Madam President, with this vote, Congress has provided

funding for our troops while also putting forward sensible provisions

to begin the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. I call upon the President

to work with Congress in order to ensure the troops receive these funds

and that we change course in Iraq.

I am also pleased to announce with Senator Schumer that after a long

struggle, and thanks to the leadership of Senator Byrd and Senator

Harkin, we have secured $50 million for the monitoring, diagnosis, and

treatment for the thousands of men and women whose health has been

terribly affected by the dust, debris, and poisons that filled the air

after the attacks of 9/11.

I am grateful for the support of Senator Byrd, Senator Harkin and

Senator Specter who have been steadfast in recognizing our duty to help

those who helped New York in our hour of need--and help everyone whose

health and lives have been affected by 9/11.

This is a great victory for the victims and heroes, for New York, and

for our values which were targeted on 9/11.

The Centers of Excellence providing care through the Mt. Sinai

consortium and the Fire Department of New York with Federal funds are

doing heroic work--but more and more people are walking through the

doors because of respiratory problems and other debilitating

conditions. These treatment centers--centers that provide essential

care to those who responded in our time of need--are on the brink of

running out of Federal resources in the fall. Thanks to the funding in

this bill, we will be able to send a lifeline of funding before these

treatment centers fall over the financial cliff.

Based upon the estimates of the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, it would take nearly $283 million to treat to 34,000 first

responders and workers for just one year. And that number doesn't take

into account the treatment needs of forgotten populations, such as

residents, office workers, students, and others who were also exposed

to these toxic substances.

The funding contained in this legislation is a great step forward and

will serve as a bridge fund until we are able to come up with a long

term solution. This $50 million will be used to help provide both

inpatient and outpatient treatment services for responders and workers

affected by debilitating respiratory and mental health problems.

These are more than names on a list or lines in a budget. These are

lives that have been turned upside down, often silently, often without

public notice.

When the towers collapsed, thousands of tons of coarse and fine

particulate matter were released into the air, and inhaled into the

lungs of hundreds of thousands of individuals--substances that included

cement dust, glass fibers, asbestos, lead, hydrochloric acid, and other

toxic pollutants. The combustion of jet fuel after the attacks created

a dense plume of black smoke, filled with other toxic substances like

benzene and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Fires at Ground Zero

continued to burn underground for several months after the attacks.

Of course, none of our incredibly brave firefighters, police

officers, emergency responders, workers, volunteers and others stopped

to think about the health implications of what they were walking into--

they risked their lives to help save others.

The day after 9/11, I visited Ground Zero; it was evident that the

air was not fit to breathe and these conditions continued for months

afterwards.

Over the next 9 months, it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of

individuals were exposed to the dust and debris not only at Ground

Zero, but also a site at Fresh Kills, the landfill in Staten Island,

where workers sifted through the debris in an attempt to recover

evidence from the attacks.

People began coming down with what we would later call World Trade

Center cough. We heard reports of previously healthy detectives who

could bench press 250 pounds unable to lift a child. Firefighters who

could run miles no longer able to climb stairs. Construction workers in

perfect physical shape before the attacks with incredible difficulty

breathing after the attacks. Increased risk of cancer. Newly developed

asthma, bronchitis, persistent sinusitis, laryngitis, or other

respiratory problems. For these individuals, their illnesses are a

constant reminder of that terrible day.

On March 21, the HELP Committee held a hearing--which I led along

side Chairman Kennedy--on the long term impacts of 9/11.

What we heard that day was nothing short of devastating and all of us

in the room during the hearing came away with a new sense of urgency in

making sure that the workers, residents, students, volunteers and

others who are experiencing adverse health effects due to exposure of

9/11 toxins get the care they desperately need.

Of particular concern: many of those who are ill are falling through

the cracks of traditional health coverage. According to testimony

presented at this hearing, more than 40 percent of the responders

enrolled in the Mt. Sinai treatment program are uninsured, and an

additional 23 percent are underinsured. New York City reports that

approximately 60 percent of those enrolled at Bellevue Hospital's

treatment program are also uninsured.

Today, Congress has sent a powerful message to the police officers,

firefighters, first responders, workers, and volunteers of 9/11: You

are not forgotten. We will respond to an attack on our values and way

of life by honoring our values and helping the victims.

But we must go further.

We need a longer-term Federal solution to provide monitoring,

diagnosis, and treatment. The city and local organizations have done a

tremendous service, but this was as an attack on our whole Nation and

our whole Nation should support the efforts taking place in New York.

These funds will only support the work for the short term. And a third

treatment center at Bellevue Hospital--the only center that evaluates

and treats many of the forgotten victims: residents, office workers,

students, and others--has not received any Federal help at all.

I have introduced the 9/11 Heroes Health Improvement Act to provide

$1.9 billion in grants for ongoing medical and mental health treatment

and monitoring, and I will continue to work with my colleagues on the

Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to ensure that we have

a long-term solution for 9/11 affected individuals.

We should always keep in our hearts the people who deserve our help.

Retired New York Police Detective Michael Valentin is one of those

who is living with the health effects of 9/11. He rushed to Ground Zero

from his home on Long Island on 9/11 and for the first few days

searched for remains in the area, later working on the pile and

providing perimeter security.

Before 9/11, he was running miles a day and going to college at night

to become a supervisor.

Since 9/11, he has experienced respiratory problems and breathing

difficulties, asthma attacks, operations to treat tumors he has

developed, and other conditions. He could no longer find the strength

to attend college at night or run enough to pass even the police

department's physical test. He retired officially on January 31 of this

year.

Detective Valentin wanted to attend the hearing in Washington. He

wanted to speak out and be heard because too many of the victims and

heroes feel forgotten and left behind. Unfortunately, Detective

Valentin was too sick to make the trip, and he is not alone.

The tragedy of 9/11 is not over. The loss of life, the pain, and the

suffering are not over. The tragic legacy continues for the families

who lost loved ones and for residents, workers, volunteers, first

responders and others who

have faced hardship and health consequences in the aftermath of the

attacks.

Today, we have achieved a great victory--but it must only be a first

step to make sure those that gave so much on that terrible day are not

forgotten and receive the help they deserve.