

Last week I had the privilege of visiting Iraq and thanking our troops for the amazing job they are doing in defense of our freedom. I saw first hand the tremendous progress we are making in Iraq and got to meet with our troops and commanders on the ground to hear from them what is really going on in that country.

My trip began with a long flight from Washington to Amman, Jordan. My travel companions were two other Congressmen, Steven Lynch of Massachusetts and Peter Welch of Vermont. Our first meeting of the trip was a roundtable with representatives from a number of Non-governmental Organizations, also known as NGO's. We discussed issues surrounding the number of refugees coming to Jordan from Iraq. I learned quite a bit about the difficult process of caring and providing for hundreds of thousands of refugees.

We also met with leaders from the Jordanian Financial Investigation Unit, which tracks illegal money laundering to terrorists groups operating in the Middle East. We discussed their role in the War on Terror and they explained the importance of cutting off funding to terrorist organizations. I was very pleased with the progress the Jordanian Financial Investigation Unit is making in their quest to end the financing of terrorism.

After our meetings in Jordan we headed off to Iraq. Upon landing in Baghdad, my first thought was, wow it's kind of chilly! Despite what you would think of the region, I was caught off guard by the rather cold temperatures. In fact it never got above 50 degrees while I was there.

After unloading our bags we were given the opportunity to have a working lunch with Ambassador Ryan Crocker and General David Petraeus, who is commanding our forces in Iraq. We received a secure briefing and then discussed the great progress being made by U.S. Forces and the Iraqi people in combating insurgents and al-Qaeda. General Petraeus reported that we are experiencing significant progress in the reduction of both military and civilian casualties. And both he and Ambassador Crocker were pleased to report that the surge is showing significant gains all across the country.

They also briefed us on a new tactic they have employed in which our troops are embedding themselves in the community and taking on an active role in the day-to-day rebuilding of individual neighborhoods. This is a vital component of overall movement towards stability in the country. Our troops are engaging local leaders and working with doctors, teachers and activists to bring about lasting change to the communities they are stationed in. I am thrilled at the prospects this plan offers and I look forward to hearing more about future successes we may enjoy as a result of this new approach towards peace and reducing the number of American soldiers in Iraq.

There was much more to my trip and I plan to tell you all about it next week, including some thoughts on my first ever telephone town hall meeting, which I conducted live from the green zone in Baghdad.

For now I wish you all a great week!

