I thank my friend, the gentleman from Texas, for

yielding time.

Let me start by saying, first, I want to thank our troops, our

embassy personnel, State Department personnel and all their families

for the sacrifices that they've dealt with as we've dealt with this

problem in Iraq, this challenge that we're faced with.

I've come away from a trip just this past week and recognize that I

truly believe that General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker are going to

come forward with a very independent, unvarnished report about what's

going on in Iraq. We're going to see what's working and what's not

working, and I appreciate that. And I think that's going to be the most

important report that this Congress will look at to determine how do we

move forward; what steps should we take as a Congress with this

situation in Iraq.

With that having been said, this past year was very difficult. We saw

a lot of

violence. I know at the beginning of 2006, Iraq was really threatening

to spiral out of control with violence. Some described it as anarchic

fragmentation, which was really a very visual term for what was

potentially going to happen in Iraq.

And when the President announced his surge strategy back in I think

it was late December, I have to say I was very skeptical because I kept

thinking, what's next? A surge is fine. We can get more troops in. The

Iraq Study Group actually agrees that this could be a temporary measure

to gain security. But what do we do following that to get political

gains in Iraq? What can be done to help develop the economy in Iraq?

These were the key issues to me.

Then it became clear, subsequently, that our State Department was

working on a plan to deal with this. And it was unclear as to what

exactly the steps were; but as things have unfolded, we have seen

significant success over the past year.

And this was highlighted by my recent trip when I walked through the

streets of Fallujah with three other Members of Congress. And I would

have never thought that just even a month ago or two months ago a

platoon of marines could even walk through the streets of Fallujah,

much less four Members of Congress.

So as we walked through the streets, we saw shops that were open.

Shop keepers were smiling, children were playing in the streets. There

was a volleyball game going on on one block. Another block I saw some

children playing soccer. There were families strolling through the

streets and talking. And this clearly was a major change, a major

departure from what we had seen just months ago in Fallujah.

And what we found out was that an Iraqi solution was being brought to

bear in Fallujah, an Iraqi solution for security, which has allowed for

security to grow throughout the city of Fallujah, creating an

environment that's now allowing economic activity in that city.

Children are now back in school. We're seeing shops that are open,

microlending programs are ongoing, and this is just tremendous success.

And the hallmark of the plan that has been implemented by General

Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker is that you look at the circumstances

in a particular local in Iraq, like Fallujah, or perhaps Ramadi or

Tikrit, and work with the circumstances on the ground and make those

institutions that are available work for the positive.

And what I mean by that is, what we have is a situation where, after

getting security and working with the Iraqis to set up these joint

security stations throughout the city of Fallujah, now we've got a

provincial reconstruction team working in Fallujah. This is a team of

civilians and military who are working on the political side of things,

working to help build the political infrastructure from the ground up.

And now what we're seeing is tremendous success with this, with a

sort of a grass roots movement. And I've said over and over, the most

difficult thing is going to be to get the Iraqi central government to

come to reconcile and to come to terms, because it's been a country

that's been fraught with division. But it's going to be an Iraqi

solution that will bring that together. And as this grass-root

development happens in Fallujah, in Ramadi, in Tikrit and Mosul and

other cities throughout Iraq and our communities throughout Iraq, we

will see a coalescence of political activity which will put pressure on

those central politicians to come forward. And that's part of the whole

political process.

The Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, the Sunni Deputy Prime Minister,

his name is Salaam as Zobadaei, told us that you can look at the fruit,

but the fruit will not come until you grow the tree. And that was a

very, very, precise and visual way of describing what needs to happen.

We need to see Iraqi institutions growing from the ground up, because

then you'll have a sustainable government. To have an Iraqi Government

impose from the top and to try to force it down is not sustainable. So

I'm encouraged that this plan is working. We're seeing positive signs,

and we need to give it further time.

These provincial reconstruction teams are doing an outstanding job.

There are some 10 or 14, I believe, just in the Baghdad and Anbar area,

and then one in each other province. And I think our State Department

deserves tremendous credit for working under very difficult

circumstances and putting these provincial reconstruction teams

together to make this sort of political grass-roots movement occur.

And on the broader diplomatic front, we now know that the Saudis are

looking at putting an embassy into Baghdad. Recently, the French

Foreign Minister was in Baghdad and they expressed that the French want

to play a bigger role. We need to have continued vigorous diplomacy to

move forward to get debt relief on the Iraqi Government. And I believe

if we move along on the diplomatic front, as I mentioned, on continuing

to build this grass-roots political development internally in Iraq,

economic development with microlending programs, all because we managed

to get security, we're going to see a successful outcome in Iraq. And I

think in short order we should be able to draw back down on our combat

troops and offer more of a supportive role.

I think the gentleman is absolutely correct. And if you

look at Iraq, there were 27 ethnic groups in Iraq, hundreds of tribes,

and this was all held together artificially under Saddam Hussein's

reign of terror, so to speak. And now that is gone and they are trying

to figure out how to reconcile all of this.

And there are signs that there is Iraqi nationalism. Look at what

happened recently with their soccer team, which was a phenomenal event

where everyone was celebrating in the streets. It truly showed that

they have that sense of nationalism and pride in their country.

That is absolutely true. They are a proud civilization.

And I am not at a point now where I am ready to preemptively declare

defeat in this, and I do believe we need to give it time. I believe the

plan is working. And for the first time since I have been in Congress,

I have got a level of comfort that I believe we are on the right track.

So I would urge patience in this. I do believe we will draw down some

of our combat troops in the short term, and I am guardedly optimistic.