Mr. Speaker, we have a moral obligation to support our

troops while they are in combat and when they come home. That is why we

fully fund our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and why we commit $3.1

billion in this bill to build better barracks, housing, and training

facilities here at home for our troops returning from war.

We also believe that supporting our veterans is a real cost of war,

just as real as guns, tanks, and bullets. That is why we had $1.7

billion in high-priority health care and benefits programs for our

veterans, with a special focus on taking care of those who need us the

most, those suffering from traumatic brain injury, PTSD, or loss of

arms and legs. Our veterans' sacrifices don't end after they return

home, and neither should our commitment to them.

For members of the Guard and Reserves in rural areas, we provide $100

million for contracting out mental health care services so these brave

citizen soldiers don't have to suffer even more by waiting weeks or

months for health care they desperately need and deserve. For some,

that timely care could mean the difference between health and

depression; for other, the difference between life and death.

To prevent a Walter Reed Annex 18 tragedy from occurring in VA

hospitals, we commit $550 million to address serious maintenance and

repair needs at those hospitals. Not one soldier, not one veteran, not

one, should ever again have to endure the indignity of living in rat-

infested, moldy housing.

The needs addressed in this bill are real, and our troops and

veterans deserve no less. A vote for this bill is a vote for better

health care and housing for America's heroes. By voting for this bill,

we can honor and respect our troops, our veterans, and their families,

not just with our words, but with our deeds.