Mr. Speaker, just about sunrise in the desert of

the sun and the valley of the gun, the last American troops left Iraq.

It was this past Sunday, December 18, 2011. It has been 8 years, 7

months, and 24 days since the war began. The Americans are coming home

by Christmas. Mission accomplished.

4,474 Americans gave their lives, and thousands of others were

wounded. The last American casualty was Army Specialist David Emanuel

Hickman from North Carolina, killed on November 14. These Americans

died in a land they had never been for a people they had never known.

The Americans have liberated Iraq from a dictatorship. To apply Ben

Franklin's statement on the founding of America: We have given the

Iraqis a free country; let's see if they can keep it or not.

The choice and responsibility for Iraq is now with Iraq, but we here

in America shall remember those who served and returned, those who

served and did not return, and those who served and returned with the

wounds of war. As one wounded trooper said yesterday:

And that's just the way it is.