

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the gentleman's courtesy in permitting me to speak on this.

Mr. Chairman, I rise to thank Chairman Hunter and Ranking Member Skelton for the real progress that this legislation represents for our men and women in uniform.

I think this is truly landmark legislation in this regard. I also deeply appreciate the work of the committee leadership in working with me to include section 311 to improve the management of our unexploded ordnance and munition response programs. This is going to pay dividends for our troops here at home.

In the long run it is going to save money for the taxpayers, and the more progress we make here we are going to develop technology and techniques that are going to make people safer around the world.

I do want to share a troubling story that came forth in my community this weekend of military recruitment abuse, a problem that frankly I thought was behind us.

An 18-year-old autistic high school student who, despite a clear disability, was recruited into the Army, in the cavalry as a scout, despite the strong objection of his parents and in apparent violation of military rules.

After news media attention and our office intervened, the Army has recently back-pedaled. But this is an outrageous situation. I have heard from numerous sources that this young man was not even aware that we were fighting in Iraq when he was being recruited in and signed a contract to serve in the Army.

The evidence strongly suggests that the recruiters purposefully withheld information about his disability in order to circumvent the rules. This does not appear to be an isolated incident. Pentagon statistics show accusations of recruitment abuses are at record levels.

I have called upon the Secretary of Defense for an investigation at least in this situation, because we need to get to the bottom of it, and it is likely not just one isolated case around the country. To be the finest fighting force in the world, we must continue to demand the most rigorous standards of conduct at all ranks of the military, including recruiting.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that the Armed Services Committee will work with me as this bill moves forward to make sure that safeguards are in place to make sure what happened to this young student never happens again and, most important, to make sure the integrity of the people he would serve with are protected as well.

Thank you for your courtesy.