Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be here, and

I appreciate my colleague including me in this Special Order. It was a

wonderful trip and a great experience and what a momentous time to be

in Iraq, to be there as they were drafting their interim Constitution.

I have had the good fortune over the years of being in two countries

when they have been drafting a constitution. I spent time in southern

Africa in the country of Namibia in 1990 when they were sitting down

after their first elections and drafting their first Constitution; and

I was able to see that process firsthand, to see a country draft its

first constitution and actually look to the future with hope and

optimism. It was a similar experience here, if the gentleman will

recall. In Baghdad we were meeting with Ambassador Bremer, and on the

coffee table was a copy of the interim constitution that they would

approve later that night, with a scratch-out here, a circle here, a

white-out here; and it was just amazing to see that. It was

appreciated, I think, on a number of levels.

As the gentleman mentioned, we were able to go to Basra, and one

thing that strikes you when you go to Basra is the utter neglect that

the southern half of Iraq has faced over the years. Saddam Hussein,

after the first Gulf War, simply repressed the people in every way

possible. The infrastructure of southern Iraq was completely neglected.

The streets, the buildings falling apart, because he wanted to punish

the people there. And the worst part, obviously, were the killings,

mass graves, over 400,000 people already discovered; and it is feared

that over a million were killed over the last couple of years by Saddam

Hussein. That was striking.

But like the gentleman from Indiana, I felt the optimism of the Iraqi

people, particularly in the south, who had undergone a lot over the

last couple of years and finally could see forward to a bright future.

And that feeling was certainly palpable there as we met with business

people and with students and with clerics and others. It was a great

opportunity. It is difficult when you are in the north to actually meet

with regular Iraqis, because the security situation is so tight; but we

had the opportunity in southern Iraq.

With that, I yield back to the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, we were told

that Saddam Hussein had built some 70 palaces just in the last 10 years

during the time of the sanctions for food program, or the oil for food

program, where every drop of oil revenue was supposed to be spent for

the benefit of the Iraqi people, for food or for medicine. Instead,

Saddam Hussein spent an estimated $2 billion building palaces for

himself and the people of Iraq surely suffered during that time.

Mr. Speaker, that was an extraordinary meeting, to see, as

we were able to do, to talk with the clerics who were repressed so much

over the past couple of years. The gentleman had a previous slide there

when we were in the C-130 with the troops, and it reminded me of

perhaps the most special time in Iraq was being able to meet with the

troops at Tallil Air Base. We were able to go to the mess hall, and I

was looking for any Arizonans who might be present. It turned out there

were a number of them. In fact, I ran into a cousin of mine from my

hometown that I did not know was there, and another one from my

hometown, and pretty soon there were a dozen or so. The 222nd National

Guard unit out of Flagstaff was there and

doing a great job. They had been there about 11 months and obviously

were anxious to get home and see their families.

But what struck me was how they felt that they were there for a

cause, and that morale was high, despite what some will tell us. It was

a very difficult post for them to be in, obviously, very difficult and

dangerous circumstances. But they were proud to do it, and they were

proud to serve and anxious to see their families and be reunited once

again. There were a lot of highlights on the trip and that was

certainly one, to meet with the troops. And then we went to Baghdad and

were able to meet with other troops from Arizona as well. Arizona is

well represented in Iraq, and they are doing a great job; and I was

just proud to be associated with them. I yield back.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Indiana (Mr.

Pence) for yielding.

Another highlight of the trip, obviously, was meeting, and I believe

there is a slide coming up, meeting with some of the former prisoners

of war. It was just striking to talk to them and to hear about the

repression that they had experienced and to hear about the work they

are currently doing to try to reunite family members with others that

they have not seen or at least to find the remains of family members

who have been missing for so long. A difficult task for them,

obviously. But these people have been through a whole lot.

For those who I heard make references earlier today to we went to

Iraq, for what, because Saddam had drained the marshes or drained the

swamps in Iraq, the reference to Saddam Hussein draining the area where

the Marsh Arabs lived and what an ecological and societal disaster that

has become, as actual as that is, it pales in comparison to the human

lives that were lost: over a million killed, some gassed, weapons of

mass destruction used against the Kurds, mass graves found, people

buried alive. The stories go on and on and on. It was just trying to

hear that.

My colleague has some experience with that.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding. We often

hear about the carnage and bloodshed since the war unofficially ended.

The day after we left, there were over 200 killed in a series of

bombings in mosques. Just today some 30 people were killed. So those

things draw the most attention, as they should, and it is a terrible

thing to happen. And our troops, we have lost a number of them. We

continue to lose them. It is a very dangerous situation there.

But often overlooked are the positive and good things that are

happening. I think that that is one thing that we brought back from our

trip. One thing that was pointed out to us is the day, our first day

there, the day prior they had set a record for oil output for a day

since the war that the oil production is coming back. This is with

equipment, obviously, that was neglected and abused during the past

decade and is rendered almost unusable; and still, with our engineers

and others, they have been able to go in and actually produce record

oil output for a day.

Also, electricity we were told that we were actually producing more

electricity in Iraq than was being produced not during the war but

before the war. So things are happening.

It is much to the credit of our engineers and our individuals who are

going over from this country doing contract work and USAID and other

groups who are actually doing some very good things for the Iraqi

people.

Education, I know that my colleague will want to talk about some of

the education work going on, our democracy programs and whatnot. So I

will yield for that.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for allowing me to

participate. I will say a few words and yield back to my colleague to

close.

The thing that struck me after all the experiences we had in Iraq,

our last picture there in Baghdad we climbed on the C-130 to fly back

to Kuwait and we waited outside of our plane while the ceremony was

held where the body of an Estonian soldier who was killed the day

before who, I believe, was trying to detonate an explosive on the

street and was killed by a sniper as he was there, was placed on our

plane. And we flew out with the body of that young soldier in the belly

of our plane.

And it was quite a surreal experience to fly over Iraq, to fly over

ancient Babylon, the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the

cradle of civilization with the casualty of the latest conflict in our

plane.

But it really made me think and ponder back about our time with the

Iraqi people and about the experiences that we had where the yearning

for freedom is strong; it is in the soul of every man and woman. And as

our President has said, freedom is not a gift to the world; it is God's

gift to mankind. It is something that is felt by everyone and certainly

expressed in the gratitude that was expressed by people touching their

heart when they would talk to us, that our country was able in some

small way to bring that gift back to them to have them experience that

God-given gift of freedom. It was a wonderful experience.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be here. I thank the

gentleman from Indiana (Mr. Pence) for allowing me to participate in

this colloquy.