

Specialist Charles A. Kaufman  
 Chief Warrant Officer Keith R. Mariotti  
 Chief Warrant Officer Steven E. Shepard  
 2nd Lieutenant Matthew S. Coutu  
 Petty Officer 2nd Class Danny P. Dietz  
 Petty Officer 1st Class Jeffrey S. Taylor  
 Petty Officer 2nd Class James Suh  
 Petty Officer 2nd Class Eric Shane Patton  
 Lieutenant Michael M. McGreevy Jr.  
 Petty Officer 1st Class Jeffery A. Lucas  
 Lieutenant Commander Erik S. Kristensen  
 Senior Chief Petty Officer Daniel R. Healy  
 Chief Petty Officer Jacques J. Fontan  
 Chief Warrant Officer Chris J. Scherkenbach  
 Sergeant 1st Class Michael L. Russell  
 Major Stephen C. Reich  
 Master Sergeant James W. "Tre" Ponder III  
 Sergeant 1st Class Marcus V. Muralles  
 Sergeant Kip A. Jacoby  
 Chief Warrant Officer Corey J. Goodnature.

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Staff Sergeant Shamus O. Goare  
 Specialist Rafael A. Carrillo, Jr.  
 Mr. EMANUEL. Sergeant Manny Hornedo  
 Specialist Robert E. Hall Jr.  
 Signaller Paul William Didsbury  
 Sergeant Chad M. Mercer  
 Staff Sergeant Jeremy A. Brown  
 Specialist Ryan J. Montgomery  
 Private Anthony M. Mazzarella  
 Corporal Lyle J. Cambridge  
 Staff Sergeant Scottie L. Bright  
 Specialist Christopher W. Dickison  
 Sergeant Deyson K. Cariaga  
 Specialist Hoby F. Bradfield Jr.  
 Private 1st Class Eric Paul Woods  
 Staff Sergeant Joseph P. Goodrich  
 Lance Corporal Ryan J. Kovacicek  
 Sergeant Timothy J. Sutton  
 Specialist Benyahmin B. Yahudah  
 Corporal Christopher D. Winchester  
 Corporal Clifton Blake Mounce  
 Staff Sergeant Tricia L. Jameson  
 Private First Class Timothy J. Hines, Jr.

Specialist Jared D. Hartley  
 Staff Sergeant Ronald T. Wood  
 Sergeant Travis S. Cooper  
 Specialist Ronnie D. Williams  
 Staff Sgt. Frank Tiai.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the distinguished Members from both sides of the aisle who have participated in this tribute and honor, which took 3 nights over the last 2 weeks to read into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD and to the people's House.

I would also like to take this opportunity, on behalf of my colleagues, to thank the brave men and women who continue to serve our Nation in Iraq, Afghanistan, and throughout the world and serve with distinction. Our

thoughts and prayers are with them and their families at this time until they come together.

In the words of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, I again would like to cite: Each of these heroes "stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die that freedom might live, and grow and increase its blessings."

A number of our colleagues have stumbled over names. I hope those families understand that, although we struggled with their names, we honor their service. These pictures are outside my office and outside other Members' offices, all 1,900, and with the names that we see here, we will add, as the pictures are made available, to always remember that their sons and daughters, their husbands and wives, their brothers and sisters and their aunts and uncles, when called to serve, they served, and they gave their ultimate sacrifice.

May we always remember them, their names, and their faces. God bless them and God bless America.

#### OUR SOLDIERS IN THE WAR ON TERROR

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

Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, it is a great honor and a great privilege to be here this evening. In the hour before I began to speak, we heard the names of young men and women who have shed their blood in the defense of this country. It is a sober business that we are about, a serious business and a critical business.

As I have talked to hundreds of soldiers serving in Afghanistan, in Iraq, those coming back, those that I have spoken to in theater, they share one clear message, and that is that we have got to stay the course and finish a mission that they believe that we are winning and the only thing between ultimate victory and ultimate defeat is the will and the resolve of the American people.

I believe that it is critically important that we hear their story and their perspective. Every soldier, every marine that I have talked to, every airman that I have spoken to in the last 6 months, many whom I brought into this Chamber, have shared with me their dismay, their disappointment, and, yes, even their disgust, Mr. Speaker, over the way the liberal media has misportrayed the actions of our men and women in the Middle East, have misportrayed the successes, have not reported those successes and have gone for tabloid spectacular attacks of what all the folks on the ground believe is a strategically irrelevant, though still dangerous, insurgency.

Our military is winning. The Afghan people and the Iraqi people are beginning to taste freedom and are standing up.

And I think it is important in this time tonight to bring to perspective some of the units in the words of some of the people who are participating in the actions right now. It is easy to stand in this Chamber and take a position for or against the war because we are living 10,000 miles away. For those of us who have carried a rucksack and lived in the mud or lived the desert, it brings back many memories. I have seen classmates of mine from the military academy who died in service to this Nation, buried. I know many friends who have been lost. In fact, 3 weeks ago I stood at a grave site in the Arlington National Cemetery as a member of America's premier counterterrorism force was buried. All around us, as we were going through these sober and grievous moments of remembering a man's life and country to this country, as his casket was lowered into the ground, as the mournful wail of Taps played over the cemetery, people went to and fro. There were cars on the expressway as I came back to Capitol Hill, and what did I see? People going throughout their lives oblivious to the tremendous sacrifices that are being made by our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines on the other side of the world so that we would be safe at home.

I had a great privilege with several of my colleagues to lead a delegation into Southwest Asia over the July 4 recess. In many senses it was a reunion, seeing friends that I had known from the army, in some cases people I had been acquainted with on active duty 29 years ago.

I would like to begin tonight by sharing a poignant e-mail. I traveled with the delegation to Kuwait. We will talk about that in a few moments. We moved to Baghdad in Iraq, visiting with units there and the command there, on to Kyrgyzstan with our men and women of the Air Force, maintaining the logistics in the transit center in Bishkek and Manas Air Base, finally down to Kabul, and then we flew 150 miles low level by helicopter to what I believe is a wonderful and stellar example of America's soldiers doing what they do best, advancing the cause of freedom, protecting us here at home and representing the values of this great Nation.

So often the press nationally wants to point to the negative, to the ½ of 1 percent that underperform or do not necessarily live up to the good name of this country. They totally neglect the carnage, the terror, the inhumanity, the kleptocracies that rob people of hope and opportunity and freedom. They do not tell the soldiers' stories. And one of the things I would like to begin with tonight is from that visit. We flew into Forward Operating Base Sharona and Paktika Province, where one of the great unsung stories of the War on Terror, really the war on Islamic extremists, is taking place.

I want one thing to be clear for the record and for those who are watching

overseas, we understand perfectly what this is about. This is not simply a War on Terror. This is a war by Islamic extremism against the rest of the world. It is a war that seeks to prevent people from pursuing individual opportunity and freedom. It is a war of suppression for those who simply do not want us out of the Middle East but want the Middle East out of the world.

And one of the things that was most enjoyable for me was visiting a unit that I was affiliated with many years ago, the 1st of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. The 1st Battalion of the 508th has a long and faithful history in serving this Nation in virtually every conflict since the Second World War. Having served in the Middle East with them myself, it was a great honor to travel back and see them in Afghanistan, see the young men and women who are carrying on a great tradition, a great tradition of advancing the values of this country and protecting citizens of this Nation.

I would like to open this evening by sharing with the Members an e-mail, a message that was tremendously powerful. One thing I love about infantry NCOs and infantry enlisted soldiers is they will always shoot straight with us. They will share the truth. They will not hold anything back, and they will tell us what is on their heart. The one thing that was missing were the statements that I see on the evening news here in the United States, and what I would like to do is, rather than share with what the command said, share what might come from the Pentagon, although it is a consistent story with what is shared on the front lines, I want the Members to hear the e-mail that was sent from Command Sergeant Major Jeff Hof of Task Force Fury, 1st of the 508th Parachute Infantry. He is a great, professional noncommissioned officer, served 22 years in the army, not his first time into that region of the world. He served in Operation Desert Storm. He served in the mountains of northern Iraq. And now he sent me this message, and I would like to share with the American people, I would like to share with every citizen in the world who values hope, values freedom, values opportunity for future generations, and I also want to share a message to the enemies of this Nation, to the enemies of all free people to hear this as they watch this broadcast tonight. This is quoting Sergeant Major Hof, who is out at the tip of the spear, making a tremendous difference tonight as we speak. His NCOs, his enlisted soldiers are serving on the front lines of freedom, bringing reality that the rest of the world experiences, what we in America take for granted tonight to people who have never known it. He sent this to me. Mr. Speaker, this is an NCO speaking. This is the infantry sergeant major speaking, not the Secretary of Defense, not the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, not the commander of combined forces in Afghanistan, but a battalion sergeant major

whose principal purpose in life after carrying out his mission is caring for the welfare of the men and women under his command and under his leadership.

“Our national media has never expounded upon our success . . .,” Sergeant Major Hof begins. “The soldiers of this task force understand that this fight we found ourselves in since the war on terrorism began is important, and they understand the nuances required to win.”

Sergeant Major Hof tells his soldiers that they have two hammers in their tool box. The first one that the sergeant major points out is a Texas-size sledgehammer for their number one mission, which is to intercept terrorists, and I want to tell the Members something: They do that very well. There is a reason that the anti-government forces in Afghanistan and, for that matter, the anti-government forces in Iraq do not want direct confrontation with the American military. It is simple. They cannot win, and they have never won any sustained engagement at force of arms.

Mr. Speaker, this is about the will of the American people to stand firm, to stand by our allies, to show resolve and accept simply the call to duty that every generation in the history of this Nation has accepted. Why should we shirk from that? This Nation has not been called upon to sacrifice in the way of the Second World War or in the First World War or in the Civil War, where our losses were measured in the hundreds of thousands of lives. Every loss is a tragedy, but these young men and women who are serving on the front lines understand the nature of this struggle, understand firsthand because they have seen it through their eyes. Our national media has done a disservice to our servicemembers by not reporting the truth.

Sergeant Major Hof talks about a Texas-size sledgehammer to do what my friends in the military like to call the kinetic end of the business, but he also emphasizes the importance of the other tool in the toolbox, a New England-size carpenter’s hammer to help the Afghans build their country so they will succeed in the long term.

He goes on: “Soldiers take this on with a sincere passion in the training of the local and the national police force, the border police, and our biggest mission is training and fighting alongside the Afghanistan national army.” He continues: “There is no apprehension in fighting alongside the security forces of Afghanistan, and the members truly appreciate everything we are doing for them in building skill sets to eventually defend themselves. All of our soldiers understand the training and fighting with the Afghan security forces is critical to long-term success, which is why we have all embraced the Afghans as one of our own in combating the terrorists.”

When I was in Sharona Forward Operating Base, there were not simply

Americans there. There were Afghans there. When our soldiers go out on patrol, they go out on patrol jointly with the Afghans, and we will talk some more about that later this evening.

Sergeant Major Hof goes on and said: “My junior NCOs work with local leaders . . .,” and I will tell the Members something that is shared not in the evening news again or in the New York Times or in the Washington Post, which seem to forget the fact that this is a war involving American soldiers and American leadership and fundamentally depends on American resolve. “My junior NCOs work with local leaders building schools, mosques, distributing school supplies to some of the poorest in Afghanistan, explaining the intricacies of how democracy works, and educating hardened former mujahedin fighters on how to resolve simple tribal conflicts without the sound of a rifle fired in anger.”

□ 2045

This is all done to embolden local leaders and build long-term capacity to fight and secure these communities.”

My friends, my fellow Americans, this is a professional infantry non-commissioned officer who is sharing these words, not written by a politician, certainly not written by a reporter in the national media, to tell you the heart of the American soldiers serving in the Middle East today.

The Sergeant Major goes on. “We have a program that school children from our home base sent school supplies and toys that ranged from stuffed animals and little dolls and even a few Frisbees to be distributed if we are out on patrol.”

I had one soldier ask me to send soccer balls to Afghanistan so the kids could taste a side of life they had never experienced.

Sergeant Major Hobbs said, “I personally helped in passing out these gifts to the children, and if a mother in America who protests a military recruiting drive,” and how I regret personally to see that, “if a mother in America who protests a military recruiting drive could only see the warm smile of joy that these little ones share when they are handed a little stuffed animal or a coloring book, they would truly understand we are winning, and their sons and daughters are making a difference, and it is well worth the sacrifice, if nothing more than to see the smile on these children’s faces, if only for fleeting moment.”

Our young men and women understand that sacrifice of freedom in defending our Nation against those that would do our country harm, and they relish in the face of that that they are part of history, the history that we are making as we work to secure peace.”

He continues, “No reporter from the national media will do a story on the numbers of soldiers who have reenlisted to stay in and fight this Global War on Terror. We recently had a CNN reporter visit us, and we wanted for her

to be part of a reenlistment ceremony that would show her firsthand the dedication our young men have in fighting. This reporter from CNN, I might add, who is an opinion influencer in the world media on national security affairs, refused to cover this."

This is what the Sergeant Major shares with my old unit the First of the 508th. "She chose not to take part or even entertain the fact that we had over 45 soldiers reenlist to stay here and fight."

I ask the liberal pendants who refuse to go in theater to see the way this is actually being fought, to see the conduct of this, to live with our soldiers, who choose to use our soldiers as human shields to attack the administration, why they won't talk about the fact that in the active military unit serving in Iraq, the active military unit serving in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan and Kuwait why they are reenlisting at rates of over 100 percent.

When I was a young man growing up at the end of the Vietnam conflict, that was not the case. The reason, Mr. Speaker, is simple: These young people believe in the mission. They have accepted a profound call to duty, a profound call to duty that is as important, if frankly not more important, than that that was accepted by the so-called greatest generation during the Second World War, and I say that to honor these young men, to honor these young women, to honor the chain of command that is putting their lives on the line while we sit here in comfort in the United States.

The Sergeant Major continues. "Here is a story that will never reach the national media. One of my forward operating bases took a direct rocket attack and they sustained several severe casualties in which three young men made the ultimate sacrifice. After the Medivac lifted off carrying away their platoon sergeant, who almost lost his life to rocket shrapnel that caused a severe leg injury and another close friend of the platoon, they were later notified that the friend of the platoon died on the operating table. Those soldiers requested we continue on with the previously scheduled change of command and reenlistment ceremony."

Hear this. He writes, "Three soldiers reenlisted on the same forward operating base where just hours before they rendered first-aid to save the lives of some, but saw three mortally wounded die."

Each of these young men had different reasons for reenlisting, but to a man each said they wanted to rededicate their service and sacrifice in the names of their brothers who made the ultimate sacrifice whose names were read in this Chamber tonight.

That tells me, my friends, a very different perspective than the partisan rhetoric that is so troubling. More than that, the partisan rhetoric that does not encourage our soldiers, does not encourage the American people, does not give them a realistic perspec-

tive of what is happening, but discourages morale and emboldens the very people who are putting names on the list that was read in this Chamber in the last hour.

That is something the American people need to understand and they need to contemplate. There are very few members of this Chamber who have carried the rifle and carried the rucksack and lived in the mud and been far away from home to understand the camaraderie and the bonding that takes place in one of these units. First they take care of themselves, but they understand the purpose of their mission, and this generation, I have to tell you, from my time enlisting nearly 29 years ago, understands in a way very different than any veterans I have ever spoken with the importance and the relevance of the mission that they are on right now.

The Sergeant Major continues: "These soldiers who reenlisted wanted to complete the mission they all started together and did not want to let down one of their own who was no longer in their physical presence but is resolved in spirit still lived among them. That story did not make headlines," he writes.

And he finishes his message to me with this statement: "I could go on and on in speaking about the men and women in our Nation's military and the sacrifice we are willingly making despite the fact that we make up less than 1 percent of the population in this Nation in carrying the load of this fight for an entire Nation of 280 million people, according to the latest national census, and we get minimal credit. I am here to tell you that we are winning now, and in time we will win the peace all of us so desperately seek."

That, my friends, was spoken not by me, not by a media consultant, certainly not by a liberal pundit in the national media. That was spoken, Mr. Speaker, by the Sergeant Major of First Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, serving under the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Patika Province in Afghanistan.

It is a credit to the traditions of the United States military, of our citizen soldiers, and it is something that every citizen in this Nation should understand; this is the devotion, this is part of the story that needs to come out to the world. And, frankly, for our enemies who pay attention to our media, I want all of you to know on behalf of Task Force Fury they are there and you are never coming back into that territory again.

We enjoyed a powerful time of fellowship with these soldiers and encouragement. We saw the reality on the ground.

We will share during this hour some of the different perspectives that we had, but I would like to yield some time to my colleagues who are here tonight who had that opportunity to share. The first one whose perspective that I would like to give as he traveled

with us is the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WESTMORELAND).

We traveled a long distance to get to these remote places and had an opportunity to go from the comfortable familiarity of the United States out to the tip of the spear, out to see countries that were raped by a kleptocracy, and now are there with American young people bringing hope, opportunity, stability and ultimately security to us here at home.

I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WESTMORELAND).

Mr. WESTMORELAND. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. DAVIS) for giving me that opportunity to travel with him and his delegation as we went to Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq, Kyrgyzstan and visited our troops.

Also I want to thank the American people and the U.S. Army and all of our armed services for giving us as Members of the People's House the ability to go over and visit with them and to see the things that are going on over there, the things that we are asked to fund and the fact we are asked to keep them in the battle for liberty and justice and freedom throughout this world.

It was quite a trip. Never having been outside the country except to go to a few islands on a cruise ship, it was quite an experience to travel the distances we did and then to meet with the young men and women of our Armed Forces as they serve us so greatly overseas.

We visited a base in Kuwait where we visited the men and women that drive convoy trucks up into Iraq every day, where there are about 2,500 trucks at any one day and probably 700 or 800 of those are American troops that put their lives on the line to take supplies to their comrades in Iraq. It was unbelievable when we went and saw the actual up-armor facility that we had funded through the supplemental budget and the thanks we got from the servicemen and women about the effect and benefits that this was bringing to our troops.

We saw firsthand an up-armored vehicle that had been hit by an IED and the damage that it suffered, but every soldier inside of it made it. These are the things that we have got to continue to do in this Congress, is to make sure that our men and women have the best possible equipment that they can use to fight terror all across this world.

We also had an opportunity to go to Iraq and to see the devastation of that country and what it is like to have 30 years of control by a dictator that was the sole justice. I am a simple thinking kind of guy, and I had thought a lot about this war before I was in Congress and since I have been in Congress, but there were a lot of things that I had never thought about. Some of those things is there is no judicial system over there. There are no prosecutors. There was no rule of law. They had a dictator that was the rule of law.

We went and met with the Third ID from Fort Stewart in what was known as the torture chamber for Saddam, and they talked about the things that they saw in the basement of that building, the horrific site that they saw that just turned their stomachs. But it also made them realize why they were there, what kind of demon they were fighting.

We also saw the building next door to it that was known as I guess the Iraqi CIA building and the devastation caused to it by a daisy cutter bomb that was dropped there, unbelievable devastation. But there again it was one of those signs that we have given our military the best tools known to man to fight this war.

We saw at that same base members of the Third ID playing soccer with Iraqi troops, having a great time of fun. It is an international game, as one of the soldiers told me, the game of soccer. They enjoyed that fellowship in heat of about 115 degrees, but they are building relationships and they are letting the Iraqi people understand what it is like to live in freedom.

It is a gift that is indescribable, when you give the people an opportunity to live in freedom. To see the electric grid, that it can only handle so much electricity, and we are producing that much electricity today. We have restored those generating plants to give an opportunity to the Iraqi people to enjoy electricity all day, every day; to have water, to be able to bathe their children, to be able to wash clothes. We are giving them that opportunity.

Then as we went to Afghanistan, and as the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. DAVIS) said, we went to Serrano, and we visited with those soldiers out there and we saw what they were going through and the patrols that they did in the country. This was 150 miles southeast of Kabul.

We were able to witness the conditions that these men live in every day, the heat and just the threat of terror and danger that they are under, but to see their spirit.

I met one soldier, I believe was Sergeant Lightly, and he needs to be a general because he spends 24/7 embedded with Afghani troops. He said, "Do you know what I see in these men and women? The desire to live in a free country, to celebrate liberty. They want that for their country. And if something happens, they are right up to the speed. If some of their comrades get killed, they have more people waiting to enlist. In fact, we can't train those people fast enough to be in the military."

One of the other things that the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. DAVIS) mentioned was the reenlistment. We were told that the reenlistment goals in Iraq and Afghanistan have surpassed what their goal was. The men and women that are over there fighting, seeing the good things we are doing, the schools we are building, the grid system, the electric, the oil refineries,

the colleges and the universities, they see the good that we are doing. And Sergeant Lightly told me, "I am over here doing this, this is my second tour, because I don't want my two sons to be over here doing this. We need to finish the job today."

It was such a great honor to be over there, to visit with our men and women and get to visit with some soldiers from Georgia, and just to get to share with them our thanks from me and my family and all the American people for what they are doing. But it was also nice to see their gratitude for us coming over to visit them.

One soldier commented to me, "It was a great morale devastation when we heard that we had been compared to the Soviet gulags and the Nazis." I said, "Well, they were talking about Guantanamo." He said, "No, they were talking about my brothers and sisters and they were talking about me when they were talking about them."

So we need to keep our tongues under control and understand that when we say things devastating to our troops it does hurt their morale. They hear that over there, and not only do they hear that, but the Iraqis and the Afghan soldiers that are putting their lives on the line every day hear that, too.

He said, "You know what? If we pull out of these countries, if we pull out without finishing what we started, we will lose our credibility to every freedom-loving, liberty-loving person in this world."

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Again, I want to thank the gentleman for yielding this time to me and giving me an opportunity to share some of the experiences that I have had.

Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia; I thank him for his eloquent remarks and the perspective that he shared. One of my memories that will be lodged in my heart is you encouraging all of those Georgia soldiers who were so glad to see you, especially those who know you from Georgia politics to see a face from back home.

I would encourage some of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle who refuse to travel, to visit the troops doing the work that they do so well, and perhaps they would have a slightly different perspective if they spent some time with them on the ground.

Before I yield to the gentleman from Indiana, I would like to take a moment and recognize some of the human side of this. We had an experience in our media at one point a few months ago where one soldier had some negative things to say that ironically flew in the face of 99 percent of his comrades and created a little bit of a challenge from back home with some of the soldiers from back home and their perspective on what was being done. I have a picture of two of them I would like to share. I am good friends with their fathers. They cast a very dif-

ferent perspective than what has been portrayed in some of the national media.

The first gentleman that I would like to point to here tonight is a great patriot. He is not a political man; he is a soldier. He is committed to defend the Constitution. He is committed to honor his brothers and sisters in arms. His name is Art Cawman, and he is from Boone County, Kentucky. Art is a great soldier. He served as a Ranger in the special forces and decided that he wanted to go to flight school. He flies in the Third Infantry Division in the Third Aviation Brigade, and he is a Blackhawk pilot. In Operation Iraqi Freedom in March of 2003, he flew one of the first Blackhawks over the line for the Third Infantry Division as they began the march to liberate Iraq.

I had the tremendous privilege to spend some time being flown by a hometown pilot from my district whose family I know who shared a perspective candidly and openly about the sober nature of this struggle. Art Cawman is the kind of soldier whose face we need to have on this war. Art Cawman is the kind of soldier who went out and made a difference. Art Cawman is somebody who adapted to the changes in circumstances, who understands the nature of this mission, who understands that Islamic extremism is a threat to every person in the world regardless of faith or ethnicity or nationality. He is willing to serve. He has had comrades that he has lost in this struggle, but he understands the nature of it. He does not do it, he does not do it in a somber way, but with a commitment and understanding and excitement of being part of a great unit, a great heritage, a great tradition and, frankly, a great country that values freedom.

One of my personal pleasures was being able to bring a taste of home to him and also to a soldier I will show my colleagues in just a moment. But we have a tradition back in the fourth district of Kentucky called Skyline chili or Cincinnati chili that is a unique regional taste, like many parts of the country have. My airfare for being flown by him and his fine crew that day on our flight of two, and also including the other aircraft, was a case of this chili. We wanted to pass that on to them, just a small way to say thank you.

What I was most impressed with Art was his clear understanding of the nature of the mission, his clear understanding, Mr. Speaker, of the nature of the struggle, and a clear understanding that all it takes to win is to continue the mission.

I heard from this young warrant officer, the same perspective, that this insurgency, though a threat to individuals, is strategically irrelevant. These elections are going to happen; this government is going to stand. It is going to be different than what we have here in the United States, but their work is bringing results. It is also bringing quality of life to people who have never

known freedom, they have never known government as a friend, they have never known that the police are not your enemy, but they are there to protect you. He is setting that example, a high standard of American values. He represents a great unit with a great tradition and a great chain of command.

There is another gentleman I would like to share with my colleagues as well. This young captain standing next to me on Forward Operating Base Sharana, I referenced our visit to Sharana before; this is as we came off the helicopters after flying 150 miles south of Kabul. This is Captain Joe Geraci. He is the class of 1997 from the United States Military Academy at West Point. His father, Joe Geraci, Sr., is an active member of our business community that I have known well for years. He has made a great contribution to our local community and his son is making a great contribution to our Nation. He is leading a tremendous operation in southeastern Afghanistan right now that is driving the Taliban out of eastern Paktika Province in Colonel Tim McGuire's 1st of the 508th.

We also brought the taste of home to him; you can see it obscured behind the photograph there. But we brought that case of chili, and he sent me an e-mail the other night as he was eating it with his troops and said the only thing that was missing was a vanilla Coke to make the taste of home complete.

They understand the seriousness of their business. Joe has a 5-year-old son whose birthday he missed. He has a wife and parents who are worrying about him every day. But as we all talked on the phone the other day, the one thing they understand is that Captain Joe Geraci, who is a professional infantry officer, who is walking in the finest heritage and traditions of every generation that has come before us, as our young soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are, he is doing a tremendous job in winning a fight over there that is every bit as critical as the Greatest Generation's fight in the Second World War. It is every bit as critical to our national security now.

I would like to yield the floor for a few minutes to another of my colleagues, the gentleman from Indiana, who joined me in the journey to Congress some 4 years ago. The gentleman from Indiana (Mr. SODREL) was a former noncommissioned officer in the Indiana National Guard who had a great opportunity to go in theater and visit some of his former comrades. I think he brings a unique perspective; and I would like him to share his views, his impressions, his experiences, and the story of his soldiers as they are experiencing this critical time and this call to duty for our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. SODREL).

Mr. SODREL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. DAVIS), my good friend.

Over the Memorial Day recess, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to

go to Afghanistan. The main reason I wanted to make the trip was to visit my former unit, the 151st Infantry Battalion of the Indiana National Guard. I do not know whether it was by accident or design, but about 15 percent of the total force in Afghanistan are Hoosiers. I follow the 151st, even though it has been almost 3 decades now since I was a member. They were deployed in Bosnia, and they have been deployed in Afghanistan.

But when I met with them over there, it was not just as a fellow Hoosier or a former Guardsman and neighbor, but as their Member of Congress. I decided if I am going to be voting to send these men and women to war, I should go to the front lines and see for myself the progress that they are making and the conditions under which they are doing their job. After spending time with them in Afghanistan both in Khandahar and Camp Phoenix, I can assure my colleagues that we owe them a debt of gratitude.

These men and women operate under harsh conditions. They are seldom able to leave the confines of the bases unless they are on an official mission of some kind. In fact, the 151st lived in tents when they first arrived in Afghanistan. The dust, we talk about sand, this is not beach sand, this is dust; it is the consistency of talcum powder. It is very difficult to keep vehicles and aircraft operational. The heat, when you are walking around in body armor and carrying all of your weapons and pack and everything with you, it is hard work.

I had an opportunity to meet with everybody from the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Grube, to his executive officer, Major Rick Graham, to Staff Sergeant Steve Springer from Brownstown, Indiana, to specialist Nick Geshwein from Corydon. They all told me they are proud of the work that they have done while they have been there. They took it upon themselves to start a humanitarian project.

What Colonel Grube told me is that 25 percent of the children die before they are 10 years old in Afghanistan. They had a lot of poverty around Camp Phoenix and they worked with Graceland Baptist Church, a church there in southern Indiana, to get supplies and blankets and shoes for a lot of them who did not have shoes. They have worked with all of the local people, and they all assured me, when I heard from our diplomats and Vice President Khalili and from our troops, that the vast majority of Afghans really want peace. After a generation of warfare, they are tired of warfare.

The attitude has changed a lot in the last year. When the 151st first arrived there, they said most of the locals just wanted to keep their heads on. Their attitude was the coalition was on one side and the terrorists were on the other side, and they just did not want to get involved. They are getting involved today. They tell our people

where the bad folks are hanging out. They point out where the IEDs, improvised explosive devices, are. The relationship with the Afghan people has changed considerably during the last year.

Mr. Speaker, it is a difficult mission. It is a very inhospitable place. I personally think that, although it has been hard on the National Guard and hard on their families, I think, well, for example, they had one soldier who was a part-time magician, and I have a picture of him riding a unicycle with all the Afghan kids around him. They are just one step removed from civilian life, and they can relate very well to the local people.

But I think the recent attacks in London underscore the fact that we must not let up. We have to keep prosecuting the war on terror.

While much of my trip focused on Afghanistan and the meeting with the troops there, I also took the opportunity to go to Pakistan, and I spent about an hour with President Musharraf. He has started what he called a concept of enlightened moderation. Simply put, he understands that there are two challenges here. One is to defeat the terrorists militarily, but the other challenge is to stop creating terrorists and change the conditions that create terrorists.

Part of that is the madrassa schools and their curriculum, which he is going through and causing all of the madrassas to register with the Pakistani government. He also understands that he has to grow his economy, that he has to change the socioeconomic conditions, and that the other countries there in Central Asia do as well.

But the long-term prospects for peace and prosperity depend on the ability of democracy to take hold, and it depends on the abilities of those leaders to improve the living conditions of the average person. That means creating jobs, building roads, and generally enhancing the infrastructure of these countries. It means fostering opportunities for higher education.

It is clear to me from spending time in Afghanistan that what began as a military mission to defeat the terrorists who attacked the United States on September 11 will not end as the majority of our military comes home. Afghanistan will require the assistance of U.S. Government agencies and NGOs until self-governance and the Afghan economy are well established. Winning the war on terror and improving the quality of life for the people of Central Asia are globally important objectives. We have to stay on course to ensure a lasting peace in Afghanistan. A peaceful, tolerant Afghanistan is important to the long-term elimination of terror as a weapon of intolerance, and I am confident our folks are up to the task. I thank the gentleman from Kentucky for yielding to me.

Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Indiana. I thank him for recounting those

experiences with his Hoosier soldiers and the great job that they are doing in winning this war that our liberal media simply refuses to report, they refuse to report the successes.

Before I introduce another distinguished Member of this body, a gentleman who has spent many hours on an airplane with me, I would like to comment on one personal friend. I have the photographs behind me of two of my constituents who are great American soldiers and, really, they represent great young Americans who are serving with them in many, many capacities in the war, a critical war, the most important fight this country has seen since the end of the Second World War.

□ 2115

My friend, Art Cawman, who is here on my right, flew us in the afternoon after we had had some meetings with some commanders and met with the embassy staff over to the Second Brigade Combat Team of the Third Infantry Division in east Baghdad. The Second Brigade Combat Team has their headquarters in the former Ministry of Intelligence office complex. The main building was destroyed in the opening days of the war. Second brigade's headquarters is in an outbuilding that years ago was used for despicable, a heinous act perpetrated upon the Iraqi people in the name of raw power. Now that headquarters is commanded by a colonel named Joe DiSalvo. That name means a lot to me because I have known Joe DiSalvo for 28 years. We stood on the plane in July of 1997 at the United States Military Academy when we were inducted into the Corps of Cadets. We attended classes together and we played intramural sports together. We socialized together. After graduation we attended our Officer Basic Course together, a maintenance course together, and even went to ranger school and became rangers together. We had some interesting memories, being snap linked on to the side of a hill in a rainstorm many, many years ago as we were out to earn that coveted designation and many shared experiences. After that time we went our different ways in service to the country and our service to the Nation took different forms and different paths.

One of the great humbling honors that I experienced on this trip was seeing my old friend who now commanded a 3,000-soldier brigade combat team that is doing great work. They are in a tough place. East Baghdad includes Sadr City, among other areas that are considered some of the great danger zones of Baghdad. When Joey drove his Humvees in the first day they took over he showed me these photographs of American vehicles that were axle deep in raw sewage running openly in the streets.

Mr. Speaker, this was the Iraq that the Iraqi people experienced. This was the Iraq of Saddam Hussein. The national media refuses to report on what

our soldiers have done since. Those streets are clear today and they are dry and there is a sewer system. There is running water that most of the citizens have never experienced before in their lives. Regular and predictable electric power, all the things that we take for granted in our comfortable familiarity here in the United States regardless virtually of our economic circumstances.

They have paid a price serving on the front lines. They are defeating this insurgency. They are going on patrols with an Iraqi security force that is motivated, Ministry of Interior police who are motivated as Iraqis, who understand their identity as Iraqis. They are getting intelligence working together, they are solving problems with criminal elements, with those who are government rejectionists and with the terrible Islamic extremists who are out to do one thing which is to kill people.

And I think the perfect contrast between Colonel DiSalvo's soldiers and those Islamic extremists that are a threat to every freedom loving person regardless of their background or ethnicity in the world was when our NCOs are out getting school supplies and our enlisted soldiers are getting school supplies for young people, giving candy to children, letting them know that they are there to protect them, not to be overlords like the prior regime was. They are seeing the opportunities to go back to school, receiving health care in many cases for the first time in their lives. They are seeing a side of life where the soldiers will play soccer with them. And you know what the insurgent response was last week, was to drive a car bomb into the midst of a group of children around some American soldiers. To take the life of one American they are willing to murder 24 little ones.

I think this is a clash of world views, Mr. Speaker, and I think I know who is on the right side. And the Second Brigade Combat team whose primary mission is to defend those people and to defeat those terrorists, really criminal thugs and murders with no courage, no will and a unwillingness to openly take their battle against soldiers. They only turn on the harmless to rule by fear and terror, and that only comes from one place. And that pit of darkness is not represented by this Nation and by its values.

I want to commend the soldiers of the Second Brigade Combat team. I want to commend those working in every area to keep those vehicles running, those who go out on patrols, those who invest in relationships locally, those who encourage one another. And also the same thing that I heard with the soldiers in the Second Brigade Combat team when they told me this: Tell our story to the American people.

Mr. Speaker, this is the thing that is not heard by the national media. I challenge CBS and NBC and CNN and ABC for their purported fairness to

broadcasting to actually report the truth. Talk to some soldiers who actually represent the overwhelming majority of those who are serving. I decry those producers of 60 Minutes who I personally believe do not represent the interests of the American people.

You at 60 minutes know this: This Congressman served this country and the Second Brigade Combat team soldiers and the First of 508 soldiers serve now to defend your right to put the awful things on the air that you do. And you do not understand the freedoms that you have. I am so disappointed and my heart is broken when you go out of your way to embarrass and defame those who are serving this Nation and those who are leading this Nation.

It is a travesty, Mr. Speaker. But I would rather have you have that freedom than to have the alternative of what Colonel DiSalvo and his soldiers had to clean up in East Baghdad because that really is the alternative when we think about it.

My friend from Texas (Mr. CONAWAY) had so many unique perspectives and probably more than any other State of the Union of all of the soldiers that we saw in the four countries that we were in during this trip were soldiers from the great Republic of Texas. And I would like for him to take as much time as he would like to share his perspective on the trip, on this critical time in our Nation's history and just the great young men and women that we met. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Kentucky for yielding this time, giving me a chance to speak. True to his ranger training, the trip that we took was fast paced and there was precious little sleep involved. But the four of us who have spoken tonight are none the worse for wear. It was a wonderful experience that I will treasure as one of the highlights of my term here in Congress.

I have had the opportunity this pass weekend to go back to Texas and to have a couple of different audiences that I was speaking to, giving them a legislative update, also letting them know about my trip. And as someone who speaks quite often to an awful lot of folks, you get a sense of whether or not the audience is paying attention, a sense of whether or not they are actually listening to you. And as I spoke about our experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan and in Kuwait, the audience just hung on every word, not because of my eloquence, but more importantly because the message of what I was actually imparting to them.

There is a hunger among the folks in America to understand and to know the truth. And the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. DAVIS) and I and my good colleagues from Georgia and from Indiana went over there for two reasons. One principal reason was to tell the troops that we came in contact with thank you, thank you for doing a

job that you have been asked to do. You did not ask, you were not asked whether or not you agreed with the job. You were not asked whether or not it is a job you thought ought to be done. Your country simply asked you to go to do a job in a tough, tough arena.

We stepped off the plane in Baghdad on Friday a week or so ago. I grew up in West Texas, in the high plains of West Texas. It is an arid desert region. We are used to in the summer some really hot dry weather, sandstorms, dust storms in which the dust and the sand is blowing so hard that the electronic photocells on the street lights trigger the lights to come on during the middle of the day. So I am no stranger to hot desert weather.

We stepped off the plane, the C-130 there in Baghdad at the airport and it is probably not appropriate to personify weather, but when I stepped off that airplane I stepped into what felt like just angry, mean weather. The horizon was obliterated. You could not see any distinguishing characteristics except this brown cloud all the way around us. It was hot.

About the best way that I think Americans who have not been there to help experience this, get a sense of what it was like is to go into your bathroom, pick up your hair dryer, turn it on, blow it straight into your face for about an hour, breathing that air, and it will give you a bit of a sense of what our young men and women who are serving this country so magnificently in the summers in Iraq. As the gentleman from Kentucky and I and others talked about going to Iraq this time of year, the aging veterans around, the folks who had been, said you guys could have picked a little better time of year to go than July because it is inhospitable.

What we found when we got to all three countries is troops with the morale that was incredibly high. And these were not cherry picked troops that the leadership put us in contact with. Every single person we came in contact with, their morale is high. They know they are doing a job that is important to this country.

The backdrop that our trip took was the bombings in London which happened on Thursday. We were there Thursday, Friday and Saturday. They understand the importance of what they are doing, that the work that they are doing in these three countries will help, not guarantee, but help keep those bombings from happening here in America. To a person they told us they would all rather fight whatever fight has to be fought in those countries rather than in the streets of America.

We had some great briefings not only from the military but also from the State Department in both countries, Iraq and Afghanistan. Let me quickly comment on the briefing there in Iraq with the State Department folks there are confident that the Constitution will be drafted on time and with all three ethnic groups represented at the

table, the Kurds, the Shiites and the Sunnis are drafting that Constitution. They are confident it will be done sometime near the 15th of August, which is the deadline that they set for themselves.

This is an Iraqi constitution, not an American constitution. It is one that they will live with. It is one that will meet their needs, will share power in an environment that, quite frankly, our Founding Fathers would have found pretty foreign to try to deal with the ethnic diversity that they are dealing with. But that is going to happen.

What happens next is a referendum will be held 60 days later, and then this December there will be general elections throughout the country. We are assured and coming from State Department guys who typically do not like to give a lot of assurances. We are assured that the insurgents and all of the violence that is going on right now will have no effect on the progress for creating a democracy in Iraq. This constitution, the referendum to adopt the constitution as well as the general elections in December, that is going to happen.

Now, what we do expect is that the level of violence, the intensity of violence, the high profile publicity value violence will continue during this time frame and will in fact and probably in all likelihood increase.

While we were there the Egyptian ambassador had been kidnapped and was killed. That was determined. My colleague from Kentucky has already spoken about the horrific incident this past week in which 24 young lives were snuffed out simply for being at the wrong spot at the wrong time. So this is going to continue. But the Iraqi people are going to see this through. What their main concern is, is that we will not see it through with them. Now they are out on a limb and we are giving great support to that limb and they are concerned that at the critical moment when democracy is in the breach that we will lose our resolve, that somehow public opinion will turn to the extent here in the United States that we will abandon them to the insurgents. And you know, as best as my colleagues and I could assure them or could convey some assurances to them, we said that was not going to happen.

Much the same effort is going on in Afghanistan. Again a State Department briefing there on, quite frankly, the struggles that they have with the drug traffic, the opium production as well as the drug trade, drug economy. But their elections in September are also going to come off on time, September the 18th. The elections last January in Iraq are going to serve as the model for elections in both countries in that they will police them themselves. They will secure them themselves, and we will stand ready to assist them wherever that assistance is needed. But the Iraqis and the Afghans are going to be responsible for the security at these elections during that important time frame.

A couple of events that happened. One was we landed there in Kabul and we drove several times down the same street going between the airport and the embassy. The first trip was early in the morning and we were driving it pretty fast in a relatively what appeared to be a reckless manner down a pretty narrow street. And there were hundreds of young Afghan children on the sides of the streets making their way to school. These children were clean, scrubbed up, had on what appeared to be Western clothes. Little girls were holding hands and skipping along. Little boys were roughhousing and wrestling as young children do all over the world. But they were on their way to school. And we were doing 40, 50 miles an hour through this school zone and I was very uncomfortable. I kept wanting to say, hey, wait a minute. Let us slow down. We are in a school zone. These are children. But the children were oblivious to the race going down the middle of the street. They were just headed to school. And that is because of the work that is being done by our fine men and women. It is because of the work that is being done by the Afghan people because they understand the advantages as well.

Another poignant moment, the most poignant moment for me occurred when we flew from Kyrgyzstan into Kabul. It was my turn to be on the flight deck of the C-130. If you are in a C-130 there are not a lot of places to look out. There are a few portholes but limited vision. So I had the chance to stay up on the flight deck with a headset on and I was talking to the pilots and the navigator, listening to what was going on. We got to Afghanistan and I began to hear the traffic, that radio traffic for the search and rescue mission that was going on to try to find our SEAL that at that point in time was on the run. In all likelihood he was already dead at that point in time. But we were probably 50 or so nautical miles from the area where the search was being conducted. It was an incredibly haunting, eerie feeling to be in the relative safety of a C-130 listening to that search. We had a full court press going to try to find this man and save him. And to hear that traffic and know that we had an American who was, we talk about being in harm's way, this man we thought was in a big time way in harm's way, and it was very haunting to hear that traffic and be that close to him and not really be able to do anything about it.

□ 2130

I came away from the overall trip, one, just incredibly proud of the young men and women we have serving this country, from the leadership, the generals we met all the way down to the E-2 who just got there. These are some of America's finest men and women. Are they perfect? No, of course not. They are men and women just like we are. And if one of them by chance does something he or she should not do, the

good news about our system of justice is we will punish the folks who do things wrong, on occasion.

By and large, the vast majority of them, their hearts are in the right area. I met one young man and young woman from Texas in Afghanistan. We had a dinner with them just before we left. Out of the clear blue sky they just mentioned that on Friday afternoons, on their days off, on their time off they both go to the local orphanages to volunteer to go hug those kids, to play with them, to read to them, and do the kinds of things that good American GIs have done in every single war that we have ever been involved in. And they are carrying on that great tradition of the American spirit of helping the folks that they are there to protect and do just a wonderful job.

I thank the gentleman from Kentucky for organizing a wonderful trip, a trip as I mentioned when I first started would be incredibly memorable. We have some great photographs of that time together. And you get to know people a little bit better when you spend collective 44 hours on jets and C-130s and Chinooks and Blackhawk helicopters. You get a little bit different feel for that person. That is one of the pluses that travel together like that gives, particularly when you go to places as important to what is going on in America as Iraq and Afghanistan.

We are doing the job that has to be done. The leadership has a plan in place to get it done. The young men and women that are doing the job are getting it done. The Iraqi army, the Iraqi police are training and becoming more and more capable every single day to take over the job and stand in the breach in place of America's youth to create this democracy in their country.

The same thing has happened in Afghanistan, the Afghan National Police, the Afghan National Army. They are standing up, as the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WESTMORELAND) mentioned as well.

One final comment and then I will close. Over the weekend we saw a suicide bomber who was associated with a car bomb that went off. Two suicide bombers had gotten out of this car and walked away from it. The car exploded with the suicide bomber in it. A crowd gathered to try to help the wounded, to try to care for those who were injured. And these two men on foot ran back at the crowd, one of whom set off an explosion, blew himself up, and killed some additional people.

The Iraqis shot and wounded the second suicide bomber on foot. And as he lay on the ground struggling to reach his detonation button, an Iraqi EOD member disarmed him through a series of events where they grabbed the guy. They put him in the back of the pickup. The Iraqi EOD specialist went up to him wearing the big bulky protective gear that they are supposed to wear. He understood he could not reach the fellow in that gear so he took the gear off

and then went back to the pickup truck. The insurgent was trying to get his hand on the switch, and the Iraqi EOD guy disarmed that bomb.

That is a great anecdote to show that the Iraqis are doing the job that needs to be done.

I thank the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. DAVIS) for a wonderful trip, and I look forward to additional experiences like that in the future. I thank him for letting me have time tonight.

Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CONAWAY) for his thorough description of many different aspects of the trip. We certainly saw some tremendous perspectives.

As time winds down, I will leave the evening with Task Force Fury. I will talk more about it in future evenings.

In one of the messages that was shared with me by Colonel Tim McGuire and Captain Sean McCray, the assistant operations officer for the battalion passed on some of their perspectives. We know these are America's paratroopers. They are combat infantry men and their supporting team members. But he wrote this. He said, On any given day, Task Force Fury soldiers mentor Afghan citizens and leaders in the establishment and management of democracy, capitalism, ethics, education, business ethics, law enforcement, and organizational skills, all the while ready to destroy those who would stand against the Afghan National Government when they are present on the battlefield.

The keys are providing tangible hope, signs of improvement and stability. The best weapon they say that Task Force Fury maintains in its arsenal is the implementation of projects that build infrastructure in a region with little or none.

The year I graduated from West Point, Ronald Reagan asked a question in his campaign. He said, Are you better off now than you were 4 years ago? I think the citizens of Paktika Province are better off now having a paved road that can withstand the weather. The first paved road in 5,000 years.

The final story was this: this task force was moving on a convoy. A young boy, 10-year-old boy, approached Colonel McGuire's vehicle, running towards it. The children were remarkable in their acceptance and kindness towards American soldiers in Afghanistan.

This little boy was a little more agitated than normal. They stopped the convoy and they asked the little boy why he was concerned, and he said that there were a couple of bad folks had come into the village and planted an improvised explosive device. He pointed out in the road where that was. It was disabled.

Colonel McGuire asked the young boy why he did that and his response was profound. He said, Before you Americans came, I could not go to school.

I think right there shows the clash of world views and how our soldiers are

paying off on the front lines. I challenge the national media, I challenge the punditocracy to tell the truth.

George Orwell made a comment that certain things do not make sense to ordinary people, just to an intellectual. I would challenge the media that things that do not make sense in much of your reporting to us ordinary Americans maybe makes sense to you from your perspective; but I would challenge you to spend time with these soldiers, spend time with their command and see the fruits on the ground, the great things they are doing, and how we are winning this.

Our young men and women are accepting a call to duty that is bringing great honor on the heritage and traditions of this Nation.

### 30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. POE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor being before the House. I would like to thank the Democratic leader for allowing us to have one more 30-something Working Group hour. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) will be joining me tonight.

Mr. Speaker, as we would like to outline at the beginning of every 30-something, we have come to the floor bringing not only ideas but also calling out some of the issues that are not being handled in an appropriate way.

As we explain week after week, the Democrats are in the minority here in the House. It is important for everyone to understand that when bills are agendaed or non-agendaed, that is because the Republicans are in the majority. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, we work every day to make sure that we do good work on behalf of the American people, but we also make sure that we raise issue when that is not happening.

And I can tell you as it relates to the whole veterans issue, I am so glad to now see the majority side take an opportunity to smell the coffee, knowing that our veterans are in need. We have men and women in Iraq, in Afghanistan; but the question is not how we treat them and how we talk about them here in this Congress and how we tell their families that we are with them. It is important that we are with them when they come home. When they come home, they need to be able to go to the VA hospital or a VA clinic and get service.

As it stands right now, there are a number of backlogs throughout the country, but one thing I can tell you that I am very proud of, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that all along the Democratic Caucus raised the issue as it relates to veterans affairs issues, not only on the substantive standpoint but also on an appropriations standpoint.

I just want to say that if it were not for the Democrats pushing the card and