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Inglis, others brief Bush on Mideast trip

By **REGAN E. DOHERTY**, Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON - U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, R-Greenville, joined a delegation of Congressmen Thursday in an Oval Office meeting with President Bush and Vice President Cheney about their recent weeklong trip to the Middle East.

"It was a great opportunity to share some impressions about the trip," Inglis said after the hourlong meeting.

Inglis characterized the briefing as "a free exchange ... quite a lively conversation, with lots of back and forth, questions and answers." President Bush was particularly interested in how Inglis' observations of the region might affect the continuing debate over the supplemental Iraq funding bill, Inglis said.

Inglis said he told the president he saw evidence of progress in Iraq, demonstrated by the fact that he was able to drive into Baghdad from the airport on "the most dangerous stretch of highway in the world" and to visit a market. He described these as "two very tangible things we couldn't do before."

But, Inglis said "while there is progress, there is also great risk ... the surge puts American forces in the teeth of the trouble."

He described President Bush as "very resolute, very determined." Inglis described troop morale in both Iraq and Afghanistan as "amazingly good." The announcement of the recent three-month tour extension mandated by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, he said, met with "no complaints."

Inglis highlighted "the incredible ability of the United States military to get things done,"

He described the forces as "an American military under fire, performing amazing feats of reconstruction."

About 1,800 National Guardsmen from or based in South Carolina will depart for Afghanistan this month.

Inglis indicated that it is unreasonable to expect to impose a constitutional government that looks like the U.S.

"We should not set that as a goal," Inglis said. Neither should we expect to eliminate all terrorist threats in Iraq. Success, he said, will entail a regime that can maintain order, "an order that will be very different from order in Spartanburg."

In response to recent speculation that Afghanistan has morphed into a haven for drug production and trafficking, Inglis acknowledged that drugs present "a very real problem" in Afghanistan, but said it also involves "a delicate domestic political pattern." Wholesale eradication of poppy production, he said, may adversely affect "the ability of someone to feed their family."

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