a

pretty astonishing year, a very successful year.

They basically had 18 months of progress from the deep hole we dug in

2003 and part of 2004, and then came 2006. It took them 4 months to

establish a government, and then the Maliki government didn't do the

kind of heavy lifting we were hoping they would do.

I took a position that I took then and hold today, that we need to

prod the Maliki government. I believe the timeline is important, but

not a timeline based on basically pulling the rug out from them and

just leaving. We attacked them. They didn't attack us. We got rid of

all their army, their police and their border patrol. We left them

totally defenseless in a country where all their prisoners were let

out, and then we would walk away? The neighbors to Iraq said we may not

have wanted you to go in, in fact, said we did not want you to go in,

but it would be an outrage if you left. And so now this is where we're

at. Do we leave now? Do we leave sometime in the future? What do we do?

I think that what we knew we needed to do was have a new Secretary of

Defense. That's what the American people asked. That's what some of us

wanted to see happen, and we got someone who wasn't tied to the past in

Mr. Gates. Then I think all of us were hoping and praying that Mr.

Petraeus would be the general in charge to serve under Secretary of

Defense Mr. Gates. General Petraeus who had been there three times,

been involved in this effort, and knows Iraq cold and knows the

insurgency concerns extraordinarily well, given that he spent a year of

his life just studying it. He basically said, give me more people to

see what we could do in the greater Baghdad area. It was referred to as

``the surge.'' He said give me more troops; we need to establish some

security, and then we'll reappraise. And now we're coming to that

point.

When I was there in December last year, they said we have lost Anbar

province. We've just given up on it. We have no troops. It's totally in

the hands of al Qaeda, and it sounded to me like a mini-Afghanistan. I

go back in April. He said, we're winning Anbar province. I said, what

do you mean you are winning Anbar province? You told me you'd given up

on it. Well, the Sunni tribal leaders came to us, said we want al Qaeda

defeated, we want your help, come on in and we will work with you.

That's what happened. It was a model that wasn't part of the surge,

but then when I went back in May, he said the surge is working; we're

starting to see some progress from the full complement in July. And

when I went back this past August, they said the story is the surge is

continuing to go in the right direction, and we have won Anbar

province, and we are winning some of the other Sunni provinces. The

tribal leaders have bought in to what happened in Anbar and said we

want the same thing.

It's almost like, to some of my colleagues in this Chamber, that to

say the surge is working and to say that there is progress, it's like

they're angry and disappointed: how dare you say that. You had Mr.

Baird, a Democrat, who voted against going into Iraq, who said what he

saw, and he goes where the truth takes him, was that there is progress,

and it would be a mistake to leave prematurely.

So this is what we're going to be debating. Do we leave right now or

leave by April of next year or do we maintain the surge a little

longer? We know we're ultimately going to bring a good number of our

troops home. We can't maintain that surge, and Mr. Carter's right. I

have heard more of my constituents who serve in the military and those

who don't, who I've met in Iraq. They said we could accept 12 months.

Fifteen months is just too much. And I've had parents, they've come up

to me, and they never did this in the past. They kind of put their arm

around me. They whisper in my ear practically, and they say, my son or

my daughter is in Iraq and they're exhausted.

We know that we have to reduce the workload of these troops. We have

to start to tell Prime Minister Maliki what he needs to know, and I'll

conclude by making this point: we can lecture Prime Minister Maliki all

we want. We can do that if we don't mind being the biggest hypocrites

around. So why would I say that? Well, we say, why don't you Sunni,

Shias and Kurds get your act together, and I'm thinking, Republicans

and Democrats can't even work together on this.

We have asked our Democratic colleagues to allow for some amendments,

bipartisan amendments, amendments that would have support on both sides

of the aisle. They don't want it. They have simply refused to allow any

Republican amendment or any amendment that even their own side wants

that would have attraction to Republican Members.

Too many on that side of the aisle want to continue to make this a

partisan issue when the fact is we went into Iraq on a bipartisan

basis, two-thirds of the House of Representatives, three-quarters of

the Senate. The only way we're going to successfully disengage in a way

that will enable the Iraqis to stand on their own and bring our troops

home is if we do it on a bipartisan basis. I'm prepared to vote for

some things that I don't want if it is a bipartisan effort that will

ultimately lead to some common ground.

So I just want to say that it strikes me that we ask our troops to

risk their lives. They have one request from us, that we, Republicans

and Democrats, start working together for the common good of this

country. That's their one request, and it strikes me that when we

lecture Prime Minister Maliki, he's trying to run a government by

consensus, Sunni, Shias and Kurds, all agreeing to take action. He

could cut out the Sunnis and just simply agree with the Kurds, and they

could run the government. The Shias and Kurds, they could get their

more than 50 percent vote, but he is making a sincere effort to try to

find common ground.

I thank my colleague for having this Special Order. I'd like to

listen to my other colleagues, maybe jump back in, but my report to

this Congress is this surge is working. My report to this Congress is

that the tribal Sunni leaders that have asked us to help have seen a

tremendous benefit in their provinces, and that has benefited them.

It's benefited the Iraqi people, and it's benefited our troops. And so

I can't say what will happen two months from now or four months from

now; but as God is my witness, we are seeing progress in Iraq, as much

as some of my colleagues don't want me to say that.

I go every 3 to 4 months, and I've been there 18 times.

Well, you've been going more recently. I got elected

before you.

Just to point out to him that what you're encountering is

significant. When the Iraqis say to us, be patient, give us more time,

what I encountered early on was they were constantly blaming the other

groups. The Shiias would blame the Sunnis, the Sunnis would blame the

Kurds, and so on. But what they're starting to do is they're trying to

say, we're trying to work out our differences; give us more time to

work together. And that's a significant change.

I likened this to a sixth-grade dance when they first started out.

They didn't know how to interact with each other. But they're starting

to learn how to interact. They're starting to be defensive of Iraq and

speaking more with one voice; and I think it's not an insignificant

event that's taking place.

The Iraqis would say to me, How dare you say we are not a

country. We are the Fertile Crescent where two great rivers have met.

We have been the center of Western civilization. And for us to say they

are not a real country, for them they find it very insulting.