

I wrote last week primarily about the meetings I had with some high level government and military officials. This week I'd like to focus on the fine men and women serving in our armed forces and the results they are producing.

While in Iraq, I had the chance to meet with our troops, a number of whom were from the Commonwealth. It was an honor to be with them and to personally thank them for the tremendous sacrifice they are making for us. These amazing men and women were in high spirits and proud to be able to serve their country. They spoke of the progress being made and of the sense of accomplishment they felt as a result of doing such a great job restoring peace and stability to Iraq.

My visits to al-Qana'at and Ramadi were proof of the progress our troops are making. Only months ago, these areas were still facing a number of difficulties but now, thanks to the hard work of our troops and the Iraqi people the area is experiencing stability and a period of re-growth. Even in Baghdad, I was impressed with how much had returned to normal. Congressman Lynch, whom I traveled with, mentioned that on his last trip, several areas of Baghdad were still without electricity. On this trip however, almost all of Baghdad had power, water and sewer services which had not been in service for quite some time.

While there are still some trouble spots in sections of the country, our armed forces are working well with the Iraqi people and government and. We stopped to speak with Iraqi people in the streets and met with the Governor of Anbar Province and they are very upbeat about the

future of their country. I am confident that they will continue to have great success in rebuilding Iraq and giving the Iraqi people a chance at freedom.

From Iraq we traveled to Beirut, Lebanon, where we met with members of the Lebanese military and Walid Jumblatt, a prominent member of the Parliament, Prime Minister Fuad Siniora and Army Commander Michel Sleiman who is the compromise candidate to serve as the next President of Lebanon. We discussed the recent conflict with Israel, and also discussed the issue of unexploded land mines, which are a serious problem in Lebanon. We had a working lunch with Ambassador Makkawi, which was very helpful to understanding some of the problems the Lebanese are facing right now in their efforts to rebuild their country and create a free and independent Lebanon.

After a brief stop in Paris to meet with the Executive Secretary of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to discuss the economic challenges faced by the Middle East I headed back home with a better understanding of the issues facing Iraq and Lebanon.

I would also like to mention our use of a really great new technology. Implementing a live, telephone town hall meeting, I was able to communicate with over 8,000 people from the First District while I was in Iraq. It was neat to be able to report to people from the Green Zone and share some of my impressions of Iraq. I think that this technology is great resource and I plan to use it regularly so that I can continue to learn from you what is important and what issues are on your mind. In the future, if you ever get a call from me asking you to join a live town hall meeting over the telephone, please don't hang up! Join in and let me know what's on your mind.

My visit to the Middle East with two other Congressmen from across the aisle was a very valuable experience which allowed me to gain a better understanding of the issues we face. This trip was also important to me because it gave me the chance to thank our service men and women for their service to and sacrifice for our country.

Thanks and have a great week!