Iraq and Afghanistan The War in Iraq has unnecessarily diverted attention from the War on Terror and tax dollars from needy Americans. Since my election to Congress, I have remained devoted to initiatives that prevent terrorism, improve our economy and seek to redeploy our troops out of harm's way.

RETURNING FOCUS TO THE WAR ON TERROR Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, it became immediately clear that the Untied States needed to pursue al Qaeda and their Taliban supporters in order to prevent future violence against Americans.

Yet, nearly eight years later, the threat posed by Afghanistan's terrorist organizations shows little indication of decline.

With the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq and the inevitable redeployment of troops from Afghanistan, American efforts to capture and kill al Qaeda terrorists have greatly diminished.

As of August 2008, only 18,000 American troops were stationed in Afghanistan, the War on Terror's primary and most critical front.

Comparatively, over 37,000 police officers currently protect and maintain order in New York City, a city with less than 1/10th the population of Afghanistan and 1/500th

the geographic size.

Meanwhile, this lack of manpower resulted in 2008 becoming the most deadly year so far for American personnel in Afghanistan.

Fortunately, President Obama has followed the recommendations of General McKiernan, commander of American forces in Afghanistan, and has begun redeploying troops from Iraq to Afghanistan.

A redeployment of 17,000 troops has already been announced with more to come in the near future.

As a former Homeland Security official, I understand that al Qaeda and the Taliban continue to pose a significant and imminent threat to the security interests of the United States.

I strongly support President Obama's efforts to refocus our manpower and resources to the dismantling of the most dangerous terrorist networks in Afghanistan.

REDUCING THE COST TO TAXPAYERS

In our nation's ongoing economic downturn, Americans everywhere are struggling to make ends meet.

Yet, as this recession first began to take hold, the Bush Administration continued to spend billions of taxpayer dollars in Iraq, bringing the overall total to almost $700 billion since 2003.

This equals over $2,000 for every man, woman and child that could have been used to prevent foreclosures, create jobs and improve our nation's sagging economy.

As we struggle to bring ourselves out of recession, the Iraqi people are beginning to reap the benefits of a functioning democratic government, growing military and police force, and ever expanding commerce.

Their nation is not yet at peace but is closer to it than at any time in the past.

I strongly believe that it is time for the Iraqi government, which collected over $40 billion in oil revenues last year alone, to begin allocating its own resources to the reconstruction and protection of their country.

In light of our deepening economic crisis, I believe that the financial cost of the War in Iraq is unacceptable.

By forcing the Iraqi government to support their own peace and reconstruction efforts, the United States can provide health insurance to millions of American children, extend unemployment protection to millions of displaced U.S. workers, and rebuild our nation's aging transportation infrastructure.

REDEPLOYING OUR TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ Since the commencement of the War in Iraq on March 20, 2003 over 31,000 Americans soldiers have been injured and over 4,200 have lost their lives. Thousands more are facing their fourth and fifth tours in Iraq which often include extended deployments in the country's most dangerous provinces. Over the last six years, our troops have successfully fought to put Iraq on a path to revitalization and democracy.

Unfortunately, new global threats continue to arise, posing new challenges to an American military that is already stretched near its maximum capacity.

After speaking with numerous military leaders and personnel, I believe it is critical to rest, retrain and redeploy our troops currently stationed in Iraq to better ensure that they are able to protect us against the growing threats posed by rogue nations and international terrorism.

I was very pleased that President Obama announced his intent to end combat missions in Iraq by August 31, 2010.

Soon, our frontline servicemen and women will be reunited with their families and we will again be able to focus on the most imminent global threats to our safety and security.