Mr. Speaker, I am motivated to come because of the

comments made by the previous speaker, by an incident that happened

today in my committee, and listening on TV to a previous speaker on

Iraq.

All three of them, to the best of my knowledge, have not been to Iraq

since the war, and yet, they profess to know so much about what is

going on in Iraq. I have not quite understood why our colleague would

go and meet with Saddam Hussein before the war and not

seek to understand and meet with our people in Iraq and the Iraqis

after the war.

I voted to remove Iraq out of Kuwait in 1991 because I believed we

could not allow Iraq, and Saddam Hussein in particular, to control 19

percent of the world's oil, the 10 percent that was in Iraq and the 9

percent in Kuwait, and then threaten over 40 percent of the world's oil

in Saudi Arabia, the Arab Emirate, Qatar and even Iran. So even more

than 40 percent. It is almost like a James Bond movie that we would

somehow think that we would want that to happen.

People say it is all about oil. No. It is about our being able to

light a room, heat a room, provide power in a hospital, to be able to

move. Basically, it is about our lifeblood.

So we went in and removed Saddam, and we had an agreement, which he

did not abide with for 12 years. In fact, we encircled Iraq, hoping, I

guess, that he would eventually comply.

We had inspections that we sought to have him comply to, and he did

not. At the time, we did not think he had a nuclear program; in fact,

our CIA did not think he had it, and then his 2 sons-in-law went to

Jordan and told us exactly where we would find his nuclear program. And

then we were able to get Hans Blix and others to go to those areas and

we found that he did, in fact, have a nuclear program. So our faith in

the CIA, at least mine, sure was impacted significantly, frankly, by

the failure of our people to know that, in fact, he had not just

chemicals which he used on his own people.

I have been to Iraq 10 times since the removal of Saddam in 2003. I

have spoken to Kurdish families that lost loved ones. They described to

me how those killings took place. The helicopters flying over, the

mists that they saw, their families that collapsed in utter pain. I

have also seen the killing fields that existed courtesy of Saddam

Hussein. Regretfully, we almost gave him a playroom in which to do

these things, because we encircled him with a no-fly zone.

I voted to remove Saddam Hussein from power in 2002, and we did that

in 2003 because, like President Bush, former President Clinton, Senator

Clinton, my 2 democratic senators, Senators Dodd and Lieberman, I

believed he had weapons of mass destruction. I went to Hans Blix and

asked him in his own country why Saddam wanted us to believe he had

weapons of mass destruction. And he said, he wanted his neighbors to

fear him and he said, he never believed that we would come in. I

thought, that is kind of hard to believe. But then, when I thought

about it, it is not hard to believe. He never thought we would remove

him from Kuwait. He never thought we would do that, which is a real

lesson that a military power that you have, as powerful as it is, if

your adversaries do not think you will use it, becomes a power you

ultimately may use; whereas the threat of using it if they believe you

will use it means that you can get a change in behavior.

But he also believed we would not attack because we learned that the

Oil For Food program had enabled him basically, as the Dulfer Report

says, yes, he said, no weapons of mass destruction, but then he said

that in his interviews with Iraqi officials, that Saddam believed that

he had the vote of France, Russia, and China because of the Oil For

Food program, and because of the Oil For Food program, he figured that

the Security Council would not allow the United States to go in. Well,

they did not. And he figured if France and Russia and China would not

vote for us to go in, we would not go in. The President kept telling

Saddam, cooperate, or we will come in. My wife would say to me, why is

the President saying that? She said, I know he is going to do that. I

said honey, he is not speaking to you, he is speaking to Saddam,

because we do not want him to go in; we want him to comply.

Now, the bottom line is, we went in. And, in April 2003, being a

Peace Corps volunteer and someone who was not in Vietnam and yet, here

I am, of Vietnam age sending other troops to Iraq, I thought, well,

what could I bring to the table? I realized that what I could bring is

what I was trained in the Peace Corps to do: it is to understand their

culture, understand how we are able to appreciate them, an Arab Nation,

and to see how we could help them have the opportunity to decide for

themselves ultimately how to rule their own country. In Mukasa, I was

there in April 2003, and I think I was the first Member of Congress to

go into Iraq; in fact, I know I was, and I had conversations with a

number of people, but one of them was with a gentleman named Mohammed

Abdul Hassan, and I said to him, what do we do that makes you

uncomfortable. He said, when you throw candy on the ground and our

children pick it up as if they are chickens or dogs. He said, when an

Arab woman puts her hand to her heart, a Muslim woman, and your soldier

is offended, when really she is saying, thank your for honoring me, but

Muslim women do not shake hands with men, but particularly with

strangers, and you are offended. You should not be offended. She is

honoring you by saying, ``thank you, but.'' And, at one point, which

seemed a little out of character, he put his hands on my shoulders and

looked at me and said, you do not know us and we do not know you.

Well, I could not wait to get back home, because when I go to Iraq, I

do it for 3 reasons. I want to see firsthand what is happening so I am

not looking at it through the press. Because when you look at it

through the press, it is like you look at it through a little scope. It

is wherever they focus attention. I wanted to learn firsthand, because

I had learned from my concern about his having weapons of mass

destruction that I wanted to know firsthand, not through other sources.

I wanted to see for myself. But I also wanted to come back home to be

able to tell my own government things that I think they needed to do.

One of them was very clear as soon as I came back. I said to our own

government, we need Iraqi-Americans there, and we need Arabic speakers.

Now, at that time, Iraq was under the control of the military and Mr.

Bremmer, and I think they were insensitive to the cultural differences.

I think that they did not pay attention to what the State Department

had said about looting, about the need for Arab speakers.

The second time I went there, I went outside the umbrella of the

military. I want to make this point. I went on my own. Well, actually,

I went with some nongovernment organizations that enabled me to stay in

Basra, meet with Iraqis, stay in Al Gut, meet with folks in Al Gut, go

to Hanacan, Sulaymania, Irbul, speak to every day Iraqis, spend the

night, talk to them. The second time I went there, I started hearing,

why are you putting my father and my brother and my uncle out of work?

Why are you doing that? What did they do? They did not know I was a

Member of Congress; they thought I was evaluating the programs provided

by these nongovernment organizations, and it was honest, that is what I

was doing. I just did not tell them I also happened to be a Member of

Congress.

They made such a strong case. They said, why can't we at least guard

the hospitals. That rings in my ear, because we have lost 3 American

soldiers in my district, the first one guarding the hospital, which is

to acknowledge to my colleague who just spoke that we did make

mistakes, huge mistakes, and we dug a deep hole.

We basically created a void because we disbanded their Army, their

police, their Border Patrol, and their government. We put over 400,000

people out of work and, in the process, all of their family members

became a bit angry. So we are talking about nearly 2 million Iraqis who

were basically told by our government, you have no future role in Iraq.

And I say that and I wish the administration would acknowledge it,

because rather than making me more concerned about where we are today,

it makes me appreciate where we are today. If we were up here in April

2003 and were a little ahead or a little behind; we dug ourselves a

huge hole by disbanding their Army, their police, and their Border

Patrol. But when you see how far we were down, you realize now that we

have come a long way. We, the Iraqi people, and we, the United States,

in the incredible dedication of our troops, we lost nearly 2,000

Americans, but we have had over 14,000 who have been injured, and some

of them quite severely.

The bottom line is, though, if you appreciate that we have come a

long way from the hole we dug, you do see the progress that my

colleague does not seem to want to see or acknowledge, which I think

has been quite significant.

Another time I went to Iraq, I had one of Mr. Bremmer's people pull

me aside and say, we do not have any resources. I only have one person

here: me. And it is all centrally controlled. And we need money. I need

at least 50 people. The Marines are leaving and they did kind of the

work I was doing, interacting with the populace and the polls are

coming in and they are not going to do it the same way. We need

resources.

I came back and said, we need resources. I was a little shocked to

find a month later that we saw tens of billions of dollars being added.

A little resources was a lot more than I thought. And I do feel that if

I had it to do over again, I would have wanted to have a clearer

picture of the potential costs. I still would have been very strongly

an advocate of going into Iraq, but I would have liked to have known

the costs better. And that is one area when I look back and I say, why

did I not try to determine those better.

Another time I went in, I met with our folks who take the weapons,

the IEDs, the improvised explosive devices and they break them down,

and I went and saw a room filled with hundreds of these tiny

mechanisms. And the people that were there, there were about 2 to 3 of

them, I know 2 in particular, and they said, we only have a handful of

people. We need 50 to 100 folks to help us break these down. They were

key chains, the keys that would open the door, they were the car door

openers, they were timers in washing machines. They said, if we had

more people we could break down where they were made, because we could

identify the type of unit that is made to make these bombs and we would

know where to go in Iraq. When I came back, I frankly asked to meet

with the President and had an opportunity to share my concerns with the

President and other officials about the need to get people in that

area, which is to say that, and then that happened. We got those

individuals. And we were able to break down a lot more of these

weapons.

I believe, as I point out in other criticism, before I talk about

some of the amazing things that have happened, I believe that if the

White House had been more open to legislative oversight, and we in

Congress had been more aggressive on legislative oversight, Abu Ghraib

never would have happened, because this is what would have happened.

One of us would have been in Abu Ghraib, and a soldier would have come

up to us and probably use stronger language than I am going to use, and

he or she would have said, I do not know a darn thing about overseeing

prisoners. I am a cook. I am in artillery. I do not know how to do it.

By the way, Congressman, some pretty bad things are going on here by a

few people. And we would have then raised questions, and it would have

been looked into.

So one of the sad things from my standpoint is in summary, I wish

that our military had listened more to what the State Department said

would happen, which did: the looting, do not disband the Army, the

police, or the military, or the government; I wish that we had done

oversight in a stronger way.

But this is the amazing thing that has happened. It is absolutely

amazing. Those who have voted against the war have been in strong

criticism of the President. So almost everything he does, they are

critical of. And yet, when they are critical of it and it turns out

right, they just kind of fade into the woodwork. They said, do not

transfer power to the Iraqis in June, do not rush them. And we did, and

it was a huge success, the transfer of power in June of last year.

Every critic of the President said do not do it, it will be a failure.

When it succeeded, they just acted like nothing happened. Well, a huge

thing happened. We transferred power.

I can tell my colleagues that it worked and it was significant

because when I was there for one of my visits and I had met with the

President and I had met with the Prime Minister and I had met with the

foreign minister, the Foreign Minister Negroponte, and what was crucial

about the transfer of power, besides giving the Iraqis the authority,

was we took it away from Defense to run the government, Mr. Bremmer,

and let them fight the war, and we gave it to State Department to be

our liaison with a legitimate government, or at least a government that

now was in Iraqi hands. I will say legitimate in parentheses since

there was not any election.

So we went out on this press conference and there was all this Iraqi

press, and I have to tell you, I thought, this is kind of a kick, I am

going to have a press conference with Iraqis. The first thing I said

was, ``we made some mistakes, but.'' And there was nodding of heads by

the Iraqis because I knew that they all agreed and knew that it was a

mistake to disband the Army, the police, the Border Patrol and the

government, at least most of them felt that way.

Well, the first question was to the Iraqi Foreign Minister, so I

stepped aside and he answered the question. I asked, is there another

question. The second was to the Foreign Minister. I stepped aside and

he answered that. This went on for 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 times and I finally

said to Mr. Negroponte, I said, Ambassador, what better proof do we

have that the Iraqis believe, and with justification, that their own

people are now in charge.

That was a huge, huge success, for which the President basically got

no credit. Then there was the election in January 2005, and all of the

critics said do not have this election, it is going to be a big

failure. There is going to be violence. It is not going to work.

Well, I was there on election day. And it was one of my most

thrilling moments as a Member of Congress, because I was getting

affirmation that we were clearly on the right track. Clearly on the

right track. I was in Irbil. And I met with the Democratic Institute,

and the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican

Institute that are funded to help countries all around the world

understand democracy.

And in these institutes were not Americans; they were all of the

people we had helped in different places, in Yugoslavia and South

America. They were all there to help Iraqis. It was thrilling to see

all of this world community to come to help.

But at any rate, I am going and witness the vote. And I had a badge

on that gave me the privilege of serving, and in Irbil there was this

school, and there were three classrooms on one side, and three

classrooms on the other. And people were going in, and registration was

running pretty well.

Under Saddam if you did not register, you were likely to get killed.

So we had a pretty good registration list. But what was amazing was in

every one of those rooms the furniture was the same; it was corrugated

cardboard, but so firm it was like furniture.

And people were given their local, their state, and their Federal

ballot. They went behind a protected area. They voted and then they

came up to the person who was right there with the three ballot boxes.

The person took their ballots, folded them up and put them on top of

each ballot. And then took their finger and stuck it in the ink jar.

And I am thinking, well, this is interesting. You get killed, I am told

if you vote, and yet those folks are putting their finger in an ink

jar.

And I learned from some from South America, they use that system in

South America in some of the countries. If you try to erase the ink it

gets darker. The only way you can take it off is to take your finger

off. You just have to wait until the skin dies. So it is there for

many, many, many days.

And I am watching this. Give the ballot. Put your finger in the ink

jar. And I wanted to bond with the Iraqis. I was in a Kurdish village.

And I went up, I think somewhat meekly, and I said, would it be all

right if I stuck my finger in that ink jar?

Well, the woman who was in charge of the election there looked up at

me, looked down at the ink jar, looked up at me again, looked down,

then looked up at me again and then she said, no, you are not an Iraqi.

I was embarrassed.

Everybody looked at me. I sure was not an Iraqi. And then I welled up

with this incredible emotion, for two reasons. The pride that she had,

and I was

not one of her. But she was a Kurd, and she said I was not an Iraqi.

She did not say I was not a Kurd.

I saw Iraqis line up to vote. They were dressed up. And they brought

their men with them, the Iraqi women, because they wanted to vote. And

I saw them carry their children, just like we would do.

Later that day, I met with the President of Iraq. The election is in

January. This was to elect an assembly which would then select people

for a panel for the Constitution, that then had to be ready by

September for a vote in October. And he told me he got there half an

hour early. And they made him wait a half an hour.

And then he smiled, and he said, is that not terrific? But then he

got angry, and he said, I was fined $1,000 for campaigning the day

before the election.

And I said, well, Mr. President what did you do? He described to me

what he did. And I am thinking to myself, it sure sounded like

campaigning to me. And then he said, But, you know, they fined

everybody else too.

And I thought, you know what, this is amazing. When I met with the

election officials later that day, I learned there were 160,000 Iraqis

who ran this election. Contrary to what my colleague said previously,

this was not run by Americans. We taught them, Yugoslavians taught

them, South Americans taught them, the English taught them, some in the

eastern European nations, other Eastern European nations had come to

tell them about democracy.

They set it up, and they ran it almost flawlessly. Frankly, better

than happened in some of my own urban communities in my own district.

There was immense pride, and there should have been pride. So it took

them a while to get their government, but they did. And they were a few

weeks late in getting their Constitution.

What did the press say? The press said, they are failing. That is

what they said. All of the major newspapers on TV, they are failing.

And I am thinking to myself, they have failed because they missed a

deadline by a week or two? They failed? So I began to think. Let me

think. 1776. Declaration of Independence. Articles of Confederation.

Constitution of the United States. I think that was like 13 years.

And then as Condoleezza Rice pointed out to me, besides the failure

of the Articles of Confederation, in our Constitution, if you were

black you were three-fifths a person and a slave. Women did not have

the right to vote. And there were a few other things. We punted on a

few issues.

Now, the Iraqis have given women the right to vote. The Iraqis have

even guaranteed 25 percent of their seats in their assembly will be

women. That is what they have done. The Iraqis have said Sharia law

exists if you declare under Shiia or Sunni, Sharia law. If you declare

you are a Shiia or a Sunni. But if you choose to be under common law,

then you are under common law.

They then have tried to draw in the Sunnis, who in the negotiations

were allowed to participate even though they did not vote in the last

election, they did not vote. But they were still there.

But the Sunnis would tell us that they did not have this authority to

say, yes, we put our stamp of approval on this, because they said we

were not elected like you were, Shiias and Kurds.

But they agreed with so much in private as to what was done. And the

Shiias and the Kurds kept trying to say, well, if we do this, do this.

And then we hear in the press that somehow this is a bad thing. And

then I began to think about our Constitution. When we had the

Constitution, it did not include the 10 Bill of Rights, and

fortunately, Virginia, in particular, said we want the Bill of Rights.

And Jefferson said, we want the Bill of Rights. We had to change our

Constitution 10 times in order to become these United States. We had to

amend what had been already agreed to. And yet we are not even saying

that the Iraqis can do the same thing? And we are saying they have to

do it in 2 1/2 to 3 years, when we took many, many years, and along

the way had the Articles of Confederation.

So I look at the transfer of power in June of 2004 and say what a

huge thing. Then the elections in 2005. So what about the election that

just happened? I kept turning to the press to see what happened. And I

did not hear what happened. And then it dawned on me: you know, it must

have been a success, because the press was not talking about it. What a

horrible thing to say and have to admit, but it is so true.

If it is a success, it is not going to be talked about, which is to

say, frankly, if the press moves to al-Kut, that is where the bombing

would be, not in Baghdad.

If the press moved to Basra, that is where all of the bombing would

be. If the press moved to Kadhimain, that is where all of bombing would

be because the bombing is not for domestic consumption; it is for

international consumption.

The Iraqis are used to bombings. They have 400,000 people in the

killing fields. They have the dead in the Kurdish areas because of the

chemical weapons Saddam used. I met a woman who for 10 years was not

allowed to go out of her house. I do not say out of her property, out

of her house. Because her parents were so fearful, given her looks, she

was attractive, that Udai and Qusay would choose her as their woman of

pleasure some night, Saddam's two sons.

It was a horrific place to be. And now Iraqis are forming their

government. When I asked Iraqis during any number of my 10 visits, what

is your biggest fear, their biggest fear is, and it is hard to tell you

how I feel when I say it, but they say that you will leave us. That you

will have us taste what you have, give us an idea, give us a sense of

how life could be without Saddam, give us a sense to have our own

destiny determined by the majority, that you will leave us.

I say to them, we will not leave you. Now, you know what, I do not

think we will. But when I hear the talk and I look at CNN and I look at

other newscasts and I hear the blind, we are in a mess in Iraq, and I

see the transfer of power, the election in January, the referendum now,

and what I believe will be a huge participation in December, I am

saying, I am in awe of what the Iraqis have done.

I am in awe of what our Americans have done. Because while we never

should have disbanded the army, the police, the border patrol, their

government, we did, and the Americans, the limited number of Americans

had to fill in the void and pay a huge price.

But they also have done something else besides trying to maintain

security, trying to teach about democracy, trying to build an economy.

They have trained their army, their police, their border patrol, they

are training their government officials.

Six months ago, I would have had to tell you honestly, and I would

have been honest, that the police were not professionals, because they

were not. They did not have enough training. They did not have enough

experience. They did not have enough equipment. But now we are giving

them the training, the equipment. They have the cars, the uniforms, the

places, the weapons, the training clearly; and now they are getting the

experience.

They are getting the experience. The military was able in the last

town that we were able to free, the Iraqis went in. We followed. The

Iraqis freed the town. We followed. The bottom line is, we followed and

the Iraqis are now able to hold it.

Let me get toward the conclusion here and just say to you that we may

fail or we may succeed, but we have a better chance. We have a better

chance in Iraq than we had when we formed our own country.

Dave McCullough in ``1776'' said we needed lots of miracles. We

needed the miracle to make sure the wind was blowing in the right way

so George Washington could leave and escape the British in New York.

We needed a miracle to get Massachusetts and Virginia to agree. We

did not have three parties. We did not have the Kurds, the Shiias and

the Sunnis. We had 13 very independent States. We had large States; we

had small States. How are you going to get them all to agree? Are Rhode

Island and Delaware going to agree to let Virginia and New York or

Pennsylvania govern? No. But we did it. They do not need a miracle.

What they do need is a little more time.

What they do need is the possibility that they can have their

elections, that

they can refine their Constitution, and that they can make sure their

military has the capability to provide the security.

So when people say, what is our exit strategy? I say it a hundred

times, it is very simple. And when they say we do not have an exit

strategy, that is simply not true. We have had an exit strategy from

day one. It has been revised a few times, but we have had an exit

strategy. It has been revised because we underestimated the strength of

the insurgency. We underestimated the consequence of disbanding their

army, their police and their border patrol; but our strategy is so

basic, so simple, and it does not need to be doubted.

Our strategy is to train their police, to train their border patrol,

to train their military so they have the capability to keep order. To

train their government so that they not only know about majority rule,

but minority rights. To give them more time to experience the

government, to give them more time to have their military be engaged in

a fight with help from the United States. Will we leave? We will leave

probably sooner than we should.

In my judgment, Senator McCain and others have been right. We have

been understaffed in Iraq. We will leave probably sooner than we should

but we will not leave completely because Iraqis will still need

logistical support. Their military will not have the cooks, the people

who can do the transportation, and all the other things that they need

besides that fighting force. They will not have the air power that they

will need. And frankly, I do not think they are going to want us to

leave from Iraq completely when they have neighbors like Syria, the

Turks who fear the Kurds, the Iranians that fear the Kurds and are

trying to wrap their arms around the Shias, and the Saudis who do not

want democracy to succeed.

When my colleague, the previous speaker, talked about how people

predicted bad things, I know darn well that the President of Egypt

predicted the election in January would not succeed. He was wrong. He

predicted the constitution would not pass and I think he is wrong. And

I think it relates more to not the United States but more to the idea

that Sunnis are having to give up power in Iraq to Shias, and that is

of concern to many.

Have there been other benefits from our being there? I do not think

that you would have seen Qadhafi and Libya do a 180 degree turn. It was

around the time we captured Saddam Hussein that Qadhafi I think

probably thought, you know, I have billions of dollars. Why would I

want to end up like Saddam Hussein? Why in the world would I want that

to happen? And in Syria even the Israelis were saying the Syrians will

not leave Lebanon but they left Lebanon. I do not think they would have

left Lebanon if we were not in Iraq. Fortunately, the Syrians fear we

might do something in Syria.

Now to some in my district they think that would be the craziest

thing in the world to do something in Syria. No, the craziest thing

would be for the Syrians to fear that we would not do something. The

craziest thing would be for us to say that we will not do something in

Syria. The smartest thing is to keep the Syrians wondering so we can

have a change of behavior without using military.

When I met with the Syrian ambassador he said, We want to be your

friends. Just tell us what we are doing wrong and we will stop. And I

said to the ambassador, Mr. Ambassador, we will not want to tell you

the things we know you are doing wrong and then just have you stop the

things we know you are doing wrong. We want to you stop even the things

we do not know you are doing.

We want you to stop allowing insurgents to come into Damascus who are

terrorist bombers who then come into Iraq to blow themselves up. When

my colleague said only 10 percent of the insurgency are foreigners. I

thought, yes, there are only 10 percent of them but 98 percent of them

are bombers, people who blow themselves up. If we could get rid of that

10 percent, we would get rid of 98 percent of the suicide bombers. Most

Iraqis do not have any interest in blowing themselves up.

So there is more I could say about Iraq. I am in awe of what our

troops have done. I am in awe of the Iraqi men and women that I have

met. I believe that most Iraqis who are involved in this government

believe they are the Madisons, the Benjamin Franklins, the George

Washingtons. They believe they are helping to create a new nation that

not unlike its fledgling democracy in the United States, where you

could have said, you know, tell me a country that has been a democracy,

a country where there have been some States. Tell me a country. You

could have used the same argument against the United States. Nobody has

it. It is not a natural thing. We in this world have kings and queens

and dictators.

Well, what I found at least with the Iraqis is they take to

democracy. They love the debate, the dialogue. They love to barter.

They love it. And there are a lot of things we could criticize what

they have done, but I think in two and a half years they do not need a

miracle, but they make me feel like they are doing something that will

have unbelievable significance in the long run for peace and

prosperity.