Mr. Speaker, good evening.

Mr. Speaker, 2 weeks ago I had the privilege to visit our service men

and women serving in Iraq, and I saw for myself what is really

happening on the ground.

I met with several service men and women from cities that I

represent, the city of Azusa, East Los Angeles and West Covina in

California. I spoke with troop commanders, Iraqi women representing

NGOs, and two parliamentarian women.

My trip to Iraq confirmed my belief that we must supply better

support for our troops, including redeployment out of Iraq. But

supporting our troops means securing our troops and making sure we

minimize the risks they really face. Our troops, as you know, are

overextended. The length of time they are spending in Iraq is not only

demanding, but exhausting. For many of them, it is not their first tour

either, this is their second, third and maybe even fourth.

While our troops remain committed to their work, they are concerned

about the impact their duty is having on them and their families. The

time they spend with their families is shorter with each tour of duty.

Our troops are concerned about the lack of adequate equipment. Some

troops lack the basic equipment needed to do their job, like body

armor. In fact, one soldier told me they don't have light bulbs. I said

light bulbs for what? They said well, Congresswoman, for our vehicles.

When we are asked to go into the communities, if we don't have light

bulbs on our vehicles we can't see. Another one mentioned they didn't

have scissors, and I said, Why do you need scissors? And he said

because if one of my men gets hit, I need to have scissors to be able

to bandage and provide whatever help that person needs.

In some cases they told me that the equipment they use is unreliable

due to overexcessive use. And I was appalled to learn that some service

members are forced to share their equipment with recent arrivals. The

new members of the service that we are sending in in this surge or

escalation are actually taking equipment away from those who are being

currently deployed there. Without the proper equipment, our troops face

significant and unnecessary risk to their lives.

Supporting our troops also means redeployment and an Iraqi nation

that will govern itself and its people. Unfortunately, the best plan

President Bush offers is another blank check request for his already

failed policies.

In California, the 32nd Congressional District that I represent, as

you can see, 13 of our sons have already given their lives, the

ultimate sacrifice. U.S. casualties, as you know, are close to 3,200,

and more than 24,000 service men and women have been injured or

permanently disabled, and more than half of those will not be able to

lead normal lives.

This blank check that President Bush provides must end. By deploying

additional service men and women into combat, the President shows just

how out of touch he is with the real needs of our troops and the

reality of the situation. The increase of troops will do nothing to

improve the long-term security situation.

The President's escalation plan ignores the very needs of these

veterans. The crisis, as you know, at Walter Reed highlights the fact

that this administration has not prioritized the health care needs of

our returning veterans. And as Members of Congress, it is our

responsibility to protect our troops and veterans when our Commander in

Chief will not. We need a plan that will ensure that there will not be

permanent bases in Iraq. And we need to ensure that all troops are

provided with adequate equipment and training needed to do their job

safely.

Our plan must require the Iraqis to take control of Iraq and bring

other Arab states together to help solve this problem. Our plan must

refocus also on Afghanistan. And our plan must ensure that our service

men and women and veterans receive the best care available when they

return home.

This includes traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder,

culturally competent health care, housing, and education.

The troops and their families have kept their promise to us. We must

now keep our promise to them, and I am proud that we have made such a

plan available. The U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health & Iraq

Accountability Act, in my opinion, is key to this success. It supports

our troops. It holds the administration accountable. It establishes a

plan for redeployment, and provides for our veterans.

My trip to Iraq strengthened my belief that the right course of

action is to redeploy our troops out of Iraq. Our men and women in

uniform are doing their job, and we in Congress must do ours so that

our troops will come home and receive the care that they deserve. We

must not continue to turn our backs on those who proudly have served

our Nation, and I will continue to fight and support our troops.

I look forward to their redeployment and their safe return to their

families, to their friends, and to their loved ones, and I look forward

to a resolution, and an Iraq governed by Iraqis, and a world safer and

more secure for all of us. And I know our leadership will help to take

us there.