LLINOIS

TO: The Hon. Representative Joe Knollenberg
2349 Rayburn House Office Building
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FROM: Ben Phenicie
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Representative Knollenberg,

Recently I spoke with the a man who works regularly counseling returning veterans from the war in Iraq. He spoke about the difficulty these young men have in re-adjusting to American society after returning from the war. Every day, our soldiers in Iraq face great uncertainty and danger, and are forced, by their role as combatants, to make horrible choices that plague their consciences long after their return from battle. The cumulative effects of what we now term post-traumatic stress disorder are staggering. I urge you, as our representative, to do whatever you can to make sure that our returning veterans can get the mental health care they need to successfully re-integrate into American society. The sacrifices they have made in order to serve our nation are immense, as should be our commitment to their health and well being.

My concern about our returning veterans is tied into a larger issue- the war in Iraq itself. I was uncertain at the outset that this war was necessary. Thrilled by our early victories over Saddam Hussien's regime, I supported our actions. My support waned, however, through the summer of 2003 as it became apparent that the Bush administration had no coherent plan to govern and rebuild a post-Saddam Iraq. When it became clear, in November and December of 2004, that Saddam Hussein had not, in fact, possessed dangerous numbers or types of weapons of mass destruction, I felt as though the reasons given to justify our entry into Iraq had been fundamentally invalidated.

I feel strongly that our military presence in Iraq must now come to an end. Every day, American troops give their utmost in an open-ended commitment to hold together a failing, self-destructive Iraqi society bent on partisan and sectarian conflict. Our own commanders have stated that there is no military solution to the problems in Iraq today. Iraq must write its own history, in its own time and its own way. We have done all we can, and given our full devotion in pursuit of noble ideals. It is time to recognize that success will not come in the near term, and not through our military involvement. I am your fellow citizen, and a patriot, and so I urge you to support the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq.

Sincerely,

Benjamin D. Phenicie