Mr. President, toward the end of World War II, Norman

Rockwell created a cover for the Saturday Evening Post titled

``Homecoming GI.'' It is a picture of a soldier returning from war. He

has a duffle bag clutched in his left hand. He is looking up at the

back of a brick building with laundry hanging from the back porch. A

woman in an apron sees him with outstretched arms, and a young child

races down the stairs. Everyone sees that soldier--the neighbors' kids,

the man fixing the roof, faces from another window--and everyone

welcomes that soldier who has come home from war.

That is what our Nation did for the millions of service members who

returned from the Atlantic and the Pacific. We watched them come home

in waves. Some were just as strong as their first day in battle; others

limped. We saw them crowd Times Square. We saw them walk down Main

Street and sit on stoops. My grandfather, who fought in Patton's army,

would often speak about this time as America at its finest. That

homecoming didn't just happen; we were ready for it.

Long before the beaches of Normandy were stormed and the last battle

was fought, in 1943 President Roosevelt said:

These are the words of wisdom that we ignore at our peril.

Today we have more than 631,000 veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan

and other parts of the global war on terror. According to a recent VA

health care report, one-third--more than 205,000--have sought treatment

at VA health facilities.

Even if the war in Iraq comes to an end soon--and I hope the Senate

takes action this week to accomplish that goal--the war will live on

with our service members and their families for the rest of our lives.

Unfortunately, over the past month, we have all seen the disturbing

pictures of neglect at Walter Reed. We have read about bats and

bureaucratic red tape at the VA. We have seen too many stories about our

veterans who have been forgotten--not greeted by the Nation that asked

them to serve. The time has come for us to see this generation of

veterans in all their valor and pain. We should provide them with a

plan that is worthy of their courage and will help build back the

military they love.

That is what Senator McCaskill and I are trying to do with the

amendment we offer today.

First, we provide an additional $41 million to hire more caseworkers

to assist service members navigating the military's bureaucracy. The

last thing a wounded service member should have to face when they return

home is a front line of paperwork and delay. Right now, the caseworker-

to-service-member ratio at Walter Reed is 1 to 50. Caseworkers help

recovering soldiers schedule appointments, take care of their everyday

needs, and fill out paperwork. Military caseworkers are overwhelmed. I

understand the Army is reducing the caseworker-to-service-member ratio

to 1 to 17, and I applaud this move. Our amendment would help the

military achieve this goal at all military hospitals.

Our amendment also provides $30 million for the Armed Forces to

create an Internet-based system for service members to submit their

paperwork electronically. No longer will amputees and service members in

wheelchairs have to go to countless offices to fill out duplicative

forms only to learn that the forms have been lost in Government

bureaucracy.

We also need to do more to increase the number of mental health

crisis counselors available to assist recovering service members and

their families. Too many service members are returning home with unmet

mental health needs--stresses that are often experienced by their

family members.

That is why our amendment provides $17 million for more mental health

crisis counselors.

While we all praise how our country treated the service members

returning from World War II, we must remember the lessons after

Vietnam. The landmark National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study was

congressionally mandated in 1983, 15 years after the height of that

war. The completed report showed the vast majority of Vietnam veterans

had successfully acclimated to postwar life.

We can't wait 15 years to plan and prepare for the readjustment needs

of the service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The average

age of a service member deployed since September 11 is 27. The average

age of our Guard and Reserves is 33. Sixty percent of those deployed

have family responsibilities, and 47 percent of those who have died

have left families. Mr. President, 160,000 women have been deployed,

and 10 percent of those women are single mothers. These men and women

are going to face real challenges in readjusting to normal life.

Our amendment would provide for a study by the National Academy of

Sciences of the mental health and readjustment needs of returning

service members. This study will assist the Department of Defense, the

Veterans' Administration, and Congress in planning for the long-term

needs of our veterans.

Last week I met a woman at Walter Reed. She is one of the 160,000

women who have been deployed, and she suffers from post-traumatic

stress disorder. Most of us associate PTSD with men in combat, but many

of the women in theater face firsthand dangers in their combat support

roles. Driving a truck in Baghdad is one of the most dangerous missions

around, and it is considered a support role. Women are witnessing the

horrors of improvised explosive devices and the horrors of losing

fellow service members, and too many are experiencing the trauma of

sexual harassment or abuse.

This young woman was very scared, and she trembled as we spoke. I

asked her what we could do to help. She said that she could not handle

group therapy sessions; she could only tolerate one-on-one sessions

with counselors. Her experience is shared by many women. Treatment for

women with PTSD, especially sexual abuse victims, is very different

from treatment for men.

That is why as part of our amendment we want to provide $15 million

to address the unique mental health needs of women. This funding will

ensure the development and implementation of a women's treatment

program for mental health conditions, including PTSD. It will also

include the hiring and training of sexual abuse counselors so that the

service members who suffer from this trauma do not have to suffer in

silence. We can do this for the woman I met at Walter Reed and the

thousands who suffer like her.

The total cost of our amendment is $103 million--less than one-tenth

of 1 percent of the total cost of this bill. This is the least we can

do for our service members recovering at Walter Reed and other military

hospitals.

I am proud that Veterans For America has endorsed our amendment, and

I ask unanimous consent that their letter of endorsement be printed in

the Record.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in

the Record, as follows:

Mr. President, we gather on another occasion to bring the

Iraq war to its fateful end. While this effort may fall short again, we

will continue to try to do what is in the national security of our

country.

The Iraq war should never have been authorized. I was proud to say so

in 2002, but I am even more proud of the plan I have offered that calls

for combat to begin redeploying on May 1 with the goal of all combat

troops out of Iraq by March 2008.

We also must make sure that we are not as careless getting out of

this war as we were getting in, and that is why this withdrawal should

be gradual, and keep some U.S. troops in the region to prevent a wider

war in the region and go after al-Qaida and other terrorists.

Those who would have us continue this war in perpetuity like to say

that this is a matter of resolve on behalf of the American people. But

the American people have been extraordinarily resolved. They have seen

their sons and daughters killed or wounded on the streets of Fallujah.

They have spent hundreds of billions of dollars on this effort--money

that could have been devoted to strengthening our homeland security and

our competitive standing as a nation.

No, it has not been a failure of resolve that has led us to this

chaos, but a failure of strategy--a strategy that has only strengthened

Iran's strategic position; increased threats posed by terrorist

organizations; reduced U.S. credibility and influence around the world;

and placed Israel and other nations friendly to the United States in

the region in greater peril.

Iraq has been a failure of strategy and that strategy must change. It

is time to bring a responsible end to this conflict because there is no

military solution to this war.

Before we send our best off to battle in the future, we must remember

what led us to this day and learn from the principles that follow.

We must remember that ideology is not a foreign policy. We must not

embark on war based on untested theories, political agendas or wishful

thinking that have little basis in fact or reality. We must focus our

efforts on the threats we know exist, and we must evaluate those

threats with sound intelligence that is never manipulated for political

reasons again.

We must remember that the cost of going it alone is immense. It is a

choice we sometimes have to make, but one that must be made rarely and

always reluctantly.

We must remember that planning for peace is just as critical as

planning for war. Iraq was not just a failure of conception, but a

failure of execution. So when a conflict does arise that requires our

involvement, we must try to understand that country's history, its

politics, its ethnic and religious divisions before our troops ever set

foot on its soil.

We must understand that setting up ballot boxes does not

automatically create a democracy. Real freedom and real stability come

from doing the hard work of helping to build a strong police force, and

a legitimate government, and ensuring that people have food, and water,

and electricity, and basic services. And we must be honest about

how much of that we can do ourselves and how much must come from the

people themselves.

And finally, we must remember that when we send our service men and

women to war, we make sure we have given them the training they need,

and the equipment that will keep them safe, and a mission they can

accomplish. And when our troops come home, it is our most solemn

responsibility to make sure they come home to the services, and the

benefits, and the care they deserve.

The cause to defend our country and our interests around the world

will never end. It will be one of our country's constant threads

through the ages. It is our sacred trust to ensure that those moments,

those times of great struggle, are the right ones. And when they are

not, we must continue to try and end those conflicts for the sake of

our country, our service men and women, and the ideals we hold dear.

For these reasons, I strongly support the provision in the

supplemental bill that calls for the withdrawal of American combat

troops by March 31, 2008, and I will oppose any efforts to strip that

provision from the bill.