Mr. Speaker, as the war in Iraq enters its fifth year, we

take time to reflect on those who have made the greatest sacrifices

because of this war, our troops. We all salute them because of their

courage, their patriotism and the sacrifices they are willing to make.

They have done everything asked of them, and we are forever in their

debt.

That debt extends to their families, who have also made sacrifices.

The missed family events, births of children, deaths of loved ones,

graduations, anniversaries, birthdays are losses which cannot be

replaced. We owe to these families a renewed commitment

to support them in whatever way may be required and to make sure that

our troops have everything they need to do their job and to come home

safely and soon.

To those who have been wounded, our Nation has promised to care for

you as you have protected us. This is a solemn promise, and it will be

honored.

The debt which can never be repaid is to those whose lives have been

lost in the war, and as a Nation we mourn them. Their absence is felt

each day, each and every one of them; but on this day in particular,

their sacrifice should be remembered in a special way. I therefore

salute our colleague, Congressman Patrick Murphy, for leading us in a

moment of silence in memory of his colleagues who were lost in the war

and all others as well.

Mr. Speaker, 4 years ago today, our Nation launched a war of choice

in Iraq. The war has claimed the lives of over 3,200 American troops

and wounded tens of thousands more, some of them permanently.

Any U.S. military engagement has to be judged in three ways: does it

make our country safer, our military stronger, and the region in which

we are engaged in the conflict more stable. The war in Iraq has failed

on all three counts.

In fact, the administration's policy in Iraq has diminished the

safety of our country by reducing the strength of our military. The

readiness has sunk now to levels lower than Vietnam, it has failed to

hold the Iraqis accountable for the future of their own country, and it

has dishonored our commitment to our veterans. It has cost billions of

dollars and significantly damaged our reputation in the eyes of the

world.

When our young men and women are placed in danger, we owe it to them

to provide them with the best training and equipment possible and a

strategy worthy of their sacrifice.

The generals have told us over and over again, across the board,

generals on active duty, General Petraeus as recently as last week, and

many retired generals: there is no military solution to the war in

Iraq. It cannot be won solely militarily. Instead, we must leverage all

of our political, economic, and diplomatic strengths.

Again and again Senator Reid, the Democratic leader in the Senate,

and I have urged President Bush to adopt a plan for Iraq that contains

the following elements:

Change the mission. Transition the mission from combat to training.

That will enable us to responsibly redeploy our troops.

Third, we must build consensus for political accommodation in Iraq.

They must amend the constitution to be more inclusive to end the civil

strife.

Fourth, we must encourage a robust diplomatic effort, primarily

involving Iraq's neighbors. The first meeting of neighbors was held.

That is a good step. It was at a low level, appropriately, and now it

has to move to the ministerial level.

We then must reform and reinvigorate the reconstruction effort. $10

billion is unaccounted for. $10 billion in thin air of the

reconstruction effort is unaccounted for. How do we answer to the

American taxpayer, when this war is costing $2 billion a week on the

military side, and on the reconstruction side we can't account for the

money?

When we do this, when we transition, when we change the mission,

redeploy the troops, build political consensus, engage in diplomatic

efforts and reform and reinvigorate the reconstruction effort, then we

can turn our attention to the real war on terror, in Afghanistan.

I hear the voice of the future in the Chamber. What a beautiful

sound. What a beautiful sound.

Later this week, Mr. Speaker, we will debate a plan to bring the war

to an end. The U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq

Accountability Act will rebuild our military, protect our troops,

provide for our veterans and hold the Iraqi Government accountable.

The benchmarks for the Iraqi Government set forth in this bill are

the benchmarks endorsed by President Bush on January 10. They are:

improvement in the performance of the Iraqi security forces; a greater

commitment by the Iraqi Government to national reconciliation; and

reductions in the level of sectarian violence in Iraq.

After 4 years of war, it is reasonable to expect these benchmarks to

be met this year. Four years. We are in this war longer than World War

II. There is no end in sight. There is no end in sight. There is an

unlimited commitment, with no strategy to match the sacrifice of our

troops.

Democrats will be offering later in the week, and hopefully with

Republican support, we will pass a supplemental that will, that will,

place a time frame. And I am really pleased that so many retired

generals have come out in support of a time certain that relates to the

performance that the President himself established, that the Iraqi

Government themselves agreed to.

This isn't anything we created. It is the President's benchmarks. The

Iraqis agreed to it. We want to see progress. But if we don't, we will

begin the redeployment of our troops out of Iraq in 6 months from that

date. Then we will leave troops there for training, for protecting our

diplomats, for fighting terrorism, for force protection, but only for

those purposes.

I welcome the debate over this bill and the opportunity it provides

for Members of Congress to express themselves in what I consider is the

greatest ethical challenge to our country, how we send our young men

and women into battle; how we send them without the training, without

the equipment, without the rest time at home, and overextend them when

they are there.

How we send them into battle without plans to honor our commitment to

them.

In the military they say: On the battlefield, we will leave no

soldier behind. We say: And when they come home, we will leave no

veteran behind.

Apparently our country, our great country, has to make a decision for

greatness on how we are viewed in the world, on how we project our

power and our ideals to make the world a more peaceful place, to honor

our commitment to our troops, to honor our commitment to the future,

and to honor the sacrifice and the vision of our Founding Fathers.

This is a very important decision for our caucus, for our Congress,

for our country, and I hope that the debate will be in the spirit as it

was a few weeks ago. It was a great commitment to our troops with

knowledge of substance, based on values and respecting the patriotism

of each and every person who serves in the Congress.

I know for certain as Speaker of the House that every single person

who serves here is patriotic and wants to honor our veterans. I know

for certain because I have seen every single person here take an oath

of office to protect and defend our Constitution and our country. It is

in that spirit that we offer this supplemental that makes America

safer, that strengthens our military, and brings stability to the

world.