Mr. Speaker, so often when we hear of events in the

Middle East the reports are negative, sometimes even the discussion on

the floor reflects a great deal of negativism.

Recently, I led a delegation to Jordan and Iraq and later to Germany.

Matter of fact, we just returned yesterday. And I thought I would

report on what I saw there because so often soldiers say we really wish

you would go back and tell the American people the war we are fighting

and not the one that they see on television or in the newspapers.

So, on previous trips, I had been amazed at how positive the morale

was. Everyplace that I went, soldiers seemed to be rather upbeat,

pulled together, seemed to have a sense of mission.

As we flew into the Al Asad, which is a somewhat remote base about 90

miles west of Baghdad out in the desert, extreme cold, no vegetation,

no trees, no grass, as we landed there in the dust and the sand, I

thought, this is the place where we are going to see some people who

are really pretty negative about what is going on, and I was really

surprised.

There were 180 Nebraskans from my home State there. That is why I

went there. They had not had a CODEL there for at least 9 months, maybe

never there. And again I saw the same thing, a sense of accomplishment,

a real sense of pride in what they were doing. I pressed them, and I

talked to them, and I still got no negative comments and no major

complaints.

We went on down to Baghdad, and we talked to General Petraeus, who is

in charge of training the Iraqi soldiers, and General Casey, who is in

charge of the overall command there. General Casey made the point that

the infrastructure still needs improving. Obviously, the electricity is

better, but it is still not working all the time. Sewage at times is

not what it should be; and, at times, their oil pipelines are getting

blown up. But, again, there is general improvement, but they both said

the January 30 elections were truly a watershed event. Since that time,

there has been a definite qualitative shift in what is happening in

Iraq.

I thought I would just point out some of the things that we were told

and some of the things that we observed.

General Casey said, and General Petraeus as well, that by the end of

the year Iraqi troops should be out in front in all concentrations in

Iraq. They would have, in many cases, U.S. backup, but there are right

now several areas of Iraq that are totally controlled, with no U.S.

backup, by Iraqi forces. So the training of the Iraqis has been

excellent.

The Iraqi intelligence is improving. Many Iraqis are now coming

forward with information regarding insurgents that were not coming

forward before. The attacks have been reduced, and the Iraqis are

certainly much more confident of their future.

Apparently, many of the Sunnis are regretting not having participated

in the elections, and at this point they are beginning to volunteer for

the army, for the police, which was something that was unheard of a few

months ago, and the Sunnis are pressing to get a place at the table in

the new government.

There is no shortage of Iraqi recruits apparent at the present time.

There are roughly 100 battalions of army Iraqis, 152,000 total have

been trained and equipped, 85,000 police, 67,000 members of the army.

The Iraqis have been provided with up-armored vehicles, body armor,

about 130,000 sets. So they are well over halfway to their goal of

270,000 Iraqi soldiers trained.

Also, the Iraqis are performing much better, whether they are

policemen or soldiers. The recent instigation or uprising in downtown

Baghdad by al Sadr, where we have several thousands of his supporters

demonstrating, it was well-orchestrated, but the thing that we did not

hear was that whole situation was controlled by Iraqi police, with no

U.S. backup, and so we find that they are much in control of the

situation.

We also had a chance to talk to Mr. al Jafari, the prime minister.

When we asked him what he wanted to say to the American people, he had

just been installed as prime minister the day before we saw him, he

said, the thing I would like to say is we owe a debt of gratitude to

the United States and particularly for the loss of soldiers. He said,

when you sent your soldiers over here and the sacrifices they made, it

is something we can never forget, and that we will always be grateful

for.

We asked him if he would have an inclusive government, if he would

include the Kurds and Sunnis and Shiites. He said he would, and that

remains to be seen, because he is linked with a very conservative

Islamic Shiite party that has some ties to Iran. So I guess the proof

will be in the pudding,

and we will see what he does. He was very cordial, nice and

intelligent; and, of course, they have a President at the present time,

a Kurd named Talabani.

We also were heartened by the progress women had made in Iraq,

because at the present time every third name on the ballot last January

30 was a female name. So we will have about 80 representatives of the

275 member delegates to the constitutional convention.

So, all in all, Mr. Speaker, we think things are better. They are not

perfect, but it is heartening to see the progress that has been made.