Mr. Speaker, you know, over the break I had the

opportunity to spend some time in the Middle East. And just this past

week I have returned from Israel, Jordan, Iraq, visiting with our men

and women in uniform, and talking with them about their impressions of

how we are doing in the war on terrorism, talking with them about what

they see as their strengths and the weaknesses and what we can be doing

better.

And, you know, the progress is really remarkable. These men and women

in uniform are really remarkable. I had last traveled to Iraq in

October 2003, and at that time the coalition forces had removed Saddam

Hussein's regime, and the Coalition Provisional Authority governed the

nation, and there was still a lot of unrest on the horizon. That unrest

is still there, but progress is being made.

Today we have an elected government in Iraq. It is representing

Iraq's ethnic and religious factions, and they have peacefully reached

an agreement to name a Kurd to the Presidency. There are two Vice

Presidents; one is a Shiite, the other a Sunni. They have also agreed

that the Prime Minister is a Shiite.

The naysayers said that successful elections would be all but

impossible. They said that the people did not want democracy, that they

did not understand democracy. But on election day, each and every one

of us, everybody on the face of this Earth, saw the long lines, they

saw people braving potential terrorist attacks, and in the words of one

Iraqi, a Nation was born in front of a watching world. I think that is

very true.

They did that. They took those risks in order to vote. The result is

a democratic government. And, yes, it is shaky, but it is free, and it

is elected, and they are proving the naysayers wrong. They are taking

those baby steps towards freedom.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that many things have changed in Iraq since

October of 2003, but, from my observation, one thing that has remained

consistent and true through thick and thin is our military men and

women, the Armed Forces. These folks in uniform have not faltered, not

for an instant, in their dedication to this mission. They have

demonstrated an unparalleled level of commitment toward reshaping the

nation, the Middle East, and the terrorist network that runs through

that region of the world.

Over the last couple of days, I have spent some time on the telephone

calling their families, letting them know how proud of them, how much I

appreciate their sacrifice, how much I appreciate the families and the

support that they are giving their loved ones in uniform. I am also

letting them know how much our constituents in the Seventh

Congressional District of Tennessee appreciate them. You know, and

America needs to know, that the Iraqi people are appreciative as well.

Following Iraq, I was able to speak with a small business owner, an

Iraqi woman who had traveled to America about a year ago and shadowed

me for a day. And she thanks the American military, and because of the

freedom

that our men and women in uniform have helped to deliver there on the

ground, her Iraqi sisters are now elected officials. Imagine that. A

woman in Iraq, many women in Iraq who are holding elected office. It is

change. It is a step forward.

While we were in Israel, we talked peace, not just a distant hope for

peace generations from now, but of a long-term agreement and soon. This

is because of our steady and dedicated commitment to involvement in the

Middle East.

In Iraq, we reviewed the Iraqi military training with General

Petraeus, who had been the commanding general at Fort Campbell. This

American-Iraqi military training is going to help give that nation the

protection, the ability to protect from the insurgents who are there

every day, growing weaker; but they are there. It will help the Iraqis

take responsibility for their security. We have got about 150,000

Iraqis that are trained; and some of our big Tennesseeans, the 278th

regiment from east Tennessee, they are working hard, and they are

helping train many of the Iraqis.

In Jordan, we visited with the Iraqi police training facility. We

have got about 50,000 Iraqis who are now trained, carrying on the work

of the police force in Iraq.

When you are there in Iraq on the ground, you cannot help but notice

the green fields and the sense that order is taking place to their

daily lives, not only in government but also in business.

The progress made in Iraq is sending shockwaves throughout the Middle

East. We have seen the Lebanese people resist the Syrian domination of

their government. In Saudi Arabia and Egypt, there is movement. It is

slow, but there is movement towards democracy.

None of this would have been possible without our military men and

women, and it is that change that is going to destroy terrorism.

Mr. Speaker, I just stand today to commend the men and women in

uniform, to say a special thanks to our Tennesseeans who are serving,

and I know that America joins me in thanking them and their families

for their sacrifice, their bravery, and their dedication.