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## Kennedy, McCollum return from Mideast

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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Although they said they gave leaders in the Mideast a "common, consistent message," two Minnesota members of Congress retain starkly contrasting views about security in the region after a six-day tour.

Rep. Betty McCollum, a Democrat, who has questioned the handling of the war in Iraq, and Republican Rep. Mark Kennedy, who has said he is confident about the progress being made there, returned with those same views essentially intact.

McCollum, who also visited Iraq last year, said changes in Iraq were not positive. "Security is an issue," she said. "When I was there 10 months ago ... people didn't talk about the crime, about the kidnappings. We're seeing armed militias controlling cities."

While saying "more needs to be done" in terms of security, Kennedy said he saw evidence that Iraq is on the road to recovery. He also visited Iraq last year.

"Our efforts in Iraq are having a positive influence on the region and on our security," said Kennedy. "If you looked at the amount of traffic and the amount of commerce in the street, there is no question that normalcy of life is progressing."

Joined by three other House Governmental Reform Committee members, the Fourth District Democrat and Sixth District Republicans also met with leaders of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

McCollum said she will push for more congressional oversight in Iraq, focusing on an investigation into the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.

Kennedy said he will focus on "staying the course" and encouraging area governments to become more democratic.

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