

Local man's letter makes it to congressional floor

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CHRISTINE BYERS - *Rockford Register Star*

ROCKFORD - A man whose wife is in Iraq has gained national attention through a letter he wrote to politicians, describing the difficulty of not knowing when she will return.

Ron Macek's wife, Jessica, is a member of the 333rd Military Police Unit stationed in Iraq. Macek signed a petition on the Web site *MoveOn.org* asking Congress to start an inquiry about evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. He also included a letter describing how difficult it's been not knowing when his wife will return.

Lawmakers and politicians across the country received the letters from the site. U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, a Democrat from Evanston, read Macek's letter on the House floor July 15. Within days, a Newsweek reporter interviewed Macek for a story that's set to run this week.

"This whole thing has made me angry, really, because I'm powerless and there's nothing I can do about it," said Macek, 32. "I do what I can though, which is write letters, and obviously someone listened."

Macek's letter caught Schakowsky's attention because it was "compelling," said Nadeam Elshami, a spokesman for Schakowsky.

"It's obvious that he and his wife are patriotic Americans who serve the country, and they believe they deserve answers and the truth," Elshami said. "It's a powerful tool when a representative of Congress speaks on the House floor while holding a letter directly from the constituents back home."

Schakowsky plans to read more letters like Macek's on the floor until a commission to examine the evidence about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction is created. So far, Schakowsky has read about 10 letters from Illinoisans, Elshami said.

More than 320,000 people signed the online petition. In Illinois, 3,621 people wrote comments as well.

Macek's comments came from his heart, he said.

"It disturbs her greatly that she's there risking her life and it could be based on false testimony," Macek said of his wife.

Jessica joined the National Guard in 1997 when she was 17. She didn't expect to go to war and not know when she can come home, Macek said.

"We don't have a goal to look forward to, there's just rumors," Macek said. "We've heard three months, six months, a year. Just tell us so we can look forward to something because right now we don't have anything."

"It hits home every time I wake up and she's not here and I don't know when she will be here. It's a daily heartbreak."

Ron's letter

Ron Macek's letter, read on the House floor July 15:

My wife, Jessica, is with Freeport's 333rd Military Police Company. She has been overseas since late April. She has been on active duty since Feb. 9. She has not slept in her own bed next to her own husband in four months and six days. AND WE STILL HAVE NO IDEA WHEN THIS NIGHTMARE CAN BE OVER FOR US !!!!!

We understand a call to duty for our nation, we truly do. However, she did not join the National Guard with an open-ended deployment in a war zone in mind. NONE OF THEM DID.

We always thought the Guard was for short deployments in emergencies only. She tells me that morale with her soldiers is extremely low, there are short tempers, long days, fear, crying soldiers and no idea when it can be over for them. That is the root of our anguish.

These people have been uprooted from their lives and jobs, and they answered that call, yet no one can answer their most asked question, "When can I go home?" The frequency and duration of activations of not only this unit, but many others, will create retention and recruiting problems in the very near future. Surely, you must realize this.

Aside from that, the average soldier is not just a stupid order taker. We have a highly intelligent military, and they realize what is going on back home with the controversy around the evidence of WMDs (Weapons of Mass Destruction). I cannot speak for other soldiers, but it disturbs my wife deeply to think that she could be over there risking her life and living a daily heartbreak based on distorted testimony. It makes her feel like a pawn of political agenda, not an American doing good in the world.

All of this together most certainly influences her ideas of retention. We need the truth. Not someone's version of the truth, not some of the truth, but all of the truth. And we need to know when we can be reunited to live our lives together.