I thank the gentleman. I have a remark I

would like to make in a few minutes. I know our friend and colleague,

the gentleman from Tennessee, has some comments he would like to make.

But I was struck, in view of the discussion we are having right here,

that today in that hearing that the gentleman was just talking about,

the Joint House Armed Services Committee and Foreign Affairs Committee

hearing, that General Petraeus was forced, I believe is the right word,

to do something that I find absolutely extraordinary.

I have got his report right here to Congress on the situation in

Iraq.

In the second paragraph, after he thanks the chairmen and ranking

members, he says, ``At the outset, I would like to note that this is my

testimony. Although I have briefed my assessment and recommendations to

my chain of command, I wrote this testimony myself. It has not been

cleared by nor shared with anyone in the Pentagon, the White House or

Congress.''

To think, one of the finest officers in the American Armed Forces

felt it necessary to put this in the opening two sentences of his

testimony, I find shocking and distressing. I am sure we will have more

to say about that later.

But it is not only in response to this scurrilous ad, unforgivable ad

that moveon.org has written, but, frankly, as my colleagues here know,

there have been comments made by some of our colleagues directly

challenging and questioning the integrity of General Petraeus. And when

I saw this today, I was just appalled that we have reached that point.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to pick up on some of

the comments that our friend and colleague, the gentleman from

Mississippi, was addressing when he was talking about some of the

information in the testimony that we heard today from both General

Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker.

I have the testimony from General Petraeus here in my hand. Mr.

Speaker, I thought I would touch on a couple of the points that he

made. He says that the progress our forces have achieved with the Iraqi

counterparts has been substantial. He says, I see improvements in the

security environment. The level of security incidents has decreased

significantly since the start of the surge of offensive operations in

mid-June. Civilian deaths have declined considerably. He says locals

have increasingly supported our efforts. While he says al Qaeda

certainly is not defeated, it is off balance and we are pursuing its

leaders and operators aggressively.

This report is not all rosy. General Petraeus made the point several

times during the over 6 hours of testimony that we had today that he

doesn't want to look at this from a rosy standpoint or a pessimistic

standpoint or an optimistic standpoint, but from a realistic

standpoint; and I believe that this great leader, this great general,

this man of great integrity and competence and capability did just that

for us today.

One of the things that came up repeatedly during the hearing today

was a reference to another report and another hearing that we on the

Armed Services Committee heard about last week. General James Jones, a

former commandant of the Marine Corps, the former Supreme Allied

Commander Europe, was the head of a commission, a very distinguished

commission, I might add, one of the most experienced I have ever seen,

that had military officers and senior noncommissioned officers and

experienced law enforcement personnel go over to Iraq with the charge

to evaluate the Iraqi security forces.

Repeatedly today, and sometimes last week, we heard our colleagues

saying, well, General Jones came with a very pessimistic report, and he

had great concerns that things aren't going well. And one of our

colleagues actually asked the question, General Petraeus, how do you

square, how do you reconcile, if you will, these differences in

reports.

And I remember thinking, Mr. Speaker, when I was in that Armed

Services Committee hearing and listening to General Jones and his

exceptionally well-qualified colleagues, that the hearing that we were

experiencing was not at all like the news reports, perhaps like the ads

we saw earlier today, but was not at all like the news reports we had

seen before the testimony in the Armed Services Committee.

And just as an example, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to quote just a few

things that General Jones and some of his colleagues said during that

hearing.

He said, our first conclusion is that the Iraqi security forces as a

whole cannot yet defend the territorial integrity of Iraq. This is not

necessarily an alarming conclusion, he said. They're able to do more in

terms of combating the internal security threats to Iraq, and that's

positive. He said, we've noted improvement in the internal security

missions such as denying the safe haven to terrorists, and this

progress is likely to continue in the months ahead. He says, the Iraqi

security forces can bring greater security to the provinces in the next

12 to 18 months, assuming a continuing rate of progress. He said, the

impact of the surge has had a tactical success for both Iraqi and

coalition forces in the Baghdad region.

That doesn't sound like a pessimistic report or out of step with what

General Petraeus said today. It's what we have known for some time, and

I'm sure that my colleagues on their trips to Iraq have had the same

experiences and reports that I have, and that is, that the Iraqi Army

has been making steady progress but the police forces are in some

disarray and need of major improvements.

In fact, General Jones and his commission recommended that the

national police force, a relatively small group of 25,000, be disbanded

and distributed to other forces and that the much larger Iraqi security

police be strengthened. Again, not at all out of sync with what we

heard today.

And in fact, because I had heard in previous trips to Iraq that the

Iraqi Army was doing well and the Iraqi police was not doing well, I

said to General Jones, well, this seems very consistent with the

message that we have heard for some time. So I'm not surprised to hear

you say that, and you probably weren't surprised to find that yourself.

And I thought this was amazing. He said, and I will check my notes

here to make sure that I've got this right, he says, I was pleasantly

surprised. I'd been going to Iraq off and on since 2003 in my NATO hat,

and again, he was the commander of NATO, but I think I did not expect

to see the will that I saw in the Iraqi Armed Forces to take the fight

to the enemy. I did not expect to see the length and breadth of the

institutions that are functioning that you need to support an emerging

army, the training bases, the recruiting, the recruit training, NCO

schools, counterintelligence schools, training corpsmen. All of those

things exist. We know that because we saw them.

This was a very highly experienced group of four-star and three-star

generals, sergeants major, police chiefs that went, and this was their

assessment when they came back. And again, this seems to me very

consistent with General Petraeus' report today that said, well, things

are still tough over there, but the surge is working and we're making

progress. I know my colleague wants to talk about some of those

recommendations in a bit, but I just want to go to one more.

I thank the gentleman for that. Reclaiming my

time, if it's mine to reclaim, I'm not sure sometimes in these Special

Orders whose time it is. I think it's the gentleman from Georgia's, but

I don't want to have my colleagues or Americans believe that General

Jones or General Petraeus came with nothing but good news. That's not

the case.

As we discussed earlier, the Jones commission recommended some major

changes in how the police is trained and equipped and how it functions

and how it's organized, that they were highly critical of the Ministry

of the Interior and how they're functioning and, in many cases, failing

to function. So there are clearly problems, but the Jones report, the

Jones commission did not come back and say that all is lost and Iraqi

security forces are all failing.

In fact, that paragraph that I read quoting General Jones talking

about how he was pleasantly surprised about the terrific progress of

the Iraqi Army underscores that some good things are happening.

I thought it was interesting in that hearing, as my colleague from

Georgia no doubt remembers, during the question-and-answer period, the

former Deputy Secretary John Hamre, former Deputy Secretary of Defense,

was asked some questions about what we should do in Iraq, should we

leave or should we leave quickly or were things too bad. And he said in

part, and again I'm quoting, but we have strategic interests that are

larger than just Iraq. I mean our continued influence and presence in

the region, the ability to get continued access to energy resources,

providing a counterweight to Iran. We have large strategic interests.

Every one of those interests would be seriously diminished if we had to

crawl out of Iraq or run out of Iraq.

I think that is significant, Mr. Speaker. He made the point that when

we leave Iraq, we walk out of Iraq on our terms, having defeated in

large measure al Qaeda and left an Iraq with a promising future with

the violence under control and political progress being made.

And so I just think that we have seen some unfortunate, really

strident partisan statements made in the last week or so, and I guess

it's unavoidable that people tend to go to sources that match their

perspective. But I thought that the constant referring to the Jones

Commission's report as somehow undermining what General Petraeus was

saying or not consistent with it or indicating that all was lost in

Iraq was simply not correct. And these quotes were part of many in what

I thought was a very thorough, complete testimony and thorough hearing

when we had the members of that commission in before the Armed Services

Committee.

If the gentleman would yield for just a

minute, that's what struck me is that, very much like General Petraeus'

testimony today, the media discussion and the political discussion and

the partisan discussion that led up to the testimony simply didn't

match the testimony that we heard in either of these hearings.

For example, I'm sure that many of our colleagues were surprised, and

frankly I was, to hear General Petraeus say that it's tough but we're

making progress, and we're making progress to the point where I'm going

to recommend that we draw down our forces to the presurge level of

brigade combat teams and we do it by next July. I was surprised that he

put that date in there and that certainty in there when he made that

statement.

He said we're going to start drawing down this year, brigade combat

team is going to come back, Marine expeditionary unit is going to come

back, and we're going to continue to draw down through the spring and

into the summer. And that is consistent with the original intent of the

surge. It was temporary with what the Iraq Study Group said about a

temporary surge, and in fact, I think it's very consistent with what

the Jones commission said as well.

I believe that's right.