

**Antiwar Rally Speech, Walnut Creek, CA**  
**Anne Roesler, Ed.D., MPH**  
**Military Families Speak Out**  
**March 17, 2007**

Good afternoon.

I stand before you, today, with a very heavy heart. On Tuesday, we will mark the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the illegal invasion and continuing occupation of Iraq. The country is now in the middle of a civil war, and innocent Iraqis are dying by the 100s if not ,1000s. On average, 3 more soldiers or marines die each day – over 3,200 as of this morning. Over 32,000 non-mortal casualties have occurred to date, 1 out of every 3 returning soldiers or marines is suffering from PTSD, anxiety, or depression, suicide rates have increased significantly, and no one is talking about the number of female veterans who've been raped by their own comrades. Many of the wounded men and women will remain significantly and permanently disabled, requiring care for the rest of their lives.

The news about Walter Reed Medical Facility is just the tip of the iceberg, highlighting the lack of decent care available for our loved ones. Rarely a day goes by, that Military Families Speak Out doesn't hear another horror story about a soldier who's been patched together and redeployed, or a soldier given antidepressants and sent back outside the wire – the “safe zone” for soldiers, or a marine with PTSD who's placed on a wait list for a bed and becomes so despondent that he takes his own life.

My son, Michael, served as a Staff Sergeant in the Army's 82<sup>nd</sup> ABN Div. He was deployed to Iraq 3 times, spending 2 years on the ground there. Last year, at this time, I was concerned that he'd be redeployed for a 4<sup>th</sup> time. I was terrified that if that happened, he'd return as someone so different from the caring young man that I raised, that I'd no longer recognize him. Thankfully, he wasn't redeployed, and he is out of the army. His last official day was Jan. 10<sup>th</sup> – the same day that George Bush announced the surge, or escalation of the war; the same day that Michael's unit was re-entering Iraq for the 4<sup>th</sup> time. Unfortunately, the psychological and emotional damage had already been done. His spirit had already been stolen. He didn't need to return to Iraq, again, for that to happen. He was already well on his way to becoming someone I barely recognize at times.

When I went to visit him last July in North Carolina, I walked into his apartment in the middle of the day. All of the blinds were shut against the daylight, and the air conditioning was set to meat locker-like temperatures. I had to put sweat clothes on for warmth, and I had to wake him from a sound sleep. I learned that this was how he spent his days. He had a memorial built to a close friend who had died during the second deployment, and later he showed me memorabilia from another close friend who'd died. He carries the memorabilia in his wallet. When I gently asked him about it, he began screaming that I wouldn't understand. He's right. Although I've seen photos, and videotapes, and heard some of the stories, I can't even begin to imagine what he's been through. At times, he exhibits a vulnerability that breaks my heart, telling me that he doesn't know who he is anymore and crying in my arms. At other times, I've seen a dark side that keeps me awake at night – a side that is so filled with rage and hate that all he can talk about

is killing people. I barely dare to breathe when I talk with him, for fear of unleashing this dark side, but it doesn't matter. It comes forth with a fury that is indescribable and without any provocation at all. This is what war does to those who physically survive. How many more soldiers, marines, and their loved ones will we allow this to happen to? Not one more! It must stop NOW!

Two days ago, the House Appropriations Committee approved a Supplemental Spending Bill, and the House Leadership is attempting to get all members of Congress, who oppose the war in Iraq, to support the Bill. They claim that it will support our troops and bring about an end to the war, but their claims aren't supported by facts.

They claim that under this Bill:

Troops that aren't properly trained and equipped won't be deployed;  
There will be no more extended deployments; and  
Rest periods between deployments will be ensured.

The Reality: This Bill includes provisions that allow the President to waive each of these conditions.

They claim that under this Bill:

The Iraqi govt. must show substantial progress in securing the country and reducing sectarian violence, by specified dates.

The Reality: This Bill allows the President to unilaterally certify "Iraqi Government Progress."

They claim that under this Bill:

Combat troops will be out of Iraq by August 2008, at the latest.

The Reality: This Bill allows U.S. troops to remain in Iraq after the withdrawal date, if they are engaging in targeted special actions limited to killing or capturing members of terrorist organizations with global reach, or if they're "training members of Iraqi security forces."

This Bill could be used to keep tens of thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq for years to come. We are looking at another Vietnam. This is not an acceptable deadline. By providing funds to continue the war in Iraq, the House Leadership, is ensuring that thousands more troops will be wounded or killed, will return with PTSD, or will be at risk of long-term health problems from exposure to depleted uranium.

Congress needs to understand that they cannot have it both ways. They cannot say they oppose the war, yet, continue to fund it.

By continuing to fund it, they are abandoning our loved ones.

By continuing to fund it, they can no longer point the finger at George Bush and call it his war. If they continue to fund it, they've bought it and they own it.

Members of Congress may be afraid of what will happen to their political careers if they vote to defund the war, but our loved ones must not be used as pawns to support anyone's career plans. And if they are, we will not forget!

I've been told by some Congressional staffers that ending the war must be handled incrementally. My response is that our loved ones don't explode and die incrementally when an IED goes off under or next to them. The Constitution gave Congress the "power of the purse" for a reason. If ever there was a reason, it is this unjustifiable, immoral, illegal war. We need Congress to show the courage and leadership that our loved ones have shown through fulfilling their part of the contract they signed when they joined the military.

During his second deployment, and in one of his darkest moments, my son called home and asked, "Mom, where are the American people? Do they know what's going on over here? Do they even care about us?" Today, I put that question to you - do you care about our sons, our daughters, our loved ones? Then, I beg you, please don't abandon them. Call your Congressional representative on Monday. Demand that they stop funding this war. Demand that the troops be brought home NOW, and that they be taken care of with dignity and decency when they get here, and for as long as they need it. I believe that this is the greatest way that we can honor all of our troops, particularly those who, by their deaths, have paid the supreme price for this war.

Thank you.