Mr. President, 2 1/2 hours ago, along with Senator

Mikulski, I attended a mobilization ceremony for members of the

Maryland National Guard who are being deployed to Iraq. All Marylanders

are proud of the service of our members of the National Guard who have

been called up and have served in Iraq and Afghanistan and are now

being called up. It was an emotional morning as these soldiers said

goodbye to their families.

I can tell you, they are ready. They are ready to serve our country.

They will serve with great distinction. I told our soldiers and their

families I would do everything I could as a Senator to make sure they

had all of the resources so they can carry out the mission that has

been assigned to them as safely and as effectively as possible. That is

one reason I will vote for this conference report. I told their

families I would do everything I could to help support their needs and

to support the needs of military families around this Nation and to

support the needs of veterans around this Nation, to take care of their

support services, including their health care needs. That is another

reason I will be voting for this conference report.

We need a change in our mission in Iraq so our soldiers can achieve a

mission that is in the best interest of this country. That is another

reason I am supporting this conference report. It spells out a mission

that is in the best interest of this Nation and can be achieved. We

need to change our role in Iraq. We need to get our soldiers out of the

middle of a civil war, to focus on the war against terror, to help the

Iraqi people take care of their own needs, to bring our troops home.

That is another reason I will be supporting this conference report.

We need measurable and achievable benchmarks for the Iraqi Government

so they can secure their own country to undertake political

reconciliation and to provide basic needs for ordinary Iraqi citizens,

another reason I will be supporting this conference report.

We need a political framework to include all the Iraqi stakeholders

in order to provide a political answer to the problems of that country,

another reason I support this conference report.

The President of the United States has threatened a veto. That would

only delay the delivery of much needed funds to our forces, delay a

change in direction in Iraq, and undermine the need for political

reform in Iraq itself. We have our responsibility. Our first

responsibility is to act and to pass this supplemental appropriations

bill.

I urge colleagues to support this appropriation. It is in the best

interest of the country.

I yield the floor.