The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

DEMOCRATS PLAN FOR A WAY FORWARD IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) is recognized for half the time until midnight as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, there have been too many dark days in Iraq of late, but today is not one of them. The removal of Abu Musab al Zarqawi is a welcome event.

Zarqawi was a blood thirsty thug and an indiscriminate killer of innocent men, women and children. All Americans join in congratulating the American military and the Iraqi people for their success in tracking, finding and eliminating the most vicious terrorist in Iraq.

It is too early to predict what the effect of the elimination of Zarqawi will have on the counterinsurgency effort that the Iraqi and coalition forces are engaged in.

On the one hand there is ample historical evidence that eliminating terrorist and insurgent leaders does not necessarily cripple their movements. New leaders rise up to take their places. In the Iraqi case, however, Zarqawi's form of jihad, which has resulted in the slaughter of so many innocent civilians has alienated most Iraqis and helped to foster reported back-channel negotiations between the U.S., the Iraqi Government and some of the insurgent groups over the past few months.

Whether the confluence of Zarqawi's death and the completion of the new Iraqi cabinet can accelerate the prospects for some kind of more open negotiations remains to be seen. Especially as the sectarian violence that Zarqawi sought has continued to grow in recent months.

Even as we celebrate Zarqawi's death and recall the horrors he perpetrated, the videotaped beheadings of helpless hostages, the mass casualty suicide bombings of Shiite mosques, and the horrific destruction of the UN headquarters, we cannot turn away from the grim reality, that the war the President declared over in the spring of 2003 has been bloodier, costlier, longer and more difficult than the administration anticipated or planned for.

We need a new way forward in Iraq, and that is what we would like to talk about tonight. The Democratic ideas for a new way forward in Iraq are part of an overall effort to reconfigure America's security for the 21st Century, a plan we call Real Security.

Earlier this spring, Members of our party from both the House and the Senate unveiled a comprehensive blueprint to better protect America and restore our Nation's position of international leadership.

Our plan, Real Security, was devised with the assistance of a broad range of experts, former military officers, retired diplomats, law enforcement personnel, homeland security experts and others, who helped identify key areas where current policies have failed and where new ones were needed.

In a series of six special orders, my colleagues and I have been sharing with the American people our vision for a more secure America. The plan has five pillars, and each of our special order hours have been addressing them in turn: Building a 21st Century Military, Winning the War on Terror, Providing for Our Homeland Security, A Way Forward in Iraq, and the Achievement of Energy Independence.

Tonight we address a New Course in Iraq, to make 2006 a year of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty, with the Iraqis assuming primary responsibility for securing and governing their country with a responsible redeployment of U.S. forces.

Democrats will insist that Iraqis make the political compromises necessary to unite the country and defeat the insurgency, promote regional diplomacy and strongly encourage our allies and other nations to play a constructive role.

I have been to Iraq three times to visit our troops there, and I have spent time with our wounded here and in Germany. They have done everything we have asked of them, and they have done it magnificently. Whatever success we have had in Iraq, every village that was secured, every public works project that was completed, every school that was reopened, is due to the efforts of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines.

But, Mr. Speaker, these heroes are still being killed and wounded daily. Over 2,450 American troops have been killed and thousands more have been injured. American taxpayers are paying approximately $194 million a day for the war, according to the CBO. That is more than $1 billion a week.

A recent Congressional Research Service report puts the current cost of continued operations in Iraq and Afghanistan at close to $10 billion a month, with most of that money going to Iraq.

This is a conflict that has come to grief in so many ways. In the fall of 2002, Congress voted to authorize the use of force against Iraq because of the threat that Saddam Hussein had stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, and because we were told he had an active nuclear weapons program.

If you go back and look at the debate in the House and Senate, this was a decision taken by the Congress to prevent Iraq from acquiring and using or transferring nuclear weapons.

Months later as American forces pushed across the Kuwaiti frontier and into Iraq, we were told by the President that our troops were on a hunt for weapons of mass destruction. Delivering the Iraqi people from the brutality of Saddam Hussein was a noble act, but the promotion of democracy in Iraq was not our primary reason for going to war.

Similarly, we knew that the Shiite majority had suffered terribly under the Ba'athist regime, and freeing them from the oppression of the Sunni minority was an added benefit of the invasion. But reordering the ethnic balance of political power in Iraq was not our primary purpose for going to war.

Soon after the fall of Baghdad, it became clear that many of the prewar assumptions that had guided the President and his advisors were wrong. There were no chemical or biological weapons. There was no nuclear program. And while many Iraqis celebrated the ouster of Saddam Hussein, they did not line the streets of Baghdad to greet our troops with flowers. In fact, within days, there emerged the beginnings of what would be an organized, deadly insurgency that would quickly put an end to General Tommy Frank's plan to pare down the 140,000 troops in Iraq in April of 2003 to 30,000 by September of 2003.

In recent months, the nature of the struggle in Iraq has changed yet again. Long-simmering ethnic tensions which had been suppressed under Saddam's totalitarian regime have threatened to tear the country apart.

While the full-scale civil war that many feared in the wake of the bombing of Askariya mosque in Samarra has not come to past, not yet, most observers believe the country is currently in the grip of a low-level civil war that could erupt into full-scale conflict at any time.

As first, much of the sectarian violence was perpetrated by Sunni insurgents who saw continuing violence and instability in Iraq as their best hope to gain power in a country dominated by Shiia Muslims.

Shiite political factions have responded by creating militias, and these have become more active in targeting Sunnis over the past few months. In recent weeks I have been concerned by media reports that Shiite militias have been deploying to Kirkuk, Iraq's third largest city, in a bid to forestall any attempt by Kurds to assert control over this major center of Iraq's oil-rich north.

In Baghdad, Shiite units, some of them nominally under the control of the Ministry of Interior, have acted as death squads, and the streets of the capital have become a dumping ground for bodies.

We have a moral obligation to do what we can to avoid having Iraq spiral into all-out civil war. But now is the time for Iraqis themselves to decide whether they wish to be one country. That is the decision we cannot make for them.

Accordingly, the first element of the Real Security Plan for Iraq calls for

the United States to take the necessary steps to ensure that 2006 is a year of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty.

□ 2245

There is a broad consensus among experts here and abroad that Iraq's future will be determined politically and not by force. The formation of a permanent Iraqi government, one that will have power, legitimacy and vision, to assume primary responsibility for securing and governing the country is a necessary precondition to ending the insurgency, preventing civil war and allowing large scale reconstruction to begin.

Consequently, our role in Iraq must become more political and less military for if there is one thing that Iraqis of every religious, political and ethic stripe can agree on, it is that they do not want foreign troops in their country indefinitely.

The second element of the Democratic Real Security plan for Iraq is a responsible redeployment of our troops during the course of 2006 so that we are not drawn into sectarian conflict, and so that Iraqis are forced to take primary responsibility for securing and governing their country. The process of training Iraqi security forces has gone more slowly than many had hoped and few Iraqi units are capable of taking a leading role in combating the insurgency and remain almost wholly dependent on coalition forces for logistical support.

We must redouble our efforts to train Iraqi forces in order to allow for the responsible redeployment of American troops without a consequent loss of security in the areas we leave. A responsible redeployment of American coalition forces will have to be done in stages to build greater Iraqi sovereignty and control over security, not civil war.

In the first phase of redeployment, I believe our forces should be gradually withdrawn from urban centers where their mere presence in large numbers has earned the animosity of the local population. Our troops should be moved to smaller cities where reconstruction is supported by the local population and to remote bases where our troops will be able to support Iraqi units if necessary but will not become a buffer between warring sects bent on killing each other.

Over time, these troops will be withdrawn from Iraq altogether and redeployed outside the country, either in the region or back to the United States. We should publicly declare that the U.S. does not seek to maintain a permanent military presence in Iraq and many of us have co-sponsored legislation to prevent the establishment of bases which can only serve as a catalyst for the insurgency and for foreign jihadis.

A redeployment of American troops cannot succeed if the Iraqis themselves are not willing to find the political solution to counter the forces that threaten the unity of the country. There is to doubt that Iraq's ongoing sectarian strife has been exacerbated by the protracted struggle among and inside Iraq's political factions over the formation of a permanent government.

The real key to a better future for the Iraqi people and the third element of the Democratic Real Security plan for Iraq is the promotion of political compromise to unite the country. The recent formation of a national unity government by the prime minister is a positive step. While Zarqawi's death has grabbed most of the headlines today, the prime minister's announcement that he has filled the crucial vacancies in the interior defense and national security ministries may prove more important to Iraq's future, which will be determined politically and not by force.

The Iraqi government must demonstrate to its people that it can actually bring Iraq's rival factions together in a common effort to confront the foreign jihadis and bring the insurgents into the political process. This is the best hope for maintaining the unity of Iraq. But Mr. Speaker, we can not do it alone.

American soldiers, American diplomats and American reconstruction experts are shouldering almost the entire burden in Iraq. This is unfortunately a problem wholly of our making. The President made little effort to bring others on board before we went into Iraq. And after the fall of Baghdad, he rebutted an offer by the United Nations to assume a central role in rebuilding the country.

Finding a way to internationalize the struggle to stabilize Iraq is the fourth element of the Democratic Real Security plan for Iraq. It is not surprising our allies and others are reluctant to send their solders and contractors to help us. It is dangerous and we have not been amenable to listening to the suggestions of others. Unfortunately, the situation in Iraq has deteriorated to the extent that the world must reengage if only because the alternative is too horrible to contemplate. At a minimum, our allies should be willing to assume a greater role in training Iraqi security forces, as well as provide long-promised economic support.

Finally, the last element of the Real Security plan is the need to hold the administration accountable for its conduct of the war. More than any other variable under the control of Congress, our failure to perform this oversight has been a major factor contributing to the difficult situation in Iraq.

The failure of oversight and the need to hold accountable people that are responsible for those failures has plagued the Iraq war from the beginning. And because this Congress, this Republican-controlled Congress refuses to hold the President to account, we keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

For years, the administration and majority tried to cow into silence anyone who dared to question the conduct of the war by calling them unpatriotic. It is not disloyal to ask these questions. Oversight is a core responsibility of Congress. The great strength of a democratic system with built-in checks and balances is that mistakes are caught and corrected. Every Member of this House, Republican and Democrat, wants a stable and representative Iraqi government. But, Mr. Speaker, we cannot hope to change course in Iraq until and unless we are willing to acknowledge mistakes, until we hold the administration accountable and force change.

Devising and implementing a successful end game in Iraq will be difficult, but the President's open ended commitment to remain in the country is untenable and unwise. The American people want Iraq to succeed and for a representative government there to survive and lead to a better future for the Iraqi people, but that success requires a new direction.

I now yield to two of my colleagues, my fellow co-chairs of the Democratic Study Group on National Security their thoughts on the way forward in Iraq. First, I would like to turn to Mr. ISRAEL of New York who has been a great leader on this issue, who is the Chair of the Democratic Task Force on National Security. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. ISRAEL. I thank my friend from California and particularly I want to thank him for his strong and wise leadership on national security issues.

As the gentleman mentioned he and our colleague from Atlanta, Georgia, Mr. SCOTT, and I co-founded the Democratic Study Group on National Security Policy, which advocates for a long and smart military, which believes in policy that are robust and visionary when it comes to our national security.

I have the great honor, not just being a Member of Congress, but serving on the House Armed Services Committee. And I was in Iraq just a month ago. It was my second visit as a member of the Armed Services Committee. And when I was there I had the sense that we were getting close to finding al-Zarqawi. He was still on the loose but we were getting closer, and I am glad that we finished the job. This is a guy who relished beheadings. This is someone who enjoyed car bombings. This is someone who killed Americans who killed, Sunnis, who killed Shi'ia, who killed Kurds. And so I believe it is an important day and it is good news that while we have many struggles ahead this one struggle no longer exists.

But I think it is very important for us to focus on the future. While I was in Iraq I had the opportunity to meet with Prime Minister Maliki and President Talabani and General Casey and his troops. All of those people were involved and should take credit for what happened today.

The questioning now faces what is next. The gentleman talked about our plan for Iraq. The fact that 2006 should

be a year of transition to full Iraqi sovereignty, that we need a responsible redeployment of U.S. forces, that we need to promote Iraqi political compromise to unite the country, encourage our allies to play a constructive role, hold the Bush administration accountable. And there is one more thing that we must do that I know my colleagues and I agree completely on. And that is to make sure that our troops continue to have everything they need, because despite the fact that al-Zarqawi has been removed, there are going to be other al-Zarqawis in the world. There are going it be others who enjoy beheadings and car bombings. And for as long as long as they exist, we are going to need the capabilities of meeting and defeating them.

That is why I was so distressed when my constituents woke up this morning to this front page in our Long Island newspaper, Newsday. The front page headline, ''Blood clot bandages, frontline shortage, some troops calling home to ask for life saving dressings.''

By the way, I would say to my friends from Georgia and California, this story is under a story about how Ann Coulter visited my district having just attacked 9/11 widows as being witches and harpies. After Ann Coulter attacked 9/11 widows, I have about a hundred of them in my district, comes to my district and attacks them. Under that story is this story about potential shortages of blood clot bandages.

Let me share with my colleagues what this story says. ''Despite Army order that frontline medics get special clotting bandages, soldiers say they're still needed.'' It begins with this lead. ''Nine months after an Army order that all combat orders would get life saving clotting bandages to curb bleeding deaths, some troops in Iraq are still calling home, asking friends and families to supply them. Despite Army assurances that there are plenty of bandages to go around. Soldiers have written to say they have not found their way to all those on the front lines, and the manufacturer under contract with the Army acknowledged last week that early production problems may have spurred a shortage.''

Now, let me be clear on this. We have been working with the Army and we will continue to work closely with them. They are trying to get to the bottom of this and that is their obligation. I appreciate their responsiveness to this report. But we cannot afford continued reports like this three years after the invasion.

It is unfair that Ms. Doreen Kenny, who lost her job, Jacob Fletcher, in Iraq, one of the first Long Islanders to be killed in action, has to have her photograph in this story with the quote, ''If I can prevent one knock at the door of a military family, I will do all I can to prevent them from living through the heartbreak I have had to live through.''

Why is she in this story? Because Doreen Kenny, who lost her boy, is mailing this critical medical equipment to our troops in Iraq. That is not what she should be having to do right now.

So I know we will continue as Democrats to ensure that when we go to war we do not go with the Army we have, as Secretary Rumsfeld said, but with the supplies they need. That those of us who believe that we have to draw a line against totalitarianism understand that we have to make sure our supply lines are adequately equipped. That we cannot afford to send soldiers into hostility and then read reports that they are calling home asking for blood clotting bandages.

I want to thank the gentleman for his leadership. We will continue to pursue this vitally important plan for Iraq, but I know that at the centerpiece of those plans is the understanding that we have to protect the protectors and defend the defenders, and that is what Democrats are doing in the United States Congress today.

Mr. SCHIFF. I thank the gentleman for yielding and for sharing the experience of your constituent. I think each of us has sat down with troops returning from Iraq and heard the stories of the lack of lifesaving equipment that they have had to cope with. I had lunch with a guardsman from my district a couple of weeks ago who told me during the year he was in Iraq, the Humvees they were riding in had no doors, and they had to jerry-rig sheets of plywood separated by sacks of sand or concrete, what we call hillbilly armor, to protect themselves as they went from base to base, asking each other, why are we having to do this?

And when we consider all of the misspent and unaccounted for billions of reconstruction dollars and how many coagulant bandages that would pay for or body armor or uparmored vehicles, I think it is the case of going to war with the leadership you have, not the leadership you would like. And I thank the gentleman. If the gentleman has time, we can have a colloquy later on but let me turn to my other colleague from Georgia, Mr. SCOTT, one of our great leaders on national security issues, and I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. 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.

□ 2300

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.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia.

I think most of the American people really do not have a firsthand sense of the kind of sacrifice that our troops are making, which is nothing short of extraordinary, with the multiple deployments that you mentioned, with the uncertainty for their families of when they will come home, if they will come home and in what condition they will come home, the economic sacrifices the families make.

One of the concerns I have is not only the problem making sure that there is enough coagulant bandages while they are there, but what about when they come home? Our VA system is already over capacity. The administration is talking about closing Walter Reed. I do not know how that can be done. Every time I have been there it is been brimming with patients.

We, I do not think, have even begun to think about the demands on our health care system for veterans. This young Guardsman that I mentioned earlier, he told me that he still has to resist the impulse to drop to the deck when he hears someone close the door behind a Civic. There is something about the closing of a door behind a Civic that sounds a lot like a mortar going off at 2,000 meters. He said he was pretty well-off in Iraq; he was not one of the people who had to bust down doors every day and go through that kind of stress.

Imagine the mental health care needs, the physical health care needs. I do not think we are prepared yet to meet them, and I want to ask my colleague from New York, a member of the Armed Services Committee, someone who is a military historian and studied the kind of strain we are placing on our active duty and our reserve, what are your thoughts on this subject?

Mr. ISRAEL. Well, I thank the gentleman for the question. You know, every Member of Congress prides themselves on the work we do with respect to veterans case work. I know in my district we have two people devoted exclusively to trying to work with veterans, get them their retroactive payment, get them their medals.

We secured over $2 million in my district in back payments for our veterans, but those are Vietnam veterans. Some of these are World War II veterans, Korean veterans. This country is just now catching up to people who were in the military theater 40 years ago. Just catching up now to those people.

Can you imagine what our situation is going to be where we now have a multitude, a new generation of veterans coming back with post-traumatic stress disorder and other very serious physical and psychological problems, and we have to say to them we are sorry, we know we sent you to the front, but now we have got to balance the budget on your backs because we have run out of money? Just cannot do it as a result of the fiscal policy of the past 6 years.

When the gentleman and I were elected, we had a $5.6 trillion surplus. We could have paid for the war in Iraq and then paid for health care for every single soldier that went, so that they did not have to go without the potential of coagulant bandages. So when they came home, they came home to a country that would take care of them.

Now, we have got an $8 trillion debt, and we have to make painful cuts. The other side has forced us to cut back on those services, forced veterans to dig deeper into their pockets.

Mr. SCHIFF. The gentleman and I were talking just this morning, all three of us, about the need to sacrifice, the need to have leadership in this country, and ask the American people to make a sacrifice.

Right now, the people sacrificing are the people in uniform and their families, but the rest of us can contribute, too. I know you have been at the forefront of calling for our national sacrifice, and we could start by balancing the budget so that these young soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen do not come back, in addition to having to try to put their lives back together, have that huge national debt hanging over their heads.

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, there is a lot of talk by the administration about the global war on terror and America's fight on the global war on terror. 133,000 of our troops are fighting the global war on terror. They are the ones who have been made to engage in the sacrifice. They are the ones who have been uprooted from their families.

These two gentlemen on the front page of my daily newspaper, they are fighting the global war on terror. The rest of us are watching it on television. America can do better than that. I refuse, and I know the gentleman from California and the gentleman from Georgia should refuse to be the first generation of Americans in history to say let everybody else do it, we will just sit back and relax. We will pass a permanent repeal of the death tax or the estate tax which may cost $300 billion, and then have the temerity to tell these people on the front page of Newsday, sorry, we cannot afford your supplies, we cannot afford to take care of you when you come home. I do not want to be the first generation of Americans to balance the budget on the backs of someone who is on his back in this photograph.

We have an obligation if we are going to fight the Zarqawis of the world, something I believe we should do, to make sure that those who are doing the fighting are protected and make sacrifices at home that save their lives abroad.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I have to yield to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. 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.

Mr. SCHIFF. If I could ask of the gentleman from Georgia, prior to the Memorial Day weekend, you shared a short anecdote about meeting one of your constituents in Iraq. Can you tell us about that because I think it so characterizes the sacrifice we are talking about.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. 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.

□ 2315

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.

Mr. SCHIFF. I am sure that both my colleagues have had the experience of visiting our troops in the hospital in Ramstein, Germany, and here in Washington. Their thoughts are with their colleagues they left behind. They want to get back to their troops to make sure they are there for their buddies.

I had one soldier who was so concerned, could I do something about the fact that one of the people in his battalion really deserved recognition for what he had done, and since he wasn't there to make the report this other soldier would not get the recognition they deserved. This is what he was worried about as he lay in the hospital.

I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. ISRAEL. I spent some time this evening with the gentleman and with one of our best generals, and he was telling the story of visiting with a critically wounded soldier in a military hospital and walking out with that soldier's mother. And the mother said, General, my son is not sleeping at night. And the General said, well, of course he is not sleeping at night, look what he has been through. She said, no, General, he is not sleeping because he is up all night thinking about the fact that his unit is still in Iraq and he is worried about them.

That is the sacrifice that we are talking about and the dedication and the professionalism, and we have an obligation to those men and women to protect them.

If the gentleman would allow me to make a concluding point. This front page newspaper tells the story of contrast, and the same contrast is played out on the floor of the House frequently. You have got this front, top of the newspaper that says ''Ann the Ripper Brings Campaign Against 9/11 Widows to Long Island,'' and then you have the rest of the page devoted to the possibility of front-line shortages of critical medical equipment. These guys get less so that Ann Coulter, who writes a book calling 9/11 widows witches and harpies, who will make a lot of money off the proceeds of that book, can get a bigger tax cut.

How is that fair in America today? How is that just? How does that do justice to these people? It doesn't. We can do better. The Democrats will do better. We understand the need to fight and to use hard power around the world to fight totalitarianism and to fight terrorism, but if you are going to take on the fight, you got to take it on with the right supplies. And that is what we are about.

Mr. SCHIFF. I want to thank both my colleagues for joining me this evening and helping to further elucidate the Democratic plan for the way forward in Iraq, for talking about the sacrifice our troops are making, for being there for our troops, and also raising the call that this be a shared sacrifice in the war on terror; that we not force those who have borne the battle to look out for themselves and to pay off our national debt when they get back; that we heed the injunction of Lincoln that we ''look after him who has borne the battle and his widow and his orphan.''

I want to thank you again for all your leadership.

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF NAFTA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I wish to especially thank Congressman CARTER for allowing me this special privilege of appearing before he does this evening.

Mr. Speaker, the wonderful time about speaking at this time of day is we get to cover subjects that may not be on the agendas of any committee but are of importance to the American people. Tonight, I want to talk about the long-term consequences of a trade agreement called NAFTA that passed over a decade ago.

We were promised, as the American people, that NAFTA would result in more jobs, trade balances with Mexico and with Canada, and a higher standard of living in all of our countries. Indeed, exactly the opposite has happened. This country has now shipped out over 880,000 jobs, nearly a million jobs and still counting, to Mexico and to Canada, and we have not amassed any trade surpluses but, indeed, have fallen into deep deficit with both countries.

I have a couple of charts here that talk about this. Trade accounts with Mexico prior to NAFTA signing were positive. Every single year since NAFTA's signing, we have gone into deeper and deeper and deeper deficit, now over $50 billion a year, the largest ever, with each billion dollars representing a loss of 20,000 more jobs in this country.

With Canada, the other country with which we were supposed to experience a trade surplus, we have also fallen into deficit. In fact, we have doubled the deficit that we had with Canada. And what is amazing about this is that every year it gets worse. The American people inherently know this because it is happening to them directly.

At the same time in this country we have increasing illegal immigration,