Mr. President, I have filed amendment No. 670 to H.R.

1591. This amendment authorizes the Secretary to spend up to $50

million for the establishment and maintenance of a civilian reserve

corps to address post conflict situations and other emergencies

overseas. The amendment provides the Secretary the flexibility to use a

portion of the funding in this act to make an urgent effort to recruit

and train more civilians in planning and managing stabilization and

reconstruction.

The Senate embraced the creation of such a civilian corps when it

unanimously passed S. 3322 last May. The funding in this amendment

matches the level provided in the House version of the emergency

supplemental.

If enacted, this amendment provides the Secretary with access to

immediate funding to recruit and send civilians with the appropriate

skills to assist in reconstruction and stabilization in Iraq and

Afghanistan, as well as to emerging trouble spots around the world. The

United States must have the right structures, personnel, and resources

in place when an emergency occurs. A delay in our response of a few

weeks, or even days, can mean the difference between success and

failure.

Both the State Department and the Defense Department are keenly aware

of the importance of this amendment. They understand that, if we cannot

work together better as a government in post conflict and other unstable

situations, the United States may come to depend even more on our

military for tasks and functions far beyond its current role. This

amendment builds on the planning that has already taken place to

develop a civilian reserve and jumpstarts it so that it can be

available as soon as possible.

Mr. President, I would like to have printed in the Record at this

point a letter from the Secretary of State strongly endorsing the need

for the funding contained in this amendment.

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

the Record, as follows:

In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on

February 6, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint

Chiefs Peter Pace talked about the urgent need for civilian expertise

in the Iraq stabilization effort. General Pace also called for more

civilian resources for the broader worldwide effort, people who can

build judicial and rule of law systems, provide engineering expertise,

and bring clean water and electricity to people ``before a country

devolves into a state where the terrorists can find a home.''

Passing the amendment will demonstrate that there is a keen

understanding in the Senate that we need to move forward now to

strengthen our civilian reconstruction capabilities in Iraq and

Afghanistan.

I recommend this amendment to my colleagues and urge its adoption.

Mr. President, along with Senator Bond and Senator

Coleman, I will offer an amendment that addresses an issue about which

there has been much news reporting and hearings in both House and

Senate subcommittees; namely, the situation facing Iraqi and Afghani

interpreters and translators who are bravely working on the front lines

with our soldiers and diplomats. Such work is vital to our efforts in

these two conflicts, yet it often makes them and their families targets

for insurgents. This past week, Mr. George Packer wrote a lengthy piece

in the New Yorker on this that I commend to my colleagues.

My interest in this issue, like many of my colleagues, began last

summer when I received e-mails from a first lieutenant in the Indiana

National Guard who had recently returned from a tour in Iraq and from a

sergeant in the Army who was at the time serving in a combat support

hospital, also in Iraq.

Aaron Inkenbrandt wrote:

The e-mails, and a cable that our then Ambassador to Baghdad, Zalmay

Khalilzad, released regarding the life-threatening conditions our

Foreign Service Nationals were facing prompted me to write to the

Secretary of State last July about the issue. I encouraged her to

develop a policy to address these various situations and suggest

legislative language. The United States has experience and tradition in

this respect from past wars that provide precedent and guidance.

The amendment I am offering today with Senator Bond and Senator

Coleman is not a conventional amendment for an emergency supplemental,

but because it has a direct impact on the missions in Iraq and

Afghanistan, we are hopeful this can be included in the package.

By virtue of a provision crafted by former Congressman John

Hostettler of Indiana, the 2006 Defense authorization bill established

a program to allow 50 Iraqis and Afghans who have worked for the U.S.

military as translators for at least 12 months to come to the United

States on a special visa. The program has been underway now for just

over a year and has been met with success and approval by all of the

agencies who work with it.

Since instatement, 445 applications have been received. 377 have been

approved, 10 denied and 58 are pending. Under the current cap of 50 per

year, it will take until 2016 to admit those currently in the queued--

and their families--for entry to the United States.

In order to help reduce this wait-time, my colleagues and I have

crafted an amendment that expands the program to 300 admissions per

year and also makes some other technical changes. We change the

language to include interpreters as well as translators--as that is the

proper term for those who translate conversation while translators work

on documents. We also authorize the U.S. Ambassadors in Iraq and

Afghanistan to nominate non-Department of Defense personnel under this

program, and we exempt those admitted under this program, and their

families from the numerical cap of immigrants who enter in this same,

so-called 4th Preference category. Finally, we wish to sunset the

program after 3 years.