You know, as he said, I flew 62 combat

missions in the Korean War and 25 in Vietnam before being shot down. I

had the privilege of serving in the United States Air Force for 29

years, attending the prestigious National War College, commanding two

air bases, among other things.

I mention these stories because I view the debate on the floor not

just as a U.S. Congressman elected to serve the good people of the

Third District in Texas, but also through the lens of a lifelong

fighter pilot, student of war, a combat warrior, a leader of men, and a

prisoner of war.

Ironically, this week marks the anniversary that I started a new life

and my freedom from prison in Hanoi. I spent early 7 years as that

prisoner of war, more than half of that time in solitary confinement. I

flew out of Hanoi on February 12, 1973, with other long-held prisoners

of war, weighing just 140 pounds. And tomorrow, 34 years ago, I had my

homecoming to Texas, a truly unspeakable blessing of freedom.

While in solitary confinement, my captures kept me in leg stocks,

like the pilgrims, for 72 days. As you can imagine, they had to carry

me out of the stocks because I couldn't walk.

The following day they put me in leg irons for 2\1/2\ years. That is

when you have a tight metal cuff around each ankle with a foot-long bar

connecting the legs. I still have very little feeling in my right arm

and right hand, and my body has never been the same since my nearly

2,500 days of captivity. But I will never let my physical woes hold me

back. Instead, I try to see the silver lining.

I say that because, in some ways, I am living a dream, a hope that I

had for the future. From April 16, 1966, to February 12, 1973, I prayed

that I would return home to the loving embrace of my wife, Shirley, and

my three kids, Bob, Jenny, and Beverly. My fellow POWs and I clung to

the hope of when, not if, we returned home. We would spend hours

tapping on the adjoining cement walls about what we would do when we

got home to America. We pledged to quit griping about the way the

government was running the war in Vietnam and do something about it. We

decided we would run for office and try to make America a better place

for all of us.

So, little did I know back in my rat-infested 3-by-8 dark, filthy

cell that, 34 years after my departure from hell on earth, I would

spend the anniversary of my release pleading for a House panel to back

my measure to support and fully fund our troops in harm's way; and,

that just days later I would be on the floor of the U.S. House of

Representatives, surrounded by distinguished veterans, urging Congress

to support our troops to the hilt.

We POWs were still in Vietnam when Washington cut the funding for

Vietnam. I know what it does to morale and mission success. Words

cannot fully describe the horrendous damage of the anti-American

efforts against the war back home to the guys on the ground. Our

captors would blare nasty recordings over the loudspeaker of Americans

protesting back home, tales of Americans spitting on Vietnam veterans

when they came home, and worse. I don't think we should ever, ever let

that happen again. The pain inflicted by your country's indifference is

tenfold that inflicted by your ruthless captors.

Our troops and their families want, need, and deserve the full

support of this country and the Congress. Moms and dads watching the

news need to know that the Congress will not leave their sons and

daughters in harm's way without support.

Since the President announced his new plan for Iraq last month, there

has been steady progress. He changed the rules of engagement, removed

political protection. There are reports we wounded the number two of al

Qaeda and killed his deputy. And, yes, al Qaeda operates in Iraq. It is

alleged that top radical jihadist, al-Sadr, has fled Iraq maybe to

Iran, and Iraq has closed its borders with Iran and Syria.

The President has changed course, has offered a new plan. We are

making progress. We must seize the opportunity to move forward, not

stifle future success. Debating nonbinding resolutions aimed at earning

political points only destroys morale, stymies success, and emboldens

the enemy.

The grim reality is that this House measure is the first step to

cutting funding of the troops. Just ask John Murtha about his slow-

bleed plan that hamstrings our troops in harm's way.

Now it is time to stand up for my friends who did not make it home

and those who fought and died in Iraq already, so I can keep my promise

that when we got home we would quit griping about the war and do

something positive about it.

We must not allow this Congress to leave these troops like the

Congress left us. Today, let my body serve as a brutal reminder that we

must not repeat the mistakes of the past. Instead, learn from them. We

must not cut funding for our troops. We must stick by them. We must

support them all the way. And, to our troops, we must remain always

faithful. God bless you all. I salute you and this Congress.