



## Sen. Robert Byrd

# 4,000 Souls

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Last week marked the fifth anniversary of the start of our nation's invasion of Iraq. Again we are confronted with a sorrowful reminder of the consequences of that fateful decision by the death of four Americans killed in Baghdad, bringing the total number of American troops who have made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq to 4000. Each brave soul leaves behind devastated loved ones -- sons, daughters, wives, husbands, moms, and dads. Each tragic loss leaves a void -- a missing smile and loving embrace, an empty chair at the family dinner table -- that can never be filled.

As we mark this painful milestone, we must ask ourselves: what is the moral justification for allowing this war to continue? Can we honestly say that the disastrous mission in Iraq warrants the sacrifice of more of our troops and the heartache and loss that so many loved ones continue to suffer?

In March of 2003, just prior to the invasion of Iraq, I made a final plea to the administration and my colleagues in Congress to avert a war that I believed would reap sorrowful consequences for our nation. In a speech entitled "We Stand Passively Mute", I expressed my outrage at the fact that the United States Senate -- the world's greatest deliberative body -- stood "for the most part-silent-ominously, dreadfully silent" on this monumental question.

Sadly, my worst fears have been realized. The decision to invade Iraq may go down as one of the gravest foreign policy blunders in our nation's history.

Yet the war continues. American troop levels are higher than they were the day President Bush flamboyantly swooped onto the deck of the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln to declare "Mission Accomplished."

Four thousand Americans have now lost their lives, including twenty-three brave West Virginians. Almost thirty-thousand Americans have been wounded in action, many gravely, and countless thousands of Iraqi civilians have been killed.

It is long past time to start bringing our troops home. Our men and women in uniform toppled the dictator. There were no weapons of mass destruction. There is scarce evidence that the Iraqi government is working to achieve the kind of political reconciliation that could end the continuing sacrifice of our brave men and women.

At this somber moment, let us resolve to take steps to finally bring this tragic war to an end. In 2008, the American people must not stand passively mute, as far too many of their leaders did five years ago. Let your voices be heard.

