I thank my colleague for yielding. And maybe we can

have a little bit of a dialogue about the trip that we had.

It is kind of interesting. It was your first opportunity to be in

country. It was my eighth trip into the theater, and I probably spent

close to 20 days on the ground now in Iraq. And you are flying in from

Kuwait, and I think you and I both had an opportunity to be up in the

cockpit with the pilots. And I think the pilot, he had been on

assignment a number of times, and I believe this might have been his

eighth tour. It was something like that. So he spent a good part of the

last 3 years flying C-130s back and forth between Kuwait, Baghdad,

around the theater inside Baghdad to Jordan, probably to UAE and

various places.

But what really struck me was the first two soldiers that I met, the

conviction and the enthusiasm that they still felt for the mission. I

mean, each time I go, the litmus test to me is kind of what are our

soldiers saying? This C-130 pilot, he is flying our troops back and

forth, and he says, We are here. I keep wanting to come back. We need

to win this mission. We need to stay until it is done, and we are doing

the right thing and we are making progress.

And I think for a couple of reasons, these folks interact with the

pilot maybe not as much, but they hear the stories of our troops on the

ground as to the interaction that they are having with the Iraqi people

and the appreciation from the Iraqi people. And I hope this is one of

the things that Prime Minister Maliki talks about next week, about the

genuine appreciation of the Iraqi people for the progress and the

support that they have received. They see that appreciation.

The other thing that I think they see is they see the horror of the

other side. These are terrorists who attack civilians. Our troops

understand their viciousness, and they understand the nature of these

people, that they are not just attacking in Iraq, but I mean there is

all this talk now about what is going on in Lebanon. 1983 is when our

barracks were blown up, 23 years ago, Hezbollah. Even before that,

terrorist groups have been attacking U.S. interests, Western interests

around the globe. And I think our troops see the need to confront this

and to defeat it and that they genuinely believe that if we step away

and do not confront it, it will move back to the homeland.

We go on the ground to Baghdad, get met at the airport by someone who

interned in my office about a couple of years ago, interned in my

office, went to Hope College in my district, got to be a good friend

with a number of the people in the church that we go to, so he went to

our church. He is now embedded not in the international zone where you

and I were, he is embedded with Iraqi troops that have been trained. So

there are like eight to ten U.S. troops with a large group of Iraqi

troops, and he says, Man, am I glad I am here. He hadn't been there

long, but he said, You know, this is where I wanted to be. This is

where I want to be right now. I am working with Iraqi troops. I have

been to their homes. I have been to their families. We need to do this,

and we need to see the mission through.

And like I said, he had just been there a couple of months. And like

I said, this is a kid that I know. If he did not feel that way, he

would have told me. But he had just gotten there, and they also see the

sacrifices that the Iraqi people are making.

There have been a lot more Iraqi troops, police and citizens that

have been killed over the last number of months than U.S. troops. They

are willing to go to the front lines. They are willing to pay the price

and make the difference.

You and I both saw, there is lots of work to be done. It is not a

pretty picture on certain occasions. The day we were there, the folks

went in and got the chairman of the National Olympic Committee.

Maybe you have talked a little bit about some of the other things we

observed. We can talk about the training of the troops, the need to

secure Baghdad. I heard you talk about Kurdistan. But there is lots of

work to do. It is two steps forward, one step back. But it is clearly a

war against radical Islam that is moving forward, that needs to be

completed.

If the gentleman will yield, that is a conclusion that

we probably reached on a bipartisan basis, that it is absolutely

essential to as rapidly as possible train up the Iraqis and transfer

sections of the country to Iraqi troops with U.S. advisers. They know

the neighborhood, they know the culture, and I think they have the

desire and conviction to win. We need to provide them with the training

and the resources, but then get them at the front lines so that the

Iraqi people in the communities see them. This is their opportunity to

get the country back.

I think the other thing you said, it was my first time to Kurdistan.

There was never a need to go there before. Now you can see what happens

in a period of 14 years. Remember, what was the number, 182,000 Kurds

had been killed by Saddam. Iran was active in creating mischief. There

was an ethnic cleansing going on in the southern part of Kurdistan.

But over a period of 14 years, they have got political stability. The

two major parties have come together to form a unity government, the

economy is doing well and the security situation is good.

So if the rest of the country can see Kurdistan as a model and

embrace the kinds of reforms, I think that is the other thing that

happened in Kurdistan. They are doing the things that are attracting

foreign investment and foreign confidence in what they are doing.

Because you cannot rebuild Iraq with just U.S. money. You need to get

the private sector coming in, and Kurdistan is doing that in the laws

they are shaping to encourage and welcome foreign investment into their

area. You do it in the south and the rest of the country, you have got

oil, you have got agriculture, you have some manufacturing, but you

have got to put in place the right legal framework.

That is all about securing Baghdad right now.

The political meetings we had, it was very interesting

meeting with the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Interior. The

difference this time is you are meeting with people who know they are

going to be in the job for 4 years. Every time I have gone before, you

have always been kind of meeting with an appointed or an interim

minister. Now you are meeting with somebody that has been selected, and

they know they are going to be a part of this new government, which

gives you a little bit more stability. The parliamentarians, obviously,

representative government is a new phenomena for them and they have a

little bit of work to understand exactly how that works.

A couple of things. You are a hero, and you are a

target.

I would just like to reinforce the point that you made

about the stories that we heard, where the people that are involved in

the government, the strategy now for the terrorist groups, the

insurgents, the militias, is to go after their family. You are now

talking about their parents, their wife, their kids.

So it is no longer someone saying, you know, I am going to

participate in this government because I think that it is the right

thing to do and I know it is a risk to me. They are taking a much

bigger risk. These folks have to have this dialogue with their family,

saying if I participate in this, we are all at risk.

So, these are folks that are committed. The parliamentarians, when we

met with them, they leave in the middle of the afternoon, because they

don't live in the International Zone. They go back into the rest of the

country. You

can protect them, you can protect their immediate family, but when you

go out and get their brothers and sisters and parents and all that,

these are people who are committed to success and there is no other way

to look at it. There is no personal enrichment here.

It is much like what we talk about for some of our

domestic policies. The longer we are there propping them up, the more

we have the potential of creating a situation of dependency, where they

are looking to the U.S. Government to fix their political problems, to

fix their security problems and to fix their economic problems.

I think we were very clear when we met with their parliamentarians

and saying we are committed to stay with you and to provide you with

the opportunity to fix your political problems, to fix your economic

problems and your security issues. We cannot do that, because this is

your country.

Talking about soldiers that do things well, I mean, we

went to Arbil, and there were two groups of people that were absolutely

outstanding. The troops from North Dakota, our colleague from North

Dakota, Representative Pomeroy, was with us.

These guys have the responsibility of every day being on the road 18

to 20 hours and making sure that 50 miles of highway is free from IEDs.

Man, these guys are good, and they have done a phenomenal job. They had

a casualty a couple of weeks ago. Our sympathy goes to that unit,

obviously the soldier's family in North Dakota and the whole community.

But they are well-trained, and it was inspiring to listen to their

story about we came here with a job to do and here is what we have

learned and here is how we are doing it. They have experienced 42

explosions, I think about 42 explosions. The vehicles they are in are

designed that the compartment where the soldiers are in survives. The

wheels may fall off and the engine may go away and the transmission may

be gone, but the soldiers are protected.

They have experienced 42 explosions, but they have stopped, what was

it, 562 they have stopped. We saw some of the devices that they have.

If you wonder how good our guys are. It means as they are going down

the road, they are looking ahead and they see, I wish I had taken a

piece of that copper wire, just a thin little piece of copper wire,

which signals to them there is a problem here, or they see a small pile

of stones that wasn't there the day before. It is not that they know

exactly the stones weren't there, but it is kind of like, this is

strange.

Then they go in with their equipment, they find it, and they disarm

it, 562. Then the hospital. Wow, I mean what is it? The one soldier

that came in, they gave him how many units of blood? It was something

like 200.

The professionalism of the docs there, you had one there from Mayo

who had just come in. The professionalism of the folks there. The thing

that I was really impressed with, I think one was a doc or headed up

the trauma unit, was it in Cincinnati, said, ``We do things here I

could not do in Cincinnati.''

He said, you know, there will be books and articles written about

what we are doing here that is going to be brought back to trauma

centers around America, maybe around the world, because of what we are

learning and how effective we are here.

We give our troops better treatment here coming in off the

battlefield than what I can give them in any major metropolitan center.

I mean, my hats go off to these folks.

The other thing, the solder saying, before I leave,

they were on space-available because he was not as seriously injured as

some other soldiers, he was going on to Germany. I think he was going

to leave in the next 24 hours. But said, you know, before I leave I

need to make sure that I call back to my unit.

You know, it is inspiring to see those folks and also

knowing that, you know, whether it is an American or an Iraqi injured

on the battlefield, that is the quality of care that they are going to

get.

I think we also heard the number that, you know, the vast majority of

injuries today are coming from the IEDs. These things are becoming more

and more sophisticated. But, you know, it shows that the enemy is not

engaging us, they are moving to what we would call asymmetrical

tactics. They are not engaging us or the Iraqis directly. They are

using these improvised explosive devices or they are attacking civilian

targets, where fitting to their name they can create terror.

But they are also using that tactic to try to divide the country

between Sunnis and Shiia. And this is why the government has to, the

Iraqi Government has to step up and provide the security envelope so

that the militias can be disbanded, the militias that are forming in

the Shiia areas and the Sunni areas. Because our understanding, when I

talked to David Pate from my district, he said, you know, when you talk

to the Iraqi soldiers, they do not say, if you ask them, are you a

Shiia or a Sunni, the Army is moving to the level of professionalism

where they say, you know, they do not say I am a Shiia or a Sunni, what

they say is I am an Iraqi.

So they are focusing on the country. That is not everybody. You know,

sectarian violence is something that we are very, very concerned about.

It is evident. I do not think neither you or I are saying, man, it is

done. There is a lot of work to do over there.

But there continue to be signs of real progress.

I think I misspoke earlier. I said the troops were in

Erbil. They were in Balat. The troops were in Balat.

It is still a real experience.

I think you have also got to give a real set of kudos

to the folks in the background. You know, we talk about the troops that

are going out and they are finding the IEDs. We are talking to the C-

130 pilots who are flying in. You and I were there. It is a harsh

environment. You got the dust, you got the sand, you got more sand, and

then you throw a little bit of heat on it.

When we were coming off the one plane in Erbil where we walked

through the backwash of the props, it must have been 130, 140 degrees

right there. Of course we were doing it for a short period of time. But

you are wearing the body armor, you are wearing the helmet, our troops

are doing that all day long.

The other folks, there is lot of folks over there that deserve kudos,

but it is the maintenance people. These guys would say, hey, we go out,

we are near an explosion, an IED, our equipment is damaged. We bring it

back, our mechanics know that they need to get this fixed, because we

are going out again on patrol.

They may have not a spare, but they have got another truck or another

vehicle that they can take out. But, they have got to get this one

working again. And the mechanics, they work 24 hours straight to get

this stuff up and running.

Same thing with the C-130s. We are putting lots of hours on some of

these machines. I think the first plane that we flew in on from Kuwait

to Baghdad was a 1961 C-130, from Selfridge Air Base in Michigan. And,

you know, there are maintenance people back there who in this

environment, that plane goes on, I think it was doing two trips that

day back and forth to Baghdad.

You know, when that plane goes back to Kuwait that night, there is

going to be some maintenance people all over that thing, you know,

getting it back and making sure that the next morning it is going to be

able to fly again.

There is not much else to do. But absolutely, you know,

the families pay a tremendous price with the amount of time that their

husbands or wives or sons or daughters are spending in Iraq, knowing

that the conditions are tough, the environment continues to be

dangerous. And so there are sacrifices that continue to be made by all

of these families, by the whole military family.

You know, we were talking a little bit about comparing some of the

stuff that we do in the United States. One of the things that is

different about the United States and sometimes moves us a little bit

away from the military, but when you go on one of these trips, what

really does connect you back to the military is being there with the

troops.

But, you know, the military folks are so few in number to who we are

as a Nation. In Israel, since there is compulsory service, and I am not

promoting compulsory service, but in Israel where everyone is required

to serve in the military, everyone knows and understands the risks that

the soldiers, military people have to take.

That is why I think it is good for, you know, that you have reminded

us of, you know, that sacrifice, because too often we are too far away

and removed. And it is ``somebody over there''. We have got to

remember, it is not somebody over there. It is a neighbor, it is

somebody from our community. They love this country.

They have got a family. They go to church. They share the values that

we have. And they have just chosen a different career. You know, we

have got

folks who have chosen business, finance, banking, marketing, whatever.

These guys have chosen a career in the military.

It is a unique career. It is a special service that they provide to

this country.

No, I appreciate you doing the Special Order. I

appreciate you yielding me the time and the opportunity. The one thing

we did not talk about was Serbia, that on the way back we stopped in

Serbia, so that we had an opportunity to see a part of Iraq that had

been divided, that was coming out of a very tough time and after 14

years was prospering.

We then stopped overnight in Serbia, met with the three Presidents in

Serbia at Sarajevo; and, again, there is an evolving success story

that, 10 years ago, the brutal and the bitter conflict, we still have

some troops there. There are a lot of Europeans, more European troops

over there, but, again, they have made significant progress.

It takes a while to move from the ethnic religious strife to the

steps forward. What is happening in Kosovo, or Serbia, and the region,

is that the European Union finally embraced them, they have moved

forward, Serbia is moving forward, Kurdistan is moving forward.

What we now also have to have is the modern Islamic or moderate

states in the Middle East. They need to embrace Iraq. They need to

invest. They need to have their people there, their businesses there,

to show that they stand with this new democratically elected government

and that they are invested in the success of a new Iraq, in what the

people of Iraq are.

It is possible. It is not easy, but there are two examples of how

this can work. It was very painful, but by sticking to it and moving

through it, you can get to where you want to be.

I forget where I go sometimes.

But you can walk down, what is it called, Sniper Alley?

That we could walk down Sniper Alley Sunday night, and

that we could walk through the streets of Sarajevo in Bosnia, and that

we could walk through the streets of Bosnia on Monday morning, and, you

know, that it was a vibrant city, people sitting at the cafes, drinking

coffee and getting their country moving forward. Again, problems, high

unemployment rate, slow economic development, but secure.

It is why they are nervous about us pulling our final

troops out, because we are the ones that have earned their trust, and

they still look to you, and I both hope and pray for the day where the

same type of result, as we see in Kosovo, as we see in Bosnia, that we

can see that same kind of result in the rest of Iraq.