Mr. Speaker, since the spring of 2004 I've stood here in

this very spot 415 times to call for an end to foreign wars and the

start of a new, smarter approach to national security. In most of those

speeches my tone has been one of insistence and beseeching. Seldom have

I been able to echo good news or declare a sense of accomplishment, but

Mr. Speaker, today is different. As the President will reaffirm in a

speech at Fort Bragg today--and it moves me almost beyond words to say

this--the war in Iraq is finally over.

After 105 excruciating months, after so much heartbreak and despair,

after so many shameful episodes--such as the ``Mission Accomplished''

banner, Abu Ghraib, the outing of Valerie Plame, and so much more--our

troops are finally coming home from Iraq, all of them.

Much credit goes to President Obama for making good on his promise.

When he was sworn into office, there were 142,000 U.S. servicemembers

deployed to Iraq; by the time the calendar turns in 2012, there will be

zero; zero.

But this day would not have come unless some very brave people had

spoken up for peace at a time when the polls and the conventional

wisdom said that President Bush and his Iraq policy were unassailable.

I've been proud to work in particular with my friends, Congresswoman

Barbara Lee and Congresswoman Maxine Waters, in establishing the Out of

Iraq Caucus. Many of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle stood

shoulder to shoulder with us, including our late friend, Jack Murtha,

who's opposition to the war represented a major turning point in the

Iraq debate.

Of course, no one displayed more courage than the heroic men and

women who served in Iraq with honor and selflessness. They present the

best our Nation has to offer. I only wish that their elected leaders

had served them better over the last decade.

But, Mr. Speaker, we must be careful. We must be careful about

turning this into an occasion of triumph or celebration. The end of the

Iraq War is welcome, but tragically, overdue. Too much has been lost in

precious American blood, in badly needed public treasure, and in our

moral core as a Nation. The end of this war comes too late for nearly

4,500 Americans whose parents, spouses, children, and friends will miss

them desperately this holiday season and every other day of the year.

Many thousands more are home from Iraq with broken minds and bodies,

with scars they will carry for the rest of their days. We must keep our

promise to them to provide the benefits that they so need and deserve.

I don't know how we atone for the deaths of thousands upon thousands

of innocent Iraqi civilians. Our military occupation in Iraq is over,

but our bilateral engagement with Iraq most certainly will go on. There

is still plenty of human need in Iraq, and we must have an obligation

to help alleviate that.

It is critical that the United States be a peaceful and constructive

partner with Iraq, investing in development, providing the civilian

support that will empower its people, and strengthening its democratic

institutions. Now is the moment. Now, more than ever, we must move to a

smarter security in Iraq.

Finally, it is critical to remember that the end of the Iraq War does

not mean we are a Nation at peace. The war in Afghanistan lingers on,

violently and senselessly, still undermining our national security and

weakening our country. We must, Mr. Speaker, move more quickly than

ever to end that conflict.

It is time to bring our troops home, all of our troops, safely home,

now.