I am happy to say to my friend, the gentleman from

Florida (Mr. Meek), that as you know, we were particularly proud of the

work product we have had over the last 2 days. Of the 30 amendments

that were made in order, we saw 22 of those amendments made in order

offered by colleagues on your side of the aisle.

And we continue to try to do everything we possibly can to ensure a

free-flowing debate on a wide range of issues. And obviously the

existence of these Special Orders does create an opportunity to do just

that. I thank you all very much for being here.

Mr. Speaker, I have taken this time out this evening to talk about a

very important mission which took place over the Easter District Work

Period with a number of our colleagues. And I am very pleased to be

joined here in the Chamber by my very good friend, the gentleman from

Georgia (Mr. Gingrey), who was a member of this delegation.

It also included, this was a rules committee trip, it included the

vice-chairman of the Rules Committee, the gentleman from Florida (Mr.

Lincoln Diaz-Balart); the chairman of the ethics committee who is also

a member of the Rules Committee, the gentleman

from Washington (Mr. Hastings); and our friend from Ft. Lauderdale, we

had three Floridians actually, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. Hastings

of Florida); and we had another Floridian, as I said, the gentleman

from Florida (Mr. Crenshaw).

So this 6-Member delegation specifically went during a 12-day period,

during that district work period to the Middle East. We went to a grand

total of eight countries plus the Palestinian territories.

And on this trip, Mr. Speaker, we were able to go into Iraq and visit

the different regions in Iraq. We went to Fallujah, the Shiia area. We

went into Baghdad, the Sunni area, and then we went to Kirkuk in the

north which is the Kurdish area.

And we had a chance to visit with our troops. We had a chance to meet

with people who have been able to be among those 8\1/2\ million Iraqis

who on January 30 of this year, for the first time in half a century,

participated in free and fair elections. And we were able to see the

struggle that is going on.

Now, of course we continue to get tragic news from Iraq. This morning

we got the report of 12 people who were tragically killed, a contract

helicopter went down. We have had a number of our Marines killed in

recent days.

Just this past week, a very good friend who worked with my chief of

staff, Brad Smith, who was in Iraq during the month of January last

year, she was a relief worker there, was tragically killed. So, Mr.

Speaker, we continue to have very, very tragic news that has come from

Iraq. And we regularly see reports of these tragedies.

But the thing that was so incredible for this delegation, and I know

repeatedly for colleagues of mine who have had the chance to go to

Iraq, is that it has shocked many, including yours truly, someone who

was a strong supporter of the President, but believed that maybe

looking at the January 30 elections, it might not have happened just

right, so we might have considered delaying that election.

Well, thank God President Bush and Prime Minister Blair and other

international leaders, and leaders in Iraq, it was a mixed view in

Iraq, but thank God that they went ahead and insisted on holding that

election. Because they had a 58.5 percent turnout, as I said 8\1/2\

million Iraqis finally exercising the right to begin the process in

this election of the 275-member transitional national assembly.

And they elected this national assembly. They have put together a

government within the past couple of weeks. And we in our meetings had

the chance to meet with the now new prime minister; he had not been

selected by the transitional national assembly at the time, Ibrahim

Jaffari.

We met with the interim prime minister, who is no longer prime

minister, but was just for the third time yesterday a target of an

assassination attempt, that being Iyad Allawi, the man who delivered a

phenomenal address to a joint session of Congress here. And we, as I

said a moment ago, also got to see many of our troops, the courageous

men and women in uniform.

And as I said, Mr. Gingrey is here with us on the House floor, but

our entire delegation had the chance to stand before a large group of

Marines led by my very good friend, Colonel Mike Shupp, who was there

and was one of the key leaders in last November's battle of Fallujah,

and to see the dedication and the resolve of our men and women in

uniform is something that is inspiring to all of us.

Mr. Speaker, to me, one of the most amazing things from having

witnessed what we did in Iraq, is that we found President George W.

Bush was absolutely right. He was absolutely right when he referred to

the fact that by encouraging the effort to rid the Iraqi people of

Saddam Hussein and move in the direction of free and fair elections,

which, remember, many skeptics all over the world, including here in

the United States, said could never happen, how in the world could the

Iraqi people actually choose their own leaders?

Well, the fact that President Bush insisted on doing that, he was

right when he said that the example that we will see in Iraq will

spread throughout the region. Well, I have to admit I was not quite as

sanguine as he about this. I, of course, as everyone did, hoped that

this would be the case, but I did not have the degree of certainty that

President Bush obviously had.

And I am so gratified that President Bush was absolutely right. And I

am able to provide this report, because along with visiting Iraq, this

great example that we have now seen based on what took place on January

30, we have seen in country after country, people indicating, leaders

indicating that movements towards political pluralism, the rule of law,

the development of very important democratic institutions is on the

move. It is on the move today.

Now, on this trip, as I said, as well as visiting Iraq, we went to

Egypt. And in Egypt we had a wide range of meetings with leaders in

that country, including the new prime minister, who for the past 8

months has served as prime minister, Prime Minister Nazif. And he

referred to the fact that under President Mubarak a decision has been

made to actually modify what is called article 76 of the Egyptian

Constitution. That is an interesting irony that it is article 76,

because we all know what an important number that is in this history of

the United States of America: 1776, the year that we declared our

independence.

But the change in article 76 in Egypt created an opportunity for

President Mubarak to establish a chance for multi-candidate elections

for the first time in Egypt. We know that there have been very bold,

wonderful dynamic and strong military leaders in Egypt, Gamal Abdel

Nasser, who was obviously a very, very strong leader.

The world remembers in the early 1980s when that dynamic very, very,

very bright leader, Anwar Sadat, who had been a leader in the region,

was brutally assassinated, and now we for the last 2 decades have seen

Hozni Mubarak as president. All of those people, all of those people

military leaders in Egypt.

But, when we met with Prime Minister Nazif, he made it clear to us

that the country is now moving for the first time ever towards multi-

candidate elections, that, again, a very encouraging sign for us. He in

fact went to the extreme of saying they today regularly have to violate

the Constitution of Egypt, it is understood that they have to violate

the Constitution of Egypt. Why? Because he described it as a socialist

constitution, the constitution which was obviously wrought out of the

era of the Soviet Union; and it is a constitution which clearly needs

to be rewritten, as they acknowledged to us, and it is something that

clearly will take place.

He also, this is Prime Minister Nazif, referred to the fact that bold

moves towards economic liberalization are taking place. In fact, one of

the things that struck us was the fact that in Egypt they have just

reduced the top rate, the top corporate tax rate from 42 percent to 22

percent, knowing that that is very important towards encouraging

economic growth.

They also are looking for their comparative advantage economically.

What is it that they are doing in Egypt?

We had the chance, my friend, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr.

Gingrey) and I and the rest of our delegation, to visit something known

as the Smart Village where many of the high tech companies that are

based here in the United States have established new operations. In

fact, the great leader of Microsoft, Bill Gates, had dedicated a

Microsoft facility in this Smart Village just outside Cairo, Egypt. And

so we, I believe, saw many, many great things come from that visit.

We also visited with the defense minister. It was very impressive to

see this individual, who is obviously a strong military leader,

indicate when asked the question, what would it be like, would it be

possible for a nonmilitary leader to actually be elected president of

Egypt? And his response was, if the people of Egypt elect a nonmilitary

leader, so be it; that is the way it will be. Another sign that was

very, very encouraging in that country.

We also had the chance to visit Jordan. In Jordan we met with the

deputy prime minister who is providing great leadership in the area of

economic and political reform in the country. But we also had a chance

to meet with King Abdullah II. And we know that he has worked

diligently to try to bring about a resolution to the Israeli-

Palestinian question.

He, as a Western-educated individual, is someone who has worked a lot

to provide leadership on human rights issues for all in the Middle

East. And in our meeting he referred to the fact that Jordan at that

moment was not in the forefront of political liberalization in the

region. He said to us that in 6 months we will be in touch and he

assured us that Jordan will, in fact, be in the forefront.

And I was happy to see that just a week or two ago he removed over

half of his cabinet and is obviously on the road towards creating the

kind of political liberalization to go hand in hand with the very

important economic liberalization that he has already pursued. We have

been part of that, of course, by virtue of our having established a

U.S.-Jordan free trade agreement. So we are very, very excited to see

the things that took place there and are continuing to take place

there.

We also had the chance to visit Israel and the Palestinian

territories. Mr. Speaker, we all know what a challenge that has been

for years and years and years, and we have seen attempts made to try

and bring about a resolution. We happen to be in the Knesset just as

they completed the vote on what was called disengagement. It was a

referendum on the government and it has to do specifically with the

disengagement, the removal of 3,000 settlers from Gaza. And it was a

vote that by a two-to-one margin, nearly two-to-one margin prevailed

for the Sharon government and an indication that great steps are being

made towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

We also went to Ramallah in the Palestinian territories and met with

a number of the leaders there, Hanan Ashrawi, a woman who has been one

of the great proponents of women's rights and a leader in the

Palestinian area. We met with the opponents of Mahmoud Abbas, Mr.

Barghouti, and we talked about the challenges that exist in the

relationship and the fact that on January 9 of this year 1 million

Palestinians participated, following the death of Yasser Arafat, in

this free and fair election, which is again an indication that we are

seeing great progress made in that region.

One of the most moving experiences we had, of course, was when we

went to Beirut, Lebanon. And in going to Lebanon, Mr. Speaker, we were

literally there on the heels of the tremendous uprising that we saw

take place, probably 6 weeks ago at this point, when on one occasion a

quarter of a million young people and other Lebanese gathered in what

is now known as Martyr Square. And on another occasion a million people

gathered in Martyr Square. Why? To protest the fact that for 3 long

decades the Syrians have basically thrust themselves into and

controlled Lebanon. And we know that there has been great civil strife

in Lebanon in the past, but we have witnessed the Syrian involvement

which has been so extraordinarily great in that area.

Well, we stood at the graveside site of Rafik Hariri, who tragically

was assassinated and we stood with students who said to us that they

felt as if they had been in jail. And they said, We are in the process

of breaking from this jail and we today are willing to give our lives

to ensure that the people of Lebanon will be free of Syrian control.

They were inspired by a couple of factors. The efforts that the

United States and the Coalition forces put together to allow the

opportunity for the people of Iraq to be free of Saddam Hussein and to

see 8.5 million of them participate in their election, coupled with

again, the tragic assassination of the revered former Prime Minister,

Rafik Hariri. These events led to this huge uprising.

I am very happy to report that this afternoon, or this morning, I met

with the deputy chief of mission, our deputy chief of mission in

Beirut. He was here in town, Chris Murray, and he talked about the

reports that we have seen about 95 percent of the Syrian forces

including the intelligence operation, along with the military leaving

Lebanon, and he felt very strongly that by the end of April we will see

all of the Syrian forces out of Lebanon.

The law calls for an election to be held by the 31st of May. And we

were there encouraging that election to take place. We are happy to get

the report that every indication that we have is that the elections in

Lebanon will, in fact, take place. And it was a great experience, a

wonderful one, and very inspiring to see these courageous human beings.

We met with opposition members of parliament who were there,

including a man called Mr. Hamadeh, who 6 months ago was nearly killed,

and you could still see the burns on his face from a terrorist attack

that he had suffered. But he was willing to stand up for the cause of

freedom in this country. Mrs. Mouawad, who is the widow of a former

prime minister who, in 1991, had been assassinated, and a wide range of

very dynamic leaders who are looking forward to a strong future in

Lebanon.

Now, one of the questions that exists is the commitment of the United

States and the international community for the future of Lebanon

because it is clear that over the past several few decades we have had

a mixed record there in dealing with encouragement of support for the

people of Lebanon. And I am very happy to say that this administration

and the United States Congress will stand proudly with the people of

Lebanon as they pursue this goal of greater self-determination, free of

Syrian control.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that this is all in the interest

of our national security. This is all in the interest of the national

security of the United States of America. President Bush has said time

and time again, democratically elected leaders in countries do not

attack others. If we can see more democracy take place throughout the

world, it is obvious that we will diminish the kind of threat that has

existed for the United States of America.

As we encourage economic growth in country after country, I am

convinced that we will see a diminution in the attraction that many

young people, who are hungry, have towards international terrorism. In

fact, I remember talking to a number of people who said if we had a

percentage point or two of economic growth in Pakistan and Afghanistan,

we might have avoided what took place on September 11 because many of

the people who were involved in terrorism are seeking economic

opportunity in so doing.

Not all. I am not so naive as to believe that all are, but many

people are attracted because they have nothing else to do and no

economic opportunity.

So as we encourage the economic and political liberalization that is

taking place today in the region, it clearly will play a big role in

focusing on stability in that long troubled part of the world; and at

the same time it will play a big role in ensuring our national security

and the security of the neighbors throughout that area.

Now, as I said, I was joined on this trip by five of my colleagues,

and it is after 7 o'clock and we finished a very long night last night

working on the energy bill. We finally completed that this afternoon. I

am very happy to be joined by a distinguished member of the House

Committee on Rules, who was a very important part of this delegation.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to yield to my friend from Marietta,

Georgia (Mr. Gingrey) at this time.

Mr. Speaker, if I could reclaim my time, I would say to

my friend, if we look at what it is that so many of these young people,

in Lebanon especially, stood for, there clearly was, as I was saying, a

direct correlation between what is taking place in Iraq and what it is

that we are now seeing take place there; the idea of seeing in country

after country people saying if they can do it, then we can, too.

Now, Lebanon is a nation that has had a long history of democracy. It

has been a tradition there for many, many, many decades, but obviously,

when they have struggled with this control from Bashar al-Asad and

Syria for such a long period of time and his father before that, Hafiz

al-Asad, we need to do everything we can, and the United States played

a big role in leading in the United Nations Security Council the

passage of Resolution 1559 which called for the complete withdrawal of

Syrian forces.

I will never forget just looking into the eyes of these young people

who were there saying, We are willing to die to make sure that the

people of Lebanon can be free of the kind of tyranny that has been

inflicted on us. Of course, we have continued to see terrorist attack

after terrorist attack. Just a couple of days before we were there,

there was a huge explosion in the printing factory the Saturday before

we went in, and we decided it was very important for us to go anyway so

that we could encourage these people and let them know that the

international community stands behind them today and this immediate

struggle but will be with them for the long pull as they do move

towards these elections.

One of the things that I am very happy about is that we in the

Congress have just played a role in helping in Lebanon, and it will be

in other countries, with the establishment of a new commission, the

Democracy Advisory Commission, that we are going to have that will

provide a chance for Members of the United States House of

Representatives to directly work with our counterparts and newly-

elected parliaments in other parts of the world, and obviously, Lebanon

will, I believe, be a very important part of that as they begin this

rebuilding effort.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is also important to note that on

this trip we also had an opportunity, as we were coming back, to stop

and report to our counterparts in the European parliament as we went to

Brussels, Belgium. Actually, I spoke about this the other day here on

the House floor, Mr. Speaker, when I introduced a resolution calling

for negotiations for a U.S.-EU free trade agreement.

One of the things that we have found is we were reporting to European

parliaments about the importance of this, the developments that we are

seeing in the region, and they were very encouraged. Of course, a

number of these countries had been strong opponents, very strong

opponents to our effort that had taken place in the Middle East and in

Iraq.

I will never forget the dinner that we had in Brussels when a

socialist member of the European parliament from Lisbon, Portugal,

stood up, and he was proud to be a socialist. We obviously disagreed on

a wide range of issues, but what he said was that in watching both the

inaugural address and the State of the Union message delivered by

President Bush, in which he talked about the struggle for freedom in

Iraq and other parts of the world, that he had never been more proud to

hear a statement from a President of the United States, and he had

never been in such strong agreement or as inspired by a statement of

the President of the United States as he was by the statement from

President Bush. In that meeting that we had in Brussels, we were able

to get into a number of very important issues with the Europeans that

impact the United States.

First and foremost, and one of the main reasons that I wanted to stop

in Brussels to meet with members of the European commission and

European parliamentarians was that we wanted to ensure that we would

not see the European Union lift the arms embargo on the sale of weapons

to the People's Republic of China. I have been very gratified and I

know it was not just our effort because President Bush and Secretary of

State Condoleezza Rice had very successful trips. The President had one

trip. Secretary of State Rice has had three trips to Europe since she

has become Secretary of State, talking about the need to ensure that

there is not a lifting of the arms embargo. I am happy to see that

since we were there and since these other efforts have been put into

place that our European allies have decided not to lift the arms

embargo on the transfer of these weapons.

We have other trade disputes that exist over the issue of Airbus,

some other measures that were put into place by the Europeans, and it

is my hope that we can begin negotiations on a European Union-U.S. free

trade agreement that will allow us to address many of these concerns

that are understandable and have been there.

Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to further yield.

Well, I thank my friend for his contribution. I want to

say that he was very helpful in that effort as well.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that as we look at where we are

headed in the future, it seems to me that we have gotten to the point

where there is an understanding that freedom, economic freedom and

political freedom, are interdependent. We need to do everything that we

can to encourage people to choose their own leaders, to live under the

rule of law, and at the same time, we need to encourage economic

opportunity for people all over the world.

One of the things that we have learned from this trip that we took is

that it is a God-given right and it is something that everyone aspires

to. The arrogance that has existed in the past, believing that somehow,

some people may not be educated enough or have an understanding or they

may be tied to some tribe or some other entity, and so the notion of

thinking that they might be able to play a role in choosing their own

leaders is extraordinary arrogance on the part of people who hold that

view, because I believe that every single person on the face of the

earth should have that opportunity to be able to choose their own

leaders, to be able to seek economic opportunity for themselves.