Mr. Speaker, 8\1/2\ years ago, without provocation or

just cause, and based on distortions and deceptions, our country

launched a bloody and immoral war in Iraq--almost 9 years, a long time

for a war whose mission was pronounced accomplished by then-President

Bush in May of 2003.

But now the Iraq war, which has cost our Nation so very much in blood

and treasure, in moral authority and global credibility, is finally

ending. Thank you, President Obama.

When I heard the President's announcement that our troops would be

home from Iraq by the end of the year, I had one thought: it's about

damn time. And my second thought was: oh, well, we have to stay

vigilant, especially with negotiations still to come about the

possibility of military trainers or advisers remaining in Iraq. As we

move forward with a constructive bilateral partnership, let's make sure

we don't backslide into a renewed military occupation under a different

cloak.

To me, however, Friday's news was greeted not so much with

celebration but with relief and also with reflection about the

senseless sacrifice endured by so very many people. Nearly 4,500

courageous American service members gave their lives for this war. More

than 30,000 have returned home with searing wounds to their bodies and

their minds, if not missing limbs, then too often post-traumatic stress

that can make every day a living nightmare.

And let's not overlook the 100,000-plus innocent Iraqi civilians,

many of them children, who were killed because the United States of

America chose to ``liberate'' them. When I think about the humanitarian

atrocities of this war, it is most often the faces of those children

that I see.

Then there's the fiscal carnage. The $800 billion appropriated to

prosecute the war doesn't even scratch the surface of the total cost.

There is the rise in oil price, the interest on the debt we've

accumulated, and of course the veterans health obligations, a promise

we must and will keep, a promise that will still be with us at least 50

years from now.

President Obama's announcement is welcome, but long overdue. I've

been an outspoken opponent of the war since before it started, and I

introduced the first legislation to bring our troops home in 2005. More

than 400 times I've stood in this very place in this Chamber to call

for an end to the Iraq and Afghanistan military entanglements and the

beginning of a SMART Security approach that emphasizes humanitarian and

peaceful conflict resolution in place of military might.

I was proud to work with my good friends Congresswomen Waters and Lee

to establish the Out of Iraq Caucus. Their leadership, their support,

plus our many other colleagues on both sides of the aisle who lent

their voices to the cause made the difference because back in 2004 and

2005, ours was not the majority position. Because we broke the silence,

because we acted on principle and refused to stand down, the American

people came around to the out-of-Iraq perspective. Because we stood on

the right side of history, we found ourselves with the majority of

Americans on the right side of public opinion wanting--no, demanding--

an end to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Our work isn't done, of course. The war in Afghanistan rages on. It's

destructive, it's foolish and about 100,000 troops are still in harm's

way there on a futile and expensive mission that is not making us safe,

but is actually undermining our national security.

Mr. Speaker, again I give President Obama credit for his decision to

bring our troops home from Iraq by the end of the year; and at the same

time, I will continue to speak out until Americans get the peace that

they want and deserve and all of our troops are home from Afghanistan

as well.