Mr. Speaker, on February 28 through March 4, just this

past weekend, I participated in a bipartisan congressional delegation

to Iraq and Afghanistan. I have written about this extensively on my

Web blog, which my constituents should know is located at

MikePence.house.gov. But I wanted to excerpt portions today by way of

reporting back to the House on our findings in these two countries in

which American forces face a war every day.

It was a bipartisan congressional delegation, Mr. Speaker, to both

Iraq and Afghanistan. In 4 days we took off and landed 20 different

times in four different aircraft. We flew to Kuwait in a military jet.

We flew into Iraq on a cargo plane. We flew around Iraq and Afghanistan

in helicopters and Ospreys. We convoyed in military vehicles throughout

both countries. It was a rare opportunity to meet with leaders and

locals in both theaters of combat. I am personally grateful to the

people of Indiana and our military for making it possible.

Our visit also took place against the backdrop of several major

events. The Iraq Government announced that Ali Hassan al-Majid, better

known as ``Chemical Ali,'' a brutal military henchman of Saddam

Hussein, was to be executed later this month. We arrived in the Kurdish

region as that news was breaking and as Turkish forces were announcing

their withdrawal for military operations in the north.

And on the second day, our trip to Iraq coincided with the first

official visit by a President of Iran to Iraq since 1952. It was a time

of great significance for the people of Iraq in several respects.

During our time in Iraq and Afghanistan, one inescapable conclusion

emerged. After years of difficulty and setbacks in varying degrees,

freedom is making progress in Iraq and Afghanistan. In northern Iraq,

known as the Kurdish region, there is security, political process, and

economic growth.

And even in central Iraq, after years of insurgent violence,

following the military surge, al Qaeda and the insurgency are in steep

decline and political progress is beginning to take hold.

As I saw firsthand in Baghdad and in the al Anbar province, the

military surge and Sunni cooperation have resulted in extraordinary

progress and security. But those gains are fragile. Violence in Iraq

has declined by more than 60 percent since the beginning of the surge

and has remained at relatively low levels since November of last year.

The Iraqi Parliament has passed legislation that makes further

political progress possible.

Our visit was, Mr. Speaker, characterized by cautious optimism by

American military leaders and ordinary Iraqis on the street.

Afghanistan was also equally encouraging; and with President Hamid

Karzai, we saw the determination of a leader devoted to his people and

to defeating a resurgent Taliban effort to overturn their progress with

terrorist violence this spring.

In the Kunar province particularly, we convoyed out and witnessed

really the greatest threat to the Taliban terrorists who operate on

that border with Pakistan, a bridge. A bridge is being built by local

Afghanis with American resources. Seeing locals waving at our convoy,

greeting laborers at this remote construction site showed me the depth

of American generosity and the resilience of this proud people.

My summary on my Web site is simply an effort on my part to report

point by point, moment by moment on my trip. We speak about each of the

days, from the Kurdish region to our time in Baghdad, to our time in

Fallujah and our team even on the streets of Haditha, through

Afghanistan and through a stop at Ramstein military base to meet with

injured soldiers at Landstuhl Medical Center.

And again, Mr. Speaker, my Web site is mikepence.house.gov. And my

constituents could access that by visiting my blog and gaining that

information. I would be grateful for any constituent who availed

themselves of our writing.

The message that we got from Iraq is clear. The surge is working, but

the battle is far from over. Violence is down significantly in the past

year. The enemy's abilities have been downgraded in both degree and

type of attack. U.S. forces have made measurable progress against

terrorist elements in Baghdad and al Anbar province, due to both the

military surge and extraordinary expanded cooperation among the

civilian population.

And while the military surge is working, the good news is the Iraqi

Parliament seems to have gone to work too. The adoption of a budget,

the passage of a law permitting Ba'ath party members to work for the

government and the plan for provincial elections that may well occur by

October of this year represent exactly the kind of progress that many

in our diplomatic team and many in this Chamber have hoped to see.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the courtesy, especially at the

opening of this time on the House floor.

I would be grateful if any of my constituents went to

mikepence.house.gov, visited our blog and availed themselves of our

firsthand account of what we saw in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The progress is real. The progress of freedom is happening. It is

fragile. And it is my hope that, by bringing back the information from

this bipartisan delegation, that we will be able to find that

bipartisan consensus necessary to see freedom win in Afghanistan and

Iraq.