Madam Speaker, I yield myself 6 minutes.

I rise to express my strong support for our Nation's military and for

the resolution before the House today. I am a proud veteran. I know

what it is like to say good-bye to loved ones and be gone for a year,

or 13 months, as in my case when I served in Vietnam.

I voted against authorizing the use of force against Iraq because I

did not believe that the evidence provided by the administration,

particularly the intelligence data, were sufficient to justify putting

our troops in harm's way. Combat should be the last option. I know; I

have been there.

Over 3,000 American lives later, and tens of thousands suffering

debilitating injuries, yet we are no closer to our

goal of a secure and stable Iraq, and the situation there continues to

deteriorate.

Our military families are paying a high price. There were a couple of

articles in today's paper that talked about our inability to find

common ground.

Well, I disagree. I think we find common ground because we care about

not just our troops, but their families, our military families.

Madam Speaker, I would like to submit for the Record an e-mail from

Sergeant Matthew Baeza

I want to read the e-mail that I got from Sergeant Baeza, a soldier

who is from El Paso, not assigned to El Paso, but is from El Paso:

``Hello, sir, my name is Sergeant Matthew Baeza. Currently I am

deployed in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I am an El Paso

native, and I have not been too big on politics, although I did my fair

share of Democratic rallies with my father, Luis Baeza, when I was in

high school. I have met you on several occasions through my father, as

well as when we met on the steps of the Senate when I was on a high

school trip to D.C. in 1999.

``My concerns are brought forward wholehearted. They do not concern

El Paso, but it does concern El Pasoens all over the country who serve

in the military and who are deployed in the theatre of operations.

``Many of us in the military believe in what we do and feel our

mission here is warranted. The issues are not against our deployments,

but rather the length of our deployments. You see, the Army is the only

branch that will always deploy with a full 12-month rotation in its

deployments. Other

branches have been cut to 6 months or even 3 months. I do realize there

are certain elements in other branches that serve a 12-month rotation

like the Army. Nonetheless, the Army uses a 12-month rotation.

``The issue I have is that 12 months is not that difficult to pull

the first time. But into your second and third deployments, some

soldiers serving with me back to back four times, it starts to break

the backs of even the strongest of families. Children are seeking

counseling as young as 3- or 4-years-old due to the absence of their

parents.

``And if a marriage survives, most end up seeking help from chaplains

or marriage counselors. Is that how we want our service members and

their families to live? Out of a 5-year marriage, I will have been

absent 3 years and will only have known my son for 9 months when I

return in a few days for his third birthday.

``My marriage, along with hundreds of other service members are

quickly ending due to the amount of time absent from home. I am not

sure if surveys have been performed, but I can almost guarantee you the

percentage of divorces has multiplied at an exponential rate.

``But yet talks of cutting down deployments have been in the works

for years, but no progress have we seen. The vast majority of armed

services members are proud every day to put on our uniform and help

others who cannot help themselves, but at what cost? At the cost of

losing the ones we love, and at the end of it all we cannot place blame

on our spouses. For they have been holding on longer than most could

ever imagine. Our spouses run multiple lives, as my wife does. As a

professional reporter for the local newspaper, a mother who is raising

a family on her own, as a military spouse, as my wife, she has a lot to

deal with. Bills, care for our child, her work, and dealing with my

calls from home, whether they be happy or sad. It is simply too much to

ask from any one person.

``My wife is as strong as they come, but with the last 3 years, her

patience has worn extremely thin. With us being away from home, many

wives end up leaving their husbands, searching for a better life, or

long-needed affection without a phone, or even to become their own

person again.

``My wife told me something the other day that really hit me.'' And

he quotes his wife: `` `No one knows who you are. They know Megan and

they know Dominic, and the guy that keeps calling on the phone.' That

is who we have become to our families, just a voice on the phone.

``I am not asking to get out of this conflict. We are doing well

here. Plus the friends I have lost here would have died in vain. I

cannot have that on my conscience. We are accomplishing here, but we

are losing our families over it. We don't try to save the world, at

least I don't. That is too much to ask of one person.

``But rather try for the ones closest to us, my son, and my wife, but

when they are gone who is it for? Every day I am here I tell myself I

do this for them. And others feel the same way. I am not asking you to

change the way things are, but rather voice your opinion and raise the

flag for those of us that cannot, with your reputation and your

influence, in helping us cut our deployments to shorter periods.

``We are not asking to leave Iraq or Afghanistan, but rather to cut

time away from home. When you start stacking deployments on top of each

other, families get broken. When that happens you get servicemembers

who cannot perform.

``At what cost when your life is falling apart?

``Signed, Sergeant Baeza.''

Madam Speaker, that is what we are doing to our military families.

That is what this resolution is about. It is about having the Iraqis

accept responsibility for their own country and for their own

responsibility and taking care of themselves. That is why we are doing

this

Madam Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Did I hear you say that you spoke with Mr. Murtha?

I would just say that many times, my good friend and I

have discussed not to quote members of the media because most of the

time they get it wrong. So I would wait until we talk to Mr. Murtha.