Mr. Speaker, this week we lost another four soldiers from

Fort Bliss to an IED attack in Iraq. That makes a total of 35 troops

from El Paso who went to Iraq and didn't come home.

Remember, 35 is not just a number. It's not an abstract concept.

Thirty-five is the number of families suffering--aunts and uncles,

grandparents, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, children.

There are friends, classmates, teachers, coaches, fellow soldiers,

colleagues, and so many others who are connected to the lives of our

lost heroes.

The cost of this war has been too high not just in terms of lives

lost and warriors wounded. We have poured taxpayers' money into Iraq.

We have spent 500 billion--half a trillion!--dollars to that country.

And as we have increased our investment in Iraq, we have less and less

to show for it. Rather than progress, our billions of dollars have

produced civil war.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the Iraq War, my colleagues know two

things about me. One, I opposed this war from the beginning. It was a

mistake. Two, since the Iraq War began, I have been committed to our

troops and to supporting the best possible outcome.

As a Vietnam veteran I know what combat is about. I have visited Iraq

seven times. I have been to Afghanistan many times. I know what our

troops require. I have worked out of the spotlight behind the closed

doors of the Intelligence Committee and in the Armed Services

Committee. My focus has been providing our soldiers with the tools they

need to complete their mission and return home safely--body and vehicle

armor, IED jammers, and timely, accurate intelligence.

And I'm proud of that work. I'm saddened that our troops didn't have

the protection they needed right off the bat, and I'm ashamed we went

to war with bad intelligence, but I'm proud of the work we've done in

committee to set things right when we could.

But today we send a strong message, that it is long overdue for the

Iraqis to stand up for their country, for the Iraqis to assume

responsibility for their security and for their political decisions.

If Iraq is to become a democracy--and we're willing to stay and help

them with training, other support functions--but after four years it's

time that they accept responsibility for their own future. And that's

what this legislation is about.

More importantly, this bill takes care of our troops. It brings them

home. And once our troops are home, this bill commits our government to

caring for our troops and veterans in

a fashion that reflects the sacrifices they have made for our country.

Mr. Speaker, I've been listening to the arguments of my colleagues on

the other side. One thing I'm struck by is how similar the arguments

I'm hearing today are to what they've been saying for the past four

years. Every step of the way, my colleagues on the other side have been

wrong on our policy in Iraq. Yet they pony up the same rhetoric, the

same rationale for the same policies that have gotten us nowhere but

into the middle of a civil war.

For four long years, our troops have made immeasurable sacrifices in

Iraq, and now it is time for the Iraqis to step up and take

responsibility for their own security.