Thank you so much and to my good friend, Mr.

Israel. What a pleasure it is to serve, the three of us, as co-chairs

of our Democratic Group on National Security and providing leadership

for this Nation on this critical area, and also letting the American

people know that Democrats stand, foremost, for national security. Our

history, our legacy speaks to that.

As we have counted time and time again, every time we have had a

national crisis, Democrats have paved the way and brought us through,

from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Harry Truman, John Fitzgerald

Kennedy. Who could be more strong than at the Bay of Pigs, at the

missile crisis in Cuba, with the Soviet Union in the Cold War. We have

been in the forefront in every aspect of protecting this country and we

are at the forefront now.

It is such a pleasure and I am just very proud to be here with you. I

want to pick up on that theme because while we all salute the killing

of al-Zarqawi, we are proud of that, we are proud of our military.

We salute them for having done a remarkable job, but I think it is

very important for us not to get too caught up in that as much as it is

very important for us to look at this Iraq situation from the

standpoint of the soldier, from that person that is on the front lines.

Like the two of you, I have been to Iraq. I have been over into the

war zone twice. I have been into the European theater. I have been into

Afghanistan. I have been on the front lines with our troops. I have

eaten with them. I have been there and I have talked with them, and I

have looked them in the eyes and they have looked me in the eyes. We

have been able to see and to be able to feel one another's passion and

their pain.

I am committed, as the two of you are, to make sure that we speak for

the soldier, and this is what I want to do this evening. I want to talk

about our military, and I want to talk about them from the standpoint

of the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform are making.

Most recently, we had in the news the disturbing story about the

marines and about what happened over there, but I want you to know that

this is one soldier here, this is one congressman, who is going to not

come to any conclusions, because no matter what the situation is on

that battlefield, where our marines, where our soldiers are, they did

not choose to go over there. They did not choose to go over there with

bad equipment, undermanned and in the rotation cycle that they have

that has put tremendous strain on our military.

Many of our marines, many of our soldiers, are over there not on

their second tour, not even on their third tour. Some are on their

fourth tour of duty. I talked with them. That is not right, and it is

not fair.

I think as we talk tonight we need to talk about the strain that this

Iraqi situation is placing on our military so that when we judge our

military, let us judge them right. Let us judge them with the hills and

valleys and the mountains that they have got to go through over there.

I want to talk about just for a second that nearly all of the

available combat units in the United States, Army and the Army National

Guard and the Marine Corps, have been used up in the current operations

in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Every available combat brigade from the active duty Army has already

been to Afghanistan and Iraq at least once for a 12-month tour. Many

are now in

their second or third tours of duty, and approximately 95 percent of

the Army National Guard's combat battalions and special operation units

have been mobilized since 9/11, and short of full mobilization or a new

presidential declaration of national emergency, there is little

available combat capacity remaining in the Army National Guard.

All active duty Marine Corps units are being used on tight, tight

rotation schedules, 7 months deployed, less than a year home to rest or

recess, then another 7 months deployed, and all of the Marine Reserve

combat units have been mobilized.

The point I am making is that the decision to go to war is one thing.

The other thing is you never make that decision and you send on a

mission that is not clearly defined, that has been moving and shaking.

Let us review for a moment just what our soldiers, just what our

military has been asked to do.

First of all, the mission was to go and find weapons of mass

destruction, based upon faulty information and sometimes false

information purposefully, for whatever purpose. We know all that now.

We did not know it then, but we sent our military into that, and we

sent our military in with not enough manpower. Seventy percent of the

generals said we do not have enough manpower. The one person with the

level of credibility, combat experience in this administration, Colin

Powell, made the statement, We do not go to war without the size of the

military we need to do the job. You go with massive force.

Then secondly, once there were no weapons of mass destruction, the

mission changed to go to find Saddam Hussein. We did that.

Then to set up a free government. We did that, all under great, great

obstacles.

And then the test, to reconstruct the country. That was not the

mission of our Army.

So, as we sit back and as we applaud this great accomplishment today

with al-Zarqawi, let us not forget the soldier. Let us not forget the

difficult and challenging and meandering, constantly changing mission,

not having the resources, going into dung heaps, going into landfills

to get body armor.

This country, and the very just passionate story that Steve Israel

talked about on the front page of the Newsday and the Long Island

newspaper today, America deserves better. I tell you one thing, they

are going to get better because we in the Democratic group on national

security, we are going to make sure of it. We are going to hold this

administration accountable. We are going to point in a new direction,

and we are going to give the American people the kind of strong,

forceful, national security that they need and can be proud of.

That is exactly the point we were making

earlier in the debate early last week in terms of these tax cuts. I

mean, we are here and this administration last week

prides itself at a time when our soldiers are making these kinds of

sacrifice, at a time that this administration will stand in the way of

the concurrent receipts bill, and forcing our veterans to have to

choose if they get injured or they get a wound in the battlefield, and

they have to retire from the service, they have to choose between their

retirement pay and their disability pay.

This administration is standing in the way of correcting that, and at

the same time will ask for tax cuts for the top 1 percent of the most

wealthy people in this country, on the backs of not treating our

veterans right, on the backs of not increasing the military widows' pay

or giving the death benefits that we need or giving the military

service people the raise that they need.

This is why I was just so astounded at the glee that came from the

Republican administration in passing a tax cut at a time of war, of

great sacrifice. Never before in this history has that occurred.

This was a remarkable experience I had with the

soldier in Iraq, and we had to make that choice of staying that night

and putting our own selves in greater danger because, you know, going

over there, you cannot fly up at night. You have to go by the roads,

but we made that choice, and I am so glad because it gave me the

experience of a lifetime.

As we were in Camp Victory in Baghdad and we were gathered there, and

this soldier came up and was just hugging me. I was hugging him, tears

falling down his eyes, tears falling down my eyes, and we were just

squeezing each other. He said something to me I will never forget. He

said, Congressman Scott, when I am hugging you, it is like hugging a

piece of home. I almost get choked up every time that happens.

I am so glad that God gave me that experience. I am so glad we went

there, and like other soldiers, a while later, that soldier died. That

is the kind of sacrifice, and I went over there and looked in the eyes.

Let me tell you another experience. When I was in Afghanistan and I

went over there to Afghanistan, at the time when you remember the

debate was over that if we had had this kind of body armor, that

several thousand marines that have died or got wounded or would have

been saved, that story came out. The Pentagon had given that report.

So that was fresh on my mind when I was sitting there with this one

unit. And in each one of the squads there is a sniper. There is an

armor guy, an artillery guy, but each one has a sniper who the whole

troop depends upon. And I started asking about the body armor and they

started going around saying, yeah, we have all our armor on, but our

sniper here, he will not wear the neck armor to protect himself from a

head wound or a neck wound that would be almost fatal. And I asked him,

I said why. He said, I won't wear that because it hurts my agility to

be able to move my head to protect my troops. We have had many snipers.

That kind of valor, that kind of courage, that is the kind of

sacrifice that we are talking about at a time when we have not asked

others in this Nation to make that sort of sacrifice.