

SMART security encourages democracy-building, human rights education, conflict resolution through non-military means, educational opportunities, particularly for women and girls, and strengthening civil society programs in the developing world.

Mr. Speaker, our future efforts in Iraq must take the SMART approach: humanitarian assistance to rebuild Iraq's war-torn physical and economic infrastructure. Congress must commit to this type of support for Iraq, not a continuation of a military approach.

It is time to support our troops and begin the difficult recovery process from a long and destructive war. The best way to do this is to bring our troops home. Mr. Speaker, our troops deserve nothing less.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JONES of North Carolina addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FRANKS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. FRANKS of Arizona addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. EMANUEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. FILNER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DAVIS of Illinois addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Ms. BEAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. BEAN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege this evening to be joined by some of my colleagues. We went to Iraq a few weeks ago. We find a lot of conversation on the House floor about what should and should not be done, and so we would like to take this opportunity to discuss what we saw.

I guess one of the main objectives tonight is to inform the public that this is not always a highly partisan issue. The Members that went to Iraq were both Republicans and Democrats. We got along very well. We continue to get along very well. Sometimes the general impression that is conveyed by conversation on the House floor is that we are always at each other's throats and that this is what politics is all about. I think this is very misleading in many cases; and as a result, we hope to have a bipartisan discussion tonight of those events that we encountered as we traveled overseas.

Those who went with us were the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. BRADLEY), the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BEAUPREZ), who is here now, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. NEUGEBAUER), and the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. UDALL).

As we talked to the soldiers over there, we often heard this comment: there seem to be really two wars. There is the war that oftentimes is seen on television; and certainly the bombings, the beheadings and all the really violent things we see are very true, they are part of this conflict; but also the soldiers would continually mention the fact that there is another war that they are seeing, another war they are fighting that oftentimes is not conveyed over the airwaves. So we would like to really discuss these issues.

I have made three trips to Iraq. I have been to Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Jordan twice, Landstuhl Air Base in Germany a couple of times, and Walter Reed many times. So I have had many chances to talk to the soldiers. And I guess the thing that continues to impress me and the overwhelming impression that I get is the efficiency of our Army, the sense of mission, the sense of accomplishment, and a generally upbeat attitude.

Now, certainly being in Iraq or Kuwait or Afghanistan, or in a hospital, cannot be an entirely uplifting experience; and there is some hardship and there is some difficulty. But, still, it seems the soldiers are amazingly intact and amazingly upbeat when you consider their circumstances.

I will just mention two things on this trip and then turn it over to some of my other colleagues here for discussion. The first stop that we had in Iraq was at al Asad. Al Asad is a base out in the desert. It is in al Anbar Province, which is the largest province in Iraq. It is a desert area. It is becoming a fairly dangerous area because many of the insurgents have been driven out of the cities and are now in the desert. So it is a fairly wild situation.

In my previous trips, again I had always had a fairly positive reception from the troops. But as we landed in al Anbar, I thought, well, this is the place where I am going to start hearing the complaints. Because there was not a blade of grass, there was not a tree, obviously very little to do socially, and quite a large number of troops out there. There are two groups from Nebraska, one was a medical troop and one was a transportation group. So I spent quite a bit of time talking to those soldiers, probably met about 100 of them personally, and there were about another 80 who were out on patrol. Again, the same attitude that we had encountered other places was very prevalent. They were proud of what they were doing, they had a sense of mission, and generally were very positive about what was going on.

So that trip, the first part, was, again, somewhat of a surprise in view of the surroundings. The second area that I want to mention was towards the end of our trip. We went to an Iraqi women's caucus, and this caucus was held in Jordan on the banks of the Dead Sea. And the reason we went over there was that we had formed an Iraqi Women's Caucus for Women's Issues here in Washington.

The genesis of that caucus was simply a conversation between Paul Wolfowitz, Jennifer Dunn, and myself, where we began to speculate on the role of women in the new Iraqi government as the war progressed. And we began to talk about the fact that women would certainly play an important role; that women oftentimes are the peacemakers; and possibly to have a positive resolution to this whole conflict would have to involve the women of Iraq.

So we began to move forward on this. Iraqi women were brought to the United States. And part of this movement was to bring Iraqi women over to the Dead Sea, out of Iraq, where they could learn a little more about democracy and strategies in terms of running for office and so on.

So there were 1,000 women who applied for 250 spots at this seminar. And so we met with those 250 women. They came by auto, and they came from all

points in Iraq. And they were stopped for about 12 hours, most of them, at the Jordan border. They could not get in the country. So that was difficult. Three carloads of them were fired upon as they went across al Anbar Province. And of course there was a great deal of danger and a great deal of risk. Two of the women we had had over here in the United States as part of the caucus had been killed during the elections, when they ran for office. So it was a very dangerous business.

As we interacted with those women, we had some interesting conversation and we picked up some general themes, and those themes were reinforced by three women who were from Iraq who were in my office yesterday. Essentially, what these women were saying yesterday and also several weeks ago was very similar. They said, first of all, we now have a sense of hope. We have a sense that the future is going to be reasonably bright. We appreciate freedom.

They pointed out that there is now a great deal of marriage going on in Iraq, where under Saddam, for many years, very few people got married because of the situation. They have noticed a resurgence of entrepreneurial activity. They are pleased with the number of women in government. There were roughly 80 out of 275 spots in the constitutional convention that belonged to women. Schools have been renovated. Attendance, particularly by women, has gone up in the schools. And, of course, a great many of the children, about 97 percent of the children, have been vaccinated.

Now, we do not mean to paint an entirely rosy picture. The women I saw yesterday, the women we saw in Iraq said that security is a major problem. They live with some sense of fear almost all the time. They mentioned problems with the infrastructure. Electricity still is a problem. In many cases, it is on only about half the time. The thing about it now, though, is different than under Saddam. Under Saddam, there were certain areas, where his people were, that had very good electrical service and the rest of the country had no service at all. Now there is service all over the country, but many times people have only intermittent service.

Sewage disposal is still a problem, water problems still persist; and the job market is not what we would like to see it, but it is better than it was before. And of course the other issue is there has been a resurgence, particularly as it relates to women to fundamentalism. Sharia, the rather fundamental interpretation of Islamic law, sometimes is regaining a hold in terms of how women are perceived and how they feel they should be treated or are treated.

So it is a mixed picture. But still, overall, they say they would not trade their present situation with the insecurity that they are now experiencing for what they had under Saddam and feel they are generally much better off.

So with those prefatory comments, I would like to yield to my colleague from Colorado (Mr. BEAUPREZ), who we really enjoyed being with and spending time with. And so I will let each Member have a shot at it, say a few words, and then we will all have a dialogue as time goes on.

Mr. Speaker, I yield now to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BEAUPREZ).

Mr. BEAUPREZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman and commend him for leading a wonderful delegation to Iraq. It was my second visit. I know it was your third, but it was my second visit. The first one was in November of 2003. And I was taken by several things, of course, but one that really sticks out in my mind.

As the gentleman will recall, the day we were in Baghdad, Camp Victory, and took the helicopter rides, the Blackhawks, and flew over the city, I think you, myself, all of our colleagues were struck by how much normalcy, and we have to put that in the appropriate context of course, because it is still Baghdad and it is obviously still very much a zone of much conflict, but how normal it looked by comparison to when I was there last in November of 2003. Then, it was obviously in considerable turmoil, and that is probably an understatement.

But as we flew over the city that day, I remember seeing cars going up and down the streets in the residential areas. We saw people walking in and out of their homes. We saw the market areas that looked fairly busy and life going on, much as you would think to see in many other cities.

What really caught me even more later on that day was that when we got back to our rooms that night and turned on the TV, we realized that was the day there were these demonstrations in Baghdad. And watching TV that night, I thought, goodness, the entire city was somehow under siege and we missed it.

As you will recall, that was the day we sat with the generals, Petraeus, Casey, Vines, and we were also with the new Prime Minister Jafari, and I thought what did we miss? Because we did not see anything really of significance and nobody brought it to our attention.

The next day we were with the Iraqi women, as the gentleman from Nebraska pointed out, at their conference, and I recall bringing that up to a group that I was talking to, and some that were actually from Baghdad, and they were remarkably dismissive.

Now, Baghdad is a city, as I recall, roughly the population of Chicago. It is a big city. And when we mentioned what about the demonstration yesterday, it was kind of an, oh, that was Muqtada al-Sadr's bunch. They do not amount to much. It was almost like there was a demonstration in a Safeway parking lot back home. It was kind of, oh, well.

I mention that not to make light of the struggles they have, because the

gentleman from Nebraska put it in an appropriate context, it is still very much a dicey place. It is very troubled.

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Security is their number one issue, and will remain their number one issue for quite awhile.

I think what we struggle with back here at home is watching the 6 p.m. news or reading the morning paper and trying to put in the appropriate context what the rest of Iraq is dealing with on a daily basis. And I saw evidence in relative terms, they are starting to experience some degree of normalcy. Life is coming back. Choices are becoming theirs. They have some opportunity. They have that wonderful four-letter word, hope. I do not think we can underestimate how powerful that is.

We have all wondered at our own moment in time, are we on the right course, maybe even the right mission. But I at least came home feeling, because we heard it again, that this is worth it, that we do have a plan now.

The security mission has changed, or is in the process of changing rather dramatically from us doing it for them and them looking over our shoulder, to them now taking, day by day, an increasingly larger role in their own security, taking care of their own neighborhoods and their own security, and us being more the observer and the counselor.

That is a dramatic shift in the paradigm and that is critical to our exit strategy. If we are going to get out of there, they need to take care of their own security operations.

A couple of other observations. When we sat by coincidence with their new prime minister, Ibrahim Jaafari, he was in his second day of office. I was so taken by him sitting there and invoking the beginnings of a nation.

Remember, this is the Fertile Crescent. This is where civilization began. This is humanity's beginnings, and we are the upstarts by comparison. Here he is talking to us about how he would like to be the kind of nation, Iraq would like to be the kind of nation that Thomas Jefferson wrote about that honored life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That was a humbling moment for me.

He spoke with great eloquence in his native language through an interpreter. He spoke with tremendous courage and inspiring vision, and asked us all to bring back a message to the American people. He told us, We realize you did not have to send your daughters and sons over here to do as they have done, spill their blood for us to give us a chance at liberty, but they did. And he told us again, That is the kind of nation we would like to be. He said, Please take home a message to the American people from me. He said, It is a message of love, a message of love to the American people.

That is a powerful thing, Mr. Speaker. It is a powerful thing.

I remember I asked him, Mr. Prime Minister, it seems we are at a point where the history of the world might actually change. And he said, We realize in Iraq that we are a bit of a candle in the darkness, and as goes Iraq, very well may go the entire Middle East.

We do not know for sure. There is a great deal of uncertainty ahead of us. But I submit tonight as we approach Memorial Day weekend, and last week I was home and helped celebrate Armed Forces Day at one of our cemeteries where Civil War veterans are buried, especially tonight as we think about our troops still there in harm's way, as we think about this weekend thanking those who put on the uniform, both current as well as in the past, as we think about how different even our opportunity is simply because they answered the call, they put on the uniform, they went into harm's way, they took the risk, and they are making a difference. I hold in my heart of hope that it is a dramatic difference.

I would say to the gentleman, I remember as well our last stop on the way home was in Germany at Landstuhl, the military hospital. We stopped in that room with those two soldiers that the very day before had encountered an IED, an improvised explosive device. It went off under their Humvee and literally lifted that armed Humvee up in the air and turned it upside down and dropped it on its top. They were lying in their hospital beds. And I said, in my naivete, Boy, I bet you are looking forward to when you heal up enough and get sent back home to the United States.

They looked at me like I must be the dumbest person in the world. Finally one of them spoke and said, No, sir, we want to get released from this hospital so we can go back and be with our buddies and finish the job we were sent here to do.

It is very inspiring to go over there and witness not only the progress that is being made, but especially the patriotism of our young men and women.

I want to thank the gentleman from Nebraska especially because I recall the first trip I took over there, and I asked a colonel from Grand Junction, Colorado, what I could possibly do for him. He said, I am committed to this mission and I can sleep at night. I know we are in control, but please go home and tell the truth because, he said, My wife has trouble sleeping.

So I think it is important while we recognize the challenges in front of us and the tough days still ahead of us, we also recognize the good that is being done and the progress that is very much being made.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for this opportunity to share tonight and thank the gentleman for leading a wonderful trip to Iraq.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BEAUPREZ) for those observations. Many people do not realize that life does go on in Baghdad. There is a de-

gree of normalcy. It has been almost universal, my experience with the troops, who have indicated that their number one desire is to get back to their units, some who have even lost limbs.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to yield to a very unusual Member. He spends a lot of his time in the House gym. He has been up on Everest several times. I do not know if he has ever made it to the top. He has climbed a lot of the highest mountains in the world, and has become a great friend.

We have actually been to Iraq twice, and he even wore a Nebraska football hat as we flew over Baghdad, so Members can tell he is an unusual person. I am referring to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. UDALL), and I would appreciate any recollections the gentleman has of the trip.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) for organizing this important hour tonight. I concur with the remarks of the gentleman from Colorado and we enjoyed your leadership. I would duly note that it took two Coloradans to take care of one Nebraskan, but that is usually the situation we face out West.

This, too, was my second trip to Iraq. We were there last September as well. I have to say as we left Iraq, we had a feeling that although the armed services personnel and the great civilians and the State Department are always optimistic, there was a greater sense of optimism, particularly on the heels of the election that was held at the end of January.

I would also say, this is kind of unusual to have both Democrats and Republicans in a special order. I am here to listen as much to my colleagues' perspectives on our very fascinating time spent in Iraq and Jordan, and I am eager to hear all of my colleagues' impressions.

I have a couple of things to add. The gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) covered many of the important interactions we had in Iraq, and particularly when we were on the shores of the Dead Sea with the 150 Iraqi women who had traveled 2 and 3 days across Iraq. A number had been robbed and detained along the way, but they were there because they wanted to have a say in the future of their country.

We were also joined by the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. GRANGER), and they added a very important perspective to the conference itself. But you cannot come home and not feel a connection to those brave women, very brave women who were risking their lives every day.

The gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BEAUPREZ) mentioned our trip through Ramstein Air Base on our way home, and what a facility that is, along with the world-class Landstuhl Hospital. We had an opportunity to see the jointness that we hear so much about within

DOD. It was seamless. You could not tell whether the personnel in a particular setting was a Marine, sailor, airman, or soldier. For that, the DOD is to be commended because we are creating this synergy that in the end continues to put us on the cutting edge.

I think it is notable also to acknowledge the important role the Jordanians are playing in the Middle East. We were staged out of Jordan. We spent time in Amman. We received important briefings from our embassy staff. And King Abdullah and his government and the people of Jordan are a key part of the efforts in the Middle East.

On the flight over and then on the flight back, as you peer out the windows of the jet, we looked down over Israel for that short time frame that it takes to fly over Israel, and you understand the importance of the geography and the strategic and special relationship we have with Israel. They are, of course, a key player in this effort that we are all involved to stabilize and create free and democratic systems in the Middle East.

If I could just at this point conclude, I think it is important to acknowledge that there were different points of view in our delegation. You have to number me as one who had misgivings about the war in Iraq and the approach that we took. But now that we are there, my attitude is that we have to find a way clear to stabilize the situation and make good on our promises to the Iraqi people. In that undertaking, I think we are neither Democrats nor Republicans nor members of other political parties; we are Americans with a commitment to that part of the world.

The strategy to all of us is clear. It has three sections. As we have done, we have to hold the elections and support the standing up of this new government and it still has a ways to travel. That is well under way.

The second, and we heard a great deal about this from General Casey, General Petraeus and other military leaders, is to support the Iraqi security forces, the police and the military.

The third part of the strategy is to create a more stable environment in Iraq, which means providing jobs and electricity and clean water.

These three parts are all interactive. We have to stay committed and support our men and women in uniform.

I would just conclude by sharing, the men and women there are performing magnificently. Their commitment to each other, the mission, and to the United States of America and to the world at large is exemplary. I think we all came back the better for those interactions with the men and women in uniform in Iraq. For that, I am deeply grateful.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Nebraska for convening all of us, and I look forward to hearing what my colleagues have to say.

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Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Colorado for his

insights. He has been a great guy to travel with, a great person to get to know, and certainly someone whom I admire a great deal. You mentioned being at Landstuhl. All of you remember the young guy whose name was Chris Ruehl. He had been shot and been in an ambush. This guy was interesting because I thought, if I was coaching a football team, I would like to have a whole bunch of Chris Ruehls, because he had this hole in his shoulder, but he got up and he was explaining what happened. Then he gets out his camera, and he is showing us pictures that he took while he was getting shot at. I thought, you know, this is one brave guy. I tracked him down, I got his cell phone, after he got back to the United States. He was all geared up, ready to go back. He wanted to get back in the fight.

An interesting guy, an interesting time. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. NEUGEBAUER) is next. He and I made a couple of trips. We were in Afghanistan and Iraq together and Kuwait, and then this last trip. I am interested in hearing his insights into what he saw and what he remembers. Even though it has been 6 weeks ago, I am sure he remembers a lot.

Mr. NEUGEBAUER. I thank the gentleman for yielding. It was a remarkable trip. My second trip, also. As I was going over there, I was wondering what was going to be different or if things were going to be different from the first time I was there and kind of two historic events took place.

As the gentleman from Nebraska will remember, we were on our way to Iraq the first time and Afghanistan. We were eating in Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany and it was the day that they caught Saddam Hussein. Then, of course, the second time we were sitting in Baghdad and got to have, I guess, one of the first delegations to meet with the new Prime Minister Jafari. What a historic event that was. I, too, was struck, as the gentleman from Colorado was, by his enthusiasm and his passion for his new responsibility. I thought about the weight that is on his shoulders as he begins to lead the Iraqi people into uncharted territory for them.

Someone said the other day, and one of the things I wanted to talk about was General Patraeus was briefing us. I think the first thing he started off with was a little video or slide show that he had prepared for us to kick off the meeting. It was about the election. He talked about the great impact that that election had not only on our young men and women that are over there providing this opportunity for a free Iraq and a democracy but the impact that it had on the Iraqi people.

They were a little bit skeptical as to how many of the people would brave to come out with all of the threats that the terrorists, the insurgents, were going to be out on the streets and there would be a lot of people killed. As we were watching that video, I remem-

bered seeing the thousands and thousands of Iraqi people that were standing in lines for what they said were hours and hours for that first opportunity to experience what our young men and women had gone over and provided for them. Of course, the famous holding up their index finger to signify that they had voted, that they had gotten to exercise that wonderful freedom.

I also was thinking about what General Patraeus was saying about how they are now teaching the Iraqi people how to defend their own country and how that is an integral part of bringing our young men and women home and how now, though, in many areas, Iraqi soldiers are primarily providing security forces in parts of that country and we in some cases take a secondary role but in many cases we are working alongside the Iraqi people and how important that is.

One of the things that I tell the people back home about understanding what is going on in Iraq, I use the analogy that if you can imagine if you were blind and deaf at birth, you had never been able to see, but on your 30th birthday, you woke up and you could hear and you could see. Imagine all of the adjustments that you would have to go through in your life. You would have to really learn how to live your life in a new way. That is very much similar to what the Iraqi people are learning how to do. They have been oppressed for most all of their lives and all of a sudden one day they are a free people, beginning a journey of becoming a democracy, much like this country did over 200 years ago.

I think also, as the gentleman mentioned, about that historic meeting of these Iraqi women that had come from all over Iraq and many of them, we sat at various tables and had lunch. They wanted to interface with us, we wanted to hear from them, but them telling their stories of the peril, the risks that they took coming to that meeting, that meeting to learn how to begin to be a part of this process. I think about a third of the people in the parliament are women. They wanted to come and learn how do we participate. And watching them go through those exercises of how to go to a city council or how to deal with the media or how to introduce legislation, how to run for office, all of the things that make this democracy great.

I think one of the things that I did go back home and say to the people in my district as I was sitting at lunch on that day, I had probably nine, 10 women at that table with me. And so the big question I finally got around to, and I think it is a question that probably some of your constituents back home ask, So do the Iraqi people really appreciate what the Americans are doing for them? A smile came on the faces of many, but I looked over and I will never forget this one lady, I believe she was a Kurdish lady, and tears were rolling down her eyes. She

said, Oh, yes, Congressman, we appreciate that very much. Because, you see, we are mothers, we are sisters, we are wives, we are aunts, and we know there are mothers and wives and sisters and aunts in America that have paid the ultimate price for freeing our people. She looked me right square in the eye and said, And we will never forget. That made a huge impression on me, because I needed to hear that and I wanted to convey that to the American people. When I told that story back home, they said, You know, we didn't get to hear that on the evening news.

One of the things I think is so important as we have Military Appreciation Month, I think the thing that as I come back and I look at the big picture and I think the gentlemen that are in the Chamber with us tonight that traveled, is that we understand a couple of concepts about our military today. Number one, it is an all-volunteer force. Everyone that we ran into in that theater was there because they chose to be. I am overwhelmed at the dedication, the commitment, the quality of young men and women that we have defending our country, our Nation and helping liberate Iraq and Afghanistan.

I think one of the real treats for many of us was that we tried to eat about every meal with the troops that we could while we were there. Sometimes we were eating meals on the go, but many times we had an opportunity to meet with the troops and we tried to eat with people from our State or from our area. Of course, you know for sure that the people from Nebraska certainly recognize the former head coach of the Nebraska Cornhuskers. It was like traveling around with a rock star actually, because everybody wanted his autograph and wanted his picture. The rest of us kind of felt like we were part of the groupies that were following him along.

One of the things that I thought was so significant, we let those young men and women talk nonattribution, tell us kind of what is going on, how do you feel about what you are doing, your job. I never heard one soldier say, Congressman, we shouldn't be here. Congressman, get me home as quick as you can. What they wanted to talk about is how they are helping the Iraqi people and how they were proud that those Iraqi people got to exercise that right to vote and when they saw them with those index fingers stained, that they say, hey, you know, I was a part of that. I helped make that happen for the Iraqi people.

One of the things, it was an idea I think I got from the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BEAUPREZ), was that many of us, I think, got names of loved ones back home. I know that I got about 30 or 40 names of young men and women that gave me their loved ones back home, and so they gave me those numbers. It was so fun to call back and say, I was with your son, I was with your husband and talked and tell them how proud that we are of them.

But what it did remind me, and I think it reminds everyone, is that when these young men and women are serving our Nation, their families are serving right alongside them. I had been over to thank their husband or their wife or their brother or their sister or their son or their daughter, but it also gave us an opportunity to thank the parents and the wives and the husbands of those young men and women serving. It was a great trip. I enjoyed it so much. I thank the gentleman from Nebraska for including me. I look forward to going back with him soon.

Mr. OSBORNE. The gentleman from Texas has been a great guy to travel with. I have had some good experiences.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to call on the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. BRADLEY). He and I had not traveled before, so I got to know him a lot better. He is really a very astute individual, a lot of insightful questions.

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a tribute to the leadership of the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) that we would be joined tonight with Members of the other side of the aisle. We went to Iraq not as Republicans, not as Democrats, but as Americans who are interested in our troops and interested in the fate of that country. It is certainly a tribute to both the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS) and the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. UDALL) that they are joining us tonight. There is precious little of this type of bipartisan cooperation and certainly it is a pleasure for me to participate in it tonight. It is important that when we think about the ongoing hostilities in Iraq, that we see both sides of the picture. I think we had the opportunity 6 weeks ago to see an awful lot of positive developments in Iraq.

Since then, I think we all have seen the news on the television and the spate of bombings and the threat that the insurgents are trying to bring down a newly elected government. That is horrifying, especially after the reaction that I think all six of us got in Iraq, which was positive, which is that we are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel, that the Iraqi security forces are doing much better in their ability to operate. Yes, they have a ways to go. We need more of them. There are about 152,000. We need about 300,000. But they are doing better. They still have to be able to operate independently, with a command and control structure, but General Petraeus explained to us how that is on its way, that it cannot happen overnight.

The Iraqi women that we met, and perhaps this was the most telling thing when they talked about the Iraqi security forces, said that the Iraqi people are beginning to be able to trust the Iraqi security forces much more. That was so important to me, to be able to hear it straight from the horse's mouth, the Iraqi women. These are women that had endured so much, not

only to be there but they had endured 30 years of horrifying events. I will touch on that in a moment.

As the others who have spoken tonight have said, we also had the chance to talk to the new leadership, Dr. Ibrahim Jafari, the newly elected Shiite prime minister. One of the most important things he stressed to us is the need for a permanent constitution. The Shiites are a majority in Iraq, but Dr. Jafari recognized that in order for this experiment in Iraqi democracy to be successful, they will have to reach out to the Sunnis and to the Kurds. He promised us that they would do that. That is occurring now as we speak. Unfortunately, we are also seeing the resistance coming from some disaffected Sunnis that are trying to bring down the government. That is unfortunate.

But most Sunnis, working with the majority party, the Shiites in Iraq, I believe will be able to bridge these differences working with the Kurdish people and the new president who is also a Kurd, Jalal Talabani. It was a good experience in meeting with Dr. Jafari.

One thing that needs to be stressed, and I think we have all touched upon this, is the morale of our forces. We all had the opportunity. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. NEUGEBAUER) met people from Texas, the Colorado contingent, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS), certainly from Nebraska, I from New Hampshire, we all had an opportunity to meet troops from our home State. I was struck by their commitment to their mission, by the fact that they said their living accommodations were getting better, not just the food and the housing but that they felt as American soldiers, men and women, that they were making progress, and they saw the progress, they saw the fact that the vote had gone off successfully, that a government had been formed, and they felt part of this historic change in Iraq, and they reflected that to all of us.

One thing that as we approach Memorial Day that I think is critically important for all Americans to realize regardless of how we may feel about the policy of the Iraq war, it was highlighted by a wall that was at the base in al Ansar that we saw. That wall, as I recall, had about 40 letters from a second grade class in Texas.

□ 2215

These were letters from American school children thanking, thanking, our troops for their sacrifice. And I asked the captain, What does this mean to the men and women that are here in Iraq? And he said, It inspires us every day to get out and do our job; every day we know that the American people are behind us.

So whether it is school children throughout our country, whether it is supporting the families who are still here, the spouses, the children, the parents of our soldiers, we can never forget the sacrifice that our families are making; and certainly this second

grade class from Texas and millions of other classes from around the country that have sent letters to our troops, not just in Iraq, but Afghanistan and all of the countries where our troops are fighting and winning the war on terrorism, how important our show of support is for their efforts.

And, lastly, let me, like others, touch on the experience that we all had in meeting with the Iraqi women leaders, members of parliament, the new ambassador to Egypt, the acting health minister, and many others. They were Shiites, they were Kurds, they were Sunnis. But they were Iraqi women who had endured so much, unspeakable horrors.

At one point in the lunch we were having, we were asking questions of each other. And finally they asked me to introduce myself after about 45 minutes. And I talked a little bit about my family and my situation in New Hampshire, and I said that I was from the "Live Free or Die" State, and I think my colleagues all remember that every time I repeated my State motto, this really resonated with the Iraqi people because "Live free or die" means something in New Hampshire, it means something in America, and it means something in Iraq.

So then I went on to tell them about my first experience in Iraq where I had gone to the Abu Ghraib prison. We have all heard about the abuses there, and we are dealing with those abuses as a country, as well we should. But what I saw, and perhaps some of my colleagues have seen, was what happened to 80,000 Iraqis who were executed in that prison.

And I was describing this to the Iraqi women, and I realized that they were all starting to cry. I did not really know what to do because it had been such a horrifying experience to me. And then one of them said, My husband was executed in that prison. And another one said to me, My brother was executed in that prison. And I knew at that point how much they had endured on a personal level of the suffering, of the depravity, of the barbaric nature of that regime.

The most important thing, I think, for Americans to realize and the whole world to realize is the tenacity and the singleness of their purpose, that they will rebuild a country if the world will support them in that effort. And that is important for us to remember as we approach Memorial Day, that they have the will to succeed if we have the will to persevere with them.

I thank the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) for yielding to me.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman for his insights. We were at Abu Ghraib also last September, and at one time Saddam Hussein had been told he had too many people in the prison and to get rid of 2,000. The ones that he did not like a whole lot, but did not hate, he hung. And the rest of them, he put

in the wood shredder. It is unbelievable that one human being could do that to another, but in one day he got rid of 2,000 to get the numbers down to where he felt it was more comfortable.

The last person I would like to yield to is a great friend of mine, and we co-chair the Congressional Prayer Breakfast on Thursday morning. So tomorrow morning we will be together. And that is the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS). We sat across from each other for about 14 hours going over, and I learned how to speak Tennessee during that period of time. The first 3 hours I did not understand him, but as time went on, I got to understand him really well.

We really had a great time with the gentleman. We put him in the Dead Sea, and we could not even sink him in the Dead Sea.

So, Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. DAVIS of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, it was certainly a blessing to have traveled with the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) and with the entire delegation to Iraq, the time that we spent in Jordan, the times that we spent with the ladies from Iraq as we tried to relate to them how wonderful a democracy is and how wonderfully it works in our country.

I had an opportunity on more than one occasion, once before, in February, to go to Iraq. And when I was there it was just before the insurgency really started. It was February of 2004. And we spent time in Basra, as well as in Baghdad in the Sunni triangle. The troops I met there were upbeat, they were excited. We had, very quickly with the military that we had, won a war from what many of us in this country felt would be more difficult. But I think the enthusiasm of our troops, the training of our troops, the commitment of our troops to be sure that Iraq was liberated from a tyrant called Saddam Hussein was the driving force in those who serve in our military services. I think that all of us who have been to Iraq or Afghanistan have renewed energy for support of our troops that are there.

If one goes to Iraq or Afghanistan, they also have this deep, abiding feeling that if they only knew how it was in America, if every person only knew in this country how it is in America how wonderful it would be, because the insurgencies and the occurrences that are happening there today would cease to exist, because even they would realize what a greater life they could have, a better life they could have if they would just look at this country as an example.

Can that happen? I hope it can. I think it can. We must believe that it can, and we must be sure that we support the newly elected officials of Iraq to be sure that that happens.

I was asked a question in late 2003 by a sixth grader in one of the schools in Manchester, Tennessee. And sixth graders will ask, How much do we

make as a Congressman? Have we met the President? What kind of person is he? Do we like him? Do we have a family? Do we have children? Do we have grandchildren? Obviously they look at me, and they think he has grandchildren, which I do. So we get a lot of questions.

But this one little girl, with almost a certainty and it seems like she had just a mission, she said, "Congressman, do you think we can establish a democracy in Iraq?" And generally what I would tell someone at the general store, where I go on Saturdays when I have time, or on Sundays after church, generally what I would tell them is that we have to try, we have to try, because it is important that people living throughout the world have an opportunity to enjoy the freedom that we enjoy in this country.

But I felt that sixth grader, who may not have watched TV, needed a more concise answer; and my comment to her was that virtually all the democracies today, Israel, started from within, as a result of a holocaust and as a result of many of those individuals removed from other countries, in many cases arrested for being expelled from those countries.

This great country we live in with the assistance of other nations, obviously our army that was put together, the Continental Army, fought to achieve our liberty and our freedom and we established, as a result of that, a democracy where we are governed by our Constitution. So most of the democracies today started from within.

And I was looking at Iraq and saying, I am not sure this is possible, until I made the visit to Iraq. I realized democracies can be established without an uprising from within, because I believe when our troops went to Iraq and we deposed the tyrant who was imposing on the people of Iraq, the ill will that he was imposing, the horrible circumstances, the deaths of so many that he took, I realized that those individuals in Iraq have suffered and suffered greatly.

So I truly believe that in Iraq we can see a democracy established. And what I told the young lady was that if we can work in the Middle East to establish a democracy in Iraq and perhaps in Afghanistan, in my opinion, it will be the crowning accomplishment of this century. Democracies do not go to war with each other.

So I am extremely impressed with our troops that I met there. I am impressed and pleased with what I think is a great opportunity for a country in the Middle East to reach out and be governed by laws rather than a man. When we are governed by laws instead of men, then we do have a democracy. And I truly believe that will happen.

I watched the women, the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative Training Conference, and I sat with them, like all of us did. We talked to them. And I was sitting in this breakout group where there were eight or ten individ-

uals, and we were talking about whether or not a shelter should be built for women who may have been abused, or whether there should be a safe haven for them; and that was just part of a schedule problem they had to solve. It did not matter whether they supported or did not support it; they had to find a solution to it.

And this one lady sitting to my right continued to get very fretful. She was extremely irritated because she was in this group that was in the process of putting together a reason why there needed to be shelters in Iraq for women who had been abused.

There was another group that was put together, problem solving, that would say, We do not need a shelter for women. She finally left that group. And when one of the ladies who was helping to put the program together came to me, I said, I do not think I have ever seen as much fear in anyone's eyes as I saw in that woman's, and I do not understand why she would be so fearful of even putting together a plan which is like problem solving in math skills, why she would be so frightened.

She came back to me a little bit later and she said, The lady has had an attempt on her life because she was advocating this in Iraq and she was fearful that somehow it would get back to her neighbors that she was participating in just problem solving.

So when I realized that these ladies who came to Jordan to be a participant in this initiative, talking about democracy, and all of those who were traveling were actually fired upon with small arms fire, it opened up my eyes about the challenges that lie ahead for the nation of Iraq. But with the heart of the women that I met and with others that in Iraq that are Iraqi citizens, the men there, I truly believe that we have made the right decision, and I believe we will see a democracy established in the Middle East in Iraq.

One of the things that impressed me was the troops, all of them, wanted me to be sure to tell folks back home, We are safe. We are okay. Let our families know that we are okay. Great morale, totally committed.

The district I represent is in the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee. We have a volunteer spirit in Tennessee. The 278th Cavalry is one of two of the cavalries in our Nation's Army. The regular cavalry was brought back from Iraq. The 278th was activated; 2,200 members of that 278th, of 3,000, are from Tennessee's Fourth Congressional District that I represent.

I met some of them in Iraq, and I can assure the folks back home, we can all be proud of our soldiers that are serving us in Iraq and other parts of the world. The ones I met with, if one is a father or a mother or a husband or a wife or a son or a daughter or a grandparent of one of these troops, they can rest assured they are making us proud, and I know they are making them proud.

I thank the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) for the opportunity to go on the visit. It was a wonderful trip. I got to know a lot about the gentleman. As a matter of fact, a young fellow named Chris Ruehl was telling us about the 278th, if the gentleman from Nebraska remembers, and he got emotional and showed pictures, and he even found out some of the trials that we had had in Tennessee, which I will not express here on the House floor, but he even gave us a history of part of Tennessee that he learned from some of our 278th. So our folks of the 278th are serving us well in Iraq, and when they come back home, we will welcome them with open arms.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman for his comments. And we will not even get into that elephant that was hung in his district. That is for another special order.

I just want to mention the bravery of Iraqi officials. We kind of stick our necks out here a little bit, but over there when they run for office, they are literally putting their life on the line and their families. And that jumped out at us.

The other thing I might mention is that General Casey mentioned to us that he thought things were going better since the elections, but he said the wild card here is the issue of the Sunnis, are the Sunnis going to be incorporated?

□ 2230

That is still up for grabs. So we do not want to leave the American people with an impression that everything is perfect. There are still problems. But I think anyone who goes there and spends time there, spends time with the soldiers, from either party, we may disagree on how we got there, whether we should have gone there, but you have to be impressed with the soldiers in this situation.

If anyone has a closing comment for the good of the order, we would be glad to hear it from any of you.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, I thank the gentleman.

I wanted to also acknowledge that the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BIGGERT) joined us there, along with the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. GRANGER) and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS).

The other insight I had, and we shared this with General Casey and Dr. Jafari, local governments are going to be crucial to success in Iraq. After I returned, we had Baghdad city council members visit Denver, and I know the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BEAUPREZ) met with them. They are the people who are in charge of making sure the lights are on, the garbage is collected and the potholes are filled and that local services are delivered. If we do that and they do that, then the local Iraqi people will see the benefits of self-government.

We pay a lot of attention to the national government, and it is important, because they will be charged with the defense of the Nation and they will present the face of Iraq to the world, but those local governments are crucial. The civil affairs officers in our military and the civilian non-government organizations that are there, we need to remember that we have to support them in every way possible.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, it makes it all work.

Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed this. We enjoyed the trip and thank all of you for participating tonight. Again, we tried to show that a lot of us do get along pretty well. Some of the best hours here are in the gym and places like that, where we do not really have an identity as Republicans or Democrats, and we simply come together and try to solve problems in the country.

I was honored to have time with these gentleman. I thought I learned a lot. I learned a lot from the Iraqis, but I learned a lot from you, and thank I you for participating tonight.

THE FINANCIAL CONDITION OF OUR NATION'S GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. POE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on this special order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, as whip of the Blue Dog Coalition I rise this evening to talk about the financial condition of our Nation's government. There are about 35 of us that are fiscally conservative Democrats. We refer to ourselves as members of the Blue Dog Coalition and we are trying to bring some common sense back to our Nation's government as it relates to trying to restore some fiscal discipline to the way we operate our government.

Our Nation today is \$7.769 trillion in debt. To put that another way, our Nation today is spending \$160 billion a year simply paying interest on the national debt. That is about \$500 million a day. In fact, it is \$13 billion per month, it is \$444 million per day, it is \$18 million an hour, it is \$308,000 a minute, or \$5,100 a second. That is how much our Nation is simply taking tax money from you and me and using it to pay interest on the national debt.

I have got about \$4 billion in road needs in Arkansas's Fourth Congressional District, which includes 29 counties and 150 towns and three interstate projects that are now under construc-

tion. Give me less than a week's interest on the national debt and I can put thousands of people to work and complete these road projects, like I-49, I-69 and I-430, and four-laning U.S. Highway 167.

When we speak about the debt in public opinion surveys, it simply does not show up. It is like it is someone else's problem. But, Mr. Speaker, I contend this evening that it is every American citizen's problem, because every American citizen's share of the national debt equals \$26,000. \$26,000 is each individual's share of the national debt, including the children, the babies that are being born today. Every United States citizen would have to write a check for \$26,000 in order to get our Nation out of this hole that we are in.

Yet our Nation continues to go further in debt. For a fifth year in a row, we are seeing a budget that provides this Nation with the largest budget deficit ever in our Nation's history, which means more interest on more debt, which means more priorities continue to go unmet. Again, we are spending \$13 billion per month simply paying interest on the national debt. We could build 100 brand new elementary schools every single day in America just with the interest we are paying on the national debt.

Earlier today the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR), a Blue Dog member, offered a proposal on the floor of this House to guarantee every National Guard and Army Reservist in America health care for life. These are men and women that are going to Iraq, they are going to Afghanistan. If they have not been, they are headed that way, and if they are coming back, they are probably getting ready to go again. Yet they are treated different than our full-time men and women in uniform at a time when we are really dispatching them the same. The reality is they deserve health care for life, they deserve health care like the full-time soldiers.

Yet this House rejected that proposal today because they said it would cost \$1 billion. Because of the reckless spending going on in our Nation, we are spending that much money in about two days simply paying interest on the national debt.

I want to talk more about the debt and the deficit, but at this time it gives me great honor to introduce the Cochair For Policy for the Blue Dog Coalition to speak more about the debt and the deficit and how it impacts all of us as Americans, Democrats and Republicans alike, and that is my friend the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COOPER).

Mr. COOPER. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for yielding. The gentleman was focusing on one of the gravest problems our Nation has ever faced, one of the gravest threats to our children's and our grandchildren's well-being, because those debt payments the gentleman is talking about, the interest payments, they are like a tax that