Mr. President, this is meritorious legislation, important

legislation. First, I thank Senator Byrd, the chairman of our

Appropriations Committee, and his staff for working so hard to get us

where we are. I thank Congressman Obey, chairman of the comparable

committee in the House of Representatives.

I know that my friend, the distinguished senior Senator from

Mississippi, does not agree with the Iraq language, but I express my

appreciation to his staff. This bill has in it more than the Iraq

language, and his staff has worked with us all the way to get that

done. I extend my appreciation for his usual gentlemanly way doing

everything he does here.

Also, because she worked so hard on a lot of things that she was

assigned to do by Senator Byrd, Senator Patty Murray has done an

outstanding job on this bill. She is in the Chamber, and I express my

appreciation to her for her usual fine work but especially her fine

work on this matter.

The individuals I have just mentioned have delivered to us a

tremendous conference report, one we can all be proud to send to the

President and we should send to the President. This conference report

honors and provides for our courageous men and women in uniform. This

conference report doesn't forget the emergencies Americans face at home

while the war rages abroad. This conference report makes us more secure

by charting a new, more sustainable course in Iraq so we can find a

responsible end to the war and return our focus to the global

challenges that lie ahead.

President Bush requested $91.5 billion for continued military

operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. We provided every penny of that

request, but, Mr. President, more. Our bill matches the President

dollar for dollar on the equipment and training he requested for the

140,000 troops in Iraq and the 20,000 deployed in Afghanistan,

including hundreds of troops deployed from the State of Nevada.

This conference report doesn't stop there because we recognize the

President's request shortchanges our troops and our security in a

number of critical areas. For example, with the roadside bombs that

have accounted for over half of the fatalities suffered by our troops

in Iraq, Democrats have added $1.2 billion for mine-resistant vehicles.

This is important.

My friend--and he is my friend--the distinguished Republican leader,

said we should live up to our end of the bargain. Our end of the

bargain? We have done pretty well, spending over one-half trillion

dollars in the faraway land of Iraq, having lost more than 3,300,

through death, of our finest, 27,000 wounded, a third of them missing

limbs, 2,000 double amputees, brain injuries as we have never seen

before, and paralysis. We have lived up to our end of the bargain.

At a time when the health care needs of thousands of our soldiers and

veterans are being ignored, Democrats have added--with the help of two

courageous Republicans, who I am confident will vote with us on this

matter--we have added $2.5 billion to ensure all of our troops receive

the quality care they have earned--our troops--veterans. These funds

will improve the unconscionable conditions at Walter Reed and other

medical facilities around the country and greatly enhance the care

provided to those who suffer from brain trauma and post-traumatic

stress disorder.

Every Thursday, Senator Ensign and I, when we are in session, in the

Johnson Room, have a ``Welcome to Washington'' for Nevadans. The

Baileys were here today. They had a 27-year-old son who went to Iraq

and came home with severe emotional problems. He was fine before he

went. He went to a VA facility in Southern California, hundreds of

miles away from his parents, where he was not taken care of. He died of

a drug overdose. Not illegal drugs but drugs they gave him. What we

have put in this bill to help veterans, those people returning from

Iraq who have been injured, is important. It is in this bill and it

should stay here.

At a time when our citizen soldiers have been pushed to their limit,

and most Guard and Reserve units lack the equipment they need to

conduct their mission, our bill would provide an additional $1 billion

for the supplies and equipment they need. Despite the fact a majority

of the American people disapprove of this administration's Iraq policy,

this bill clearly takes care of the men and women who are serving us

courageously in Iraq, as clearly as anyone who opposes this legislation

would set back or hurt badly our efforts to support our fighting

forces.

We provide for our troops, we do that, but we also believe we have an

obligation to address emergencies facing Americans here at home. That

is what emergency supplemental bills were at one time--emergencies that

developed during the year.

President Bush has made numerous trips to the gulf region to take a

look at the devastation created by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which

devastated that region of the country, but he hasn't done anything

about it, to speak of. We believe we have a responsibility to help the

victims of this historic tragedy. We agree with the sentiment of the

people of this country, who are determined to help their fellow

citizens, and that is what this bill does. We provide $7 billion for

the victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, whose help is long overdue.

Thousands of family farmers and ranchers from virtually every State

in this country are suffering the effects of extreme drought or

damaging weather conditions. These are emergencies. We rely upon these

American farmers and ranchers for the Nation's food supply, and we

believe we have an obligation to help them when disaster strikes. That

is why we provide $3.5 billion to help address some of the losses

suffered by farmers and ranchers caused by drought, flood, fire,

hurricanes, and pestilence.

More than 5 years after the terrible terrorist attacks of 9/11, we

know gaps remain in this Nation's homeland security efforts. This is an

emergency. We have tried here on the Senate floor to offer amendments

to cover this. We have been defeated on a straight party-

line basis. This bill has that relief. That is why we provide $2

billion for port security, mass transit security, airport security, and

other initiatives to address the shortcomings identified by the

bipartisan 9/11 Commission, whose recommendations came down almost 3

years ago.

Tens of thousands of children across this country will lose their

health care in the next several months if we don't do something in this

conference report. This, too, is an emergency. That is why we provide

$650 million to keep the State Children's Health Insurance Program

running. This is health care for kids.

All of these nonmilitary investments are crucial priorities, but

fully funding our troops and changing the course of the war in Iraq is

this bill's primary goal. No one wants this Nation to succeed in the

Middle East more than I do. But I know that after more than 4 years of

mismanagement and incompetence of the war in Iraq by this

administration, there is no magic formula or silver bullet that will

lead us to the victory we all desire. Yet I also believe there is a way

forward that gives us our best chance to end the war responsibly while

protecting our strategic interests, strengthening our security, and

better positioning us to provide the long-term assistance Iraq will

need for years to come. This way forward is consistent with what our

military leaders are telling us, including General Petraeus, who

repeated again yesterday, publicly--not privately but publicly--that

this war cannot be won militarily. That is what General Petraeus says.

I want to talk about what is in this bill as relates to Iraq.

First, we transition the U.S. mission from policing a civil war to

training and equipping Iraqi security forces, protecting U.S. forces

and conducting targeted counter terror operations.

Second, we begin the phased redeployment of our troops no later than

October 1, 2007, with the goal of removing all combat forces by April

1, 2008, except for those carrying out the limited missions I have

mentioned.

Third, we impose tangible, measurable, and achievable benchmarks on

the Iraqi Government so they will be held accountable for making

progress in security, political reconciliation, and improving the lives

of ordinary Iraqis, who have suffered so very much.

Fourth, we launch the kind of diplomatic, economic, and political

offensive the President's strategy lacks, starting with a regional

conference working toward a long-term framework for stability in the

region, as recommended by the Iraq Study Group, with Saudi Arabia,

Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and, yes, Iran must be involved.

Fifth, and finally, we build up our overburdened military to ensure

that only battle-ready troops are sent into battle, and giving them the

manpower and support they need to face the daunting challenges that lie

ahead. My friend Congressman Murtha, whom I had the good fortune to

serve with when I was in the House of Representatives, pointed out

clearly in the debate on the House floor last night that we are

currently paying 126,000 individuals, independent contractors, to

supplement the work of our soldiers. These contractors are not held to

the same standards or accountability of our troops, yet often earn tens

of thousands of dollars more. This is unacceptable. Do the American

taxpayers know this, that 126,000 people are being paid over there for

various things? Doing what? Why? This is costing billions, and for

what? And why? This supplemental funding bill was forged by listening

to Members of Congress from both parties, to military experts, and,

most importantly, to the American people. I have had a number of people

from the other side who have come to me and said, we know you are doing

the right thing but we can't help you now. There are two people on the

other side, however, who are coming and saying they are going to vote

on this matter. I don't know what I can say, other than to say it is

for the American people, and they have a lot of courage.

This compromise was forged through thoughtful negotiation. It was

forged with the firm resolve that we must do what is right for our

troops, our Nation's security, and Iraq's future. Once we pass this

bill, we will send it to the President's desk. We know he has

threatened to veto this legislation. But in the same spirit of

compromise and bipartisanship with which this bill was written, we hope

the President will reconsider his stubbornness and his refusal to

listen to the American people. This is a good conference report. It

provides for the safety of our troops, it helps Americans recover from

emergencies that have plagued us here at home, and it sets us on a new

course, away from a civil war with no end in sight, and toward a

responsible, phased redeployment, and it holds the Iraqis accountable.

This is a responsible plan for redeployment, not a precipitous

withdrawal.

Our troops in harm's way will always have the resources to do the

mission their leaders ask of them. It directs our attention to

eliminating al-Qaida, addresses refugee and humanitarian crises, and

launches the diplomatic and political surges necessary to prevent

regional instability. It also allows us to provide the longer term

investments and the political solutions needed in Iraq. It prevents the

jihadists from being able to claim victory over America, and it begins

to restore America's prestige, power, and influence in the region and

throughout the world.

Some will say there is no alternative to the President's course. They

say the only course is to stay the course or fail; that there is no

plan B. But our President is wrong. I say that with all due respect.

The choice is in our hands. Today, we have the chance to support our

troops, represent the will of the American people, and lead America to

a path of responsibility. If the President refuses to change direction,

America risks being bogged down in Iraq for years, not months.

This President, who took us to war under false pretenses, now needs

the courage to admit his policies have failed and work with us to bring

the war to a responsible end. This conference report gives him that

path forward, and I hope he follows it.