Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman chairman for yielding

to me.

As he mentioned at the outset of his remarks, I was one of a group of

six Members primarily from the Committee on Rules, we affectionately

called it CODEL Dreier, and we had an opportunity really to visit these

8 countries and the Palestinian West Bank as well. But I think more

than anything else what we did in visiting those countries is to let

the people in the Middle East, and this was almost exclusively a Middle

Eastern trip, to let them know that we are their friends, to let them

know that we are willing to reach out and to help solve the myriad

problems in the Middle East. Mr. Speaker, there is no question that

there are plenty of them.

We are of course continuing to try to help the Iraqi people as they

build their own government and stand up their military so they can

defend themselves. They want democracy. They have had a taste of it. So

at these many places that we stopped you could see it just sort of

blossoming, blooming. And they seemed very, very appreciative that we

would meet and listen.

We did a whole lot of listening, Mr. Speaker; we did a little bit of

talking.

We had some formal sessions, but mainly I think it was a great

experience for us, but it was a great experience for them as well, as I

say, to see Members of Congress.

It is not the easiest place in the world to get to. It is certainly

not what you would call a vacation paradise, like some folks would go

on spring break down to Panama City or some of the beautiful beaches in

our country. It was not anything at all like that, of course.

But on one of the last days of our trip, Mr. Speaker, we were

actually on the island of Cyprus and had an opportunity there to visit

what they call the Green Zone. It is a separation, demarcation, almost

like the DMZ, frozen in time since the uprisings between the Greek

Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots in 1974, I think.

But we discussed that separation, that division, the fact that they

had recently had a referendum where one side, the north, the Turks were

very much in favor of unification per the Kofi Annan plan from the

United Nations. And the Greek Cypriots were, I think, 70 percent voted

in opposition to that. But we had an opportunity to visit, to sit down,

and just right across the table from the President of Cyprus, President

Papadopoulos.

And as the chairman said, we also had an opportunity to meet with the

Turkish Cypriot leader and let them know that we are concerned and we

care about what is going on with that, I guess you could call it the

``Gateway to the Middle East.''

So there were so many things like that, almost like each day was

another opportunity, and certainly, not the least of which as the

Chairman has just pointed out, the time we spent in Lebanon and

visiting that grave site of former Prime Minister Hariri and the

poignant, very sad, but most important, opportunity to meet and talk

with his widow. I thought that was a unique opportunity for the group

and I appreciate the gentleman from California (Chairman Dreier) for

arranging that.

Mr. Speaker, if the chairman would yield for a minute,

there was certainly an opportunity to meet with those students in

Beirut. Actually, they were in a tent city and had been there

protesting the Syrian involvement in Lebanon, and they came up to us.

It was fairly early in the day. They probably just came out of the

tents where their living conditions were not so great. They were

unshaven, but as the Chairman pointed out, just to look in their eyes,

just to look in that deep feeling that we could see, it just came

through, loud and clear. They care so much to have democracy and

freedom: freedom of speech, freedom of the opportunity to vote, and

freedom from outside interference with their country. The Lebanese are

very proud, proud people, as the chairman pointed out, and that was a

very important moment for me.

Mr. Speaker, as the gentleman will recall, as the

chairman led this delegation, as he just mentioned, in Brussels, that

opportunity to meet with the European commission and the EU, as well as

visit NATO, which was a very good experience, but we took an

opportunity to let the European Union know, as the gentleman from

California (Chairman Dreier) pointed out, how strongly we do feel about

being in opposition to them lifting that arms embargo, particularly in

light of the fact that in just a very recent session of their people's

Congress, they voted unanimously an anti-secession law which basically

says that it is

illegal for the Republic of China, Taiwan as we know it, to leave their

country and they are still part of the mainland, according to this law.

So we wanted to make sure, and I think the chairman did an excellent

job in his one-on-one discussion with several leading members of the

European commission, of how important it was to us for stability in

that region, for stability in the Middle East. I mean, I think that

was, of all of the diplomatic things that we were able to accomplish,

and there were many on this 10-day trip, but I thought that was real

significant.

Mr. Speaker, if the chairman would yield, this is such

an important point that the chairman is making, and I hope my

colleagues are listening because that reaching out, as I have said

earlier, that is so important. I do not think anybody could do it any

better than the gentleman from California (Chairman Dreier), and this

delegation showed them that we are very much willing to open our arms

and our hearts and our support of the people in the Middle East in

realizing, as the chairman pointed out, that they want to grasp hold to

a little measure of that peace and liberty that, quite honestly, people

in our country, Members of Congress as well, sort of fall into the trap

of taking that for granted. It is not something to be for granted when

we go to these countries, and we realize that they only have a very

small measure of it. So I thought that was extremely beneficial.