

risks and potential sacrifices that loom ahead.

As one of the founders of the Out of Iraq Caucus, along with Congresswoman MAXINE WATERS and Congresswoman LYNN WOOLSEY, our position has been clear all along; we opposed the war and the occupation from the start, and we have worked day in and day out to end it.

We believe that ending the occupation of Iraq means redeploying all troops—and we mean all troops—and all military contractors out of Iraq. It also means leaving no permanent bases, and renouncing any claim upon Iraqi oil.

We remain concerned about the plan, which calls for 127,000 troops to stay in Iraq until the end of this year and for 35,000 to 50,000 troops to remain in Iraq for another 2½ years after that. We cannot imagine the need for such an enormous military commitment, and we have talked to military experts who also question that.

How did the military planners agree on such a large residual for us, one which is comparable in size to our force levels in South Korea at the height of the Cold War? What role does this transitional force play in the event that violence flares back up? And what steps are being taken to address the 190,000 American contractors in Iraq, and to dismantle our permanent bases? Some say we don't have permanent bases there, others believe that we do—I am one who believes that we do. And so these questions must be addressed before we can move forward. We respectfully wrote to the President and set forth a set of questions asking some of the looming concerns which some of us still have.

America's interests in Iraq and the region will best be advanced by reducing the size of our military footprint and making greater use of other assets of national power, including diplomacy, reconciliation, commerce, development assistance, and humanitarian aid.

As we solemnly mark the beginning of a seventh year—and it's hard to imagine we have been there 7 years—of the conflict in Iraq, we not only must reflect on the incredible sacrifices made by the men and women who serve in the military, but also, we have to demand an honest assessment of the potential future obstacles that their brothers and sisters in arms will face. As President Obama has said, "We must be as careful getting out of Iraq as we were careless getting in."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### ALLOWING PRESS AT DOVER AIR FORCE BASE WHEN FALLEN TROOPS RETURN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GINGREY of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of our fallen heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our Nation in Iraq, and to share a letter I recently received from his father, Robert Stokely. Robert's letter relates to a Department of Defense policy that directly affected his family, and most especially, Mr. Speaker, his son.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to read this letter, as I feel it is necessary for this body to fully understand this issue in order to protect the dignity of our troops. Robert Stokely is from Newnan, Georgia, my wife's hometown. And of course I represented that area and am very proud of the folks in Newnan.

Mr. Robert Stokely writes:

"I was alarmed at the question asked by Ed Henry at President Obama's address to the Nation on Monday, February 9, 2009, i.e., allowing media access and cameras at Dover Air Force Base where fallen military personnel arrive on their final trip home to an honorable rest. I am also alarmed by an AP news article that Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has ordered a review of the policy. Please take a moment and read my story of meeting my son, and hopefully you can have a vivid image of why it is important to keep the family first in this matter, for it is a very personal moment when a fallen hero arrives home.

"I met my son's body at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta on August 24, 2005 as he arrived from Dover. I went alone as a special privilege to take his body to the funeral home, where the family would then be the first to see the most striking, vivid image of a fallen loved one, the flag-draped casket. I rode in the hearse to take him on a 25-mile ride, covering the roads that Mike and I had shared so many days as a divorced dad and son going to and from visitation on weekends, holidays, and summers. It was a 'last ride to take my boy home.'"

And this is in bold font, Mr. Speaker. "I wore a favorite blue blazer, trousers, and a red and blue striped tie, for my son deserved my respect. As they uncased his casket and draped the American flag over him, I saluted from nearby, tears streaming down my cheeks, as a number of busy U.S. Air cargo employees suddenly stopped in stunned silence, only then realizing what was taking place.

"I held my salute, poor as it was for an untrained civilian, until the flag was completely draped and the edges evenly cornered out. Then I stepped outside to call my wife, Retta, who loved him like one of her own. And as she answered the telephone, with tears

still streaming down my cheeks and with a quiver in my voice, I said, "our boy is home."

Mike Stokely was age 23 when he was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq. While the political debate about Iraq or any other war may be had in a free country like this, such as we enjoy, there is no debate that our military personnel engage in of the politics of when, where, or how long a war is waged. They have a constitutional duty to obey the Commander in Chief's lawful orders.

Mike Stokely, and many others, did their constitutional duty, and in doing so, preserved our freedom. Mike, and those like him who haven't yet but will die for America, do not need to be a media spectacle at Dover Air Force Base.

"I was once asked what I thought the real cost of freedom is. There are many such costs, but for the Stokely family, and like many of us, the highest cost has been paid, a lifetime of love.

"Is it too much to ask, given what the fallen and their families have given America, for us to have that first moment of seeing the flag-draped casket to be ours and ours alone? Should we now be asked to give more so that something so private can be used to sell advertising, to ensure a media outlet's profitable bottom line? Black ink on the bottom line is usually a good thing, but it cannot be so when it comes at the cost of making a spectacle of our fallen, thus dishonoring their spilled red American blood. I hope your answer will be an unequivocal, unwavering, and unapologetic 'no,' and that you will fight to keep the honorable sanctity of Dover rather than allow it to become a media spectacle.

"Please protect our fallen and their families and the privacy of Dover, for our fallen have given their lives to protect the lifetime of love you and your family and millions of other Americans continue to live and enjoy.

"Proud dad of Sergeant Mike Stokely."

Mr. Speaker, the policy of allowing media to photograph these caskets at Dover Air Force Base is a serious issue for many families that have been struck with the tragedy of losing a loved one in battle. The brave service men and women on their final journey home have given their lives for our freedom. We must ensure that not only are their remains handled with the utmost respect, but that the wishes of their families are given the respect they so richly deserve.

#### STATUS REPORT ON CURRENT SPENDING LEVELS OF ON-BUDGET SPENDING AND REVENUES FOR FY 2008 AND THE 5-YEAR PERIOD FY 2009 THROUGH FY 2013

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT) is recognized for 5 minutes.