Mr President, this morning I had the honor of saluting

members of the Maryland Army National Guard as they departed to begin

training for their upcoming deployment to Iraq. The 58th Brigade Combat

Team, including the Headquarters Company from Pikesville, MD, the 1st

Battalion of the 175th Infantry from Dundalk, MD, and the 1st Squadron

of the 158th Cavalry Regiment, are leaving their families and

communities to answer our Nation's call. As the Senator from Maryland

and the Senator for Maryland, I have promised them that I will do

everything I can to support them while they are on the battlefield,

help care for their families while they are gone, and ensure they have

the medical care, education, and job training benefits they need when

they return.

I support the conference report on the fiscal year 2007 emergency

supplemental appropriations bill because it will help us keep our

promises to America's citizen soldiers and their families.

Unfortunately, President Bush continues to threaten to veto this bill.

I hope it will not come to that. I

urge the President to work with this Congress to meet the pressing

needs of our men and women in uniform.

I support this emergency supplemental bill because it: Fully funds

the needs of our warfighters on the battlefield; adds $466 million to

ensure veterans get health care they need when they come home; and

requires the President to immediately change our mission in Iraq; and

sets the goal of bringing our troops home by no later than April 1,

2008.

This bill states clearly that Congress and the American people will

continue to support and protect our troops. Our troops must understand

that Congress will never abandon them, not while they are fighting on

the battlefield and not when they come home. The best way to support

our troops is to bring them home--swiftly and safely.

I am not new to this position. I never wanted to go to war in the

first place. I was one of the 23 who voted against this war, 4 years

ago, on October 11, 2002. I opposed giving the President unilateral

authority to launch a preemptive attack. I said the United States had

to exhaust our diplomatic options. I encouraged the administration to

stick with the United Nations U.N., to let the U.N. meet its

responsibility to deal with the threat from Saddam. The day of the

vote, I said, we don't know if we will be greeted with flowers or

landmines. Well, now we know: When we got to Iraq, there were no

weapons of mass destruction, but the destruction happened, and it

happened fast.

The United States went to war with Iraq, but today, we are at war

within Iraq. Saddam is gone, but we are still there, mired in a civil

war. No one could ask more of our troops. They are brave and courageous

and have fought valiantly. And it is time to bring them home.

We need a way forward in Iraq. The Iraq Study Group gives us 79

recommendations as a way to go forward, but the President has

completely ignored this report. Surely out of 79 recommendations, there

are 50 we can agree on. The Iraq Study Group report calls for new and

enhanced diplomatic and political efforts in Iraq and a change in the

primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq to enable the United States to

begin to move our forces out of Iraq responsibly. It provides a

direction for the U.S. and Iraqi Governments to follow that could lead

to withdrawal of American forces by the first quarter of 2008.

This is exactly the approach called for by this supplemental bill,

which will have most of our troops out of Iraq by March 31, 2008. What

are we voting for? This bill contains a binding resolution that directs

the President to promptly transition the mission of U.S. forces in Iraq

and begin a phased redeployment within 120 days. It sets a goal of

bringing U.S. combat forces home by April 1, 2008, except for a limited

number of troops essential for force protection, training, and

equipping Iraqi troops, and targeted counter terror operations.

This resolution also says success in Iraq depends on the Iraqi

Government's ability to meet important benchmarks, including the

training and equipping of Iraqi security forces so they can control the

capitol city of Baghdad; giving Iraqi military commanders the authority

to conduct operations without political interference; disarming

sectarian militias and ensuring that Iraqi security forces are loyal to

Iraq's Government; drafting and implementing legislation to ensure the

equal division of Iraqi oil revenues; drafting and implementing

legislation to reform the debaathification process; implementing a fair

process for amending the Iraqi constitution to ensure minority rights

are protected; and implementing new rules to protect minority rights in

the Iraqi Parliament.

I support this Iraq resolution. It says what the Iraq Study Group has

already told us: the problems in Iraq cannot be solved by the U.S.

military--they require a political solution by the Iraqis and

diplomatic engagement with Iraq's neighbors. It says Congress and the

American people will not only support the troops but continue to

protect them as well.

I want to end this war, and the resolution in this bill will do just

that. Yet in ending the war, it is my responsibility as a Senator to

ensure that our troops are brought home not only swiftly but safely. I

will not vote to end funding for the pay that supports military spouses

and children, body armor and armored humvees our troops need for

survival, tourniquets and surgical hospitals on the battlefield, jet

fuel for the airplanes that take injured troops from Baghdad to Germany

and then home, or the medical care they need when they get here.

In the last few weeks, we have all been shocked and awed by the

conditions facing our wounded warriors. We know that more than 22,000

Purple Hearts have been awarded in Iraq. Yet our troops are being twice

wounded. We know that acute care for our injured troops has been

astounding, with historic rates of survival from even the most brutal

battlefield injuries. Yet, while we have saved their lives, we are

failing to give them their life back. Outpatient care, facilities,

social work, case workers, disability benefits--the whole system is

dysfunctional.

This supplemental includes an additional $20 million to improve

conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and an additional $900

million for research and treatment of traumatic brain injury, post-

traumatic stress disorder, and other physical and mental trauma. It

also adds $466 million for veterans' health care, including $53 million

for new polytrauma facilities and services, $10 million for 100

additional caseworkers to aid troops and their families as they

transition from active duty, $25 million for prosthetic research and

$120 million for mental health treatment.

We know this is only a down payment for our troops and veterans. We

need to overhaul the disability benefits system that is outdated and

adversarial. We need a better system for transitioning our troops from

active duty to the Veterans' Administration, to ensure they get the

health care, job training, and educational benefits they deserve. We

need to hear the recommendations of the Dole-Shalala Commission on how

to fix the problems in our military and veterans hospitals. And I look

forward to working with Senator Murray, Senator Levin, and Senator

Inouye on a comprehensive reform package that will ensure our troops

have the medical care they will need for the rest of their lives.

This supplemental supports our troops, follows the will of the

American people, and follows the advice of the Iraq Study Group. It is

time to change our direction in Iraq and bring our forces home. Let's

send in the diplomats and bring our troops home safely and soon.