Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of this

supplemental appropriations conference report, and let me begin by

thanking Senator Byrd, the chairman of our Appropriations Committee,

who has worked diligently throughout the process to bring us to this

point today where we are addressing the critical infrastructure needs

of this country as well as moving forward and changing course in Iraq.

I also thank and commend our majority leader, Senator Reid, for his

courage and his diligence in speaking out to get us to a point where we

will be sending a message to the President and to the country that we

are willing to be courageous and change course in Iraq.

The agreement before us takes us on a responsible path on many of the

most pressing issues of the day--the war in Iraq, as we have talked

about and I spoke about on the floor yesterday, moving forward with the

needs of our veterans and our injured service members, homeland

security, and the needs of our hard-hit communities here at home.

I realize my colleagues across the aisle would prefer that Congress

obediently approve the President's request, but we are not. Instead, we

are providing a funding bill that meets the needs of the American

people and those bravely serving for us overseas and all of those here

at home.

Last November, on November 7, the American people called for an end

to the rubberstamp Congress, and today we are here to deliver. This is

not, as some have tried to say, simply a war-funding bill. Instead, it

provides funding for critical needs here at home in addition to the

$100 billion in funding that is directed to our troops who are serving

us so honorably overseas.

In recent weeks, there has been a lot of heated rhetoric and plenty

of mischaracterizations about this important bill. Much of that has

focused on the critically necessary language that is included in this

bill that will transition our mission in Iraq and begin to redeploy our

troops.

As Senator Byrd stated, there is much more in this bill. We need to

pass this legislation because we need a new direction in Iraq, but we

also need to pass this bill because it provides everything our troops

need to complete their mission. It provides billions of dollars more to

take care of them when they come home, and it will, finally, help

American communities recover and rebuild.

In addition to funding for the troops overseas, this conference

agreement provides more than $5 billion to ensure that our returning

troops and veterans get the critically important healthcare they have

earned and deserve and which we now so vividly see is needed.

It provides $6.9 million for the victims of Hurricane Katrina and

Hurricane Rita. Senator Landrieu has been on the floor many times to

talk about those families who have been forgotten on the gulf coast. We

have not forgotten them in this bill, and this must get to the

President and be signed to take care of those families.

We provide $2.25 billion in homeland security investments, including

funds for port security and mass-transit security, for explosives

detection equipment at our airports, and for initiatives in the 9/11

bill that recently passed here in the Senate. These are needs which we

cannot forget, and we include them in this bill.

We provide $3 1/2 billion to provide relief for our farmers and our

ranchers across the country. There are many families who are struggling

and who have suffered from drought and agricultural disasters. For too

long, we have forgotten them in this country or ignored them or blocked

their needs. The Senate today is saying we have not forgotten.

Finally, this conference agreement includes emergency funding for

forest firefighting, a critical need throughout the West; low-income

energy assistance, drastically needed in many of our communities; and

pandemic flu preparations that all of us know we cannot forget.

I was on the floor yesterday to talk about much of the funding, but

critically important is the funding for our troops and our veterans

when they come home. We all vividly saw the Walter Reed scandal just a

few weeks ago. We provide the funding to make sure our soldiers,

whether they are at Walter Reed or any of our facilities across the

country, get the best of care, from traumatic brain injury to post-

traumatic stress syndrome.

Of course, again, we do have the Iraq language, which is so critical.

I hope our colleagues, as we move this bill to the President, will

remind him and the country that this bill is essential for our troops,

for those of us here at home, and for the future of this country. We

urge him to read the bill and to sign it.