Mr. President, first of all, I thank the manager of the

bill, the Senator from Washington.

Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the dangers of

congressional micromanagement of war and the dangers of a precipitous

withdrawal from Iraq. Yesterday, the Senate cast a historic vote to

withdrawal our troops from a field of combat. I believe that this vote

was a mistake of enormous proportions. Now both the Senate and House

have included language in an emergency supplemental funding bill to

micromanage the war and take the authority from our commanding officers

and our Commander in Chief. The President has rightly expressed his

concern over this legislation, stated that he will veto this

legislation, and I will vote to uphold his veto.

The commanding general in Iraq, General Petraeus, had a large part in

drafting this new plan forward. Yet now, numerous Senators have called

to override his expertise and pull out our troops before this plan has

time to work. We are not a body of generals, but of policy makers, and

therefore we should not be in the business of setting arbitrary

deadlines for retreat, deadlines which are rejected by our military

commanders and the Commander

in Chief. It is the responsibility of the civilian leadership to set

the political goals of an engagement, but leave the strategy decisions

to the experts, the military leadership. It is clear to me that the

majority leadership in the House and Senate see fit to preempt our

military experts and inject their own political ideals into our

Nation's military strategy. I believe that such actions are a great

disservice to our men and women fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I

will continue to oppose their continued efforts to command our military

tactics from the U.S. Capitol Building.

This bill contains critical funding for our military to ensure that

our soldiers do receive the body armor, up-armored HMMWVs, and other

necessary equipment to keep them safe in combat and allow them to seek

out and destroy our enemies. The majority party is using this bill to

play politics and score points with their base, delaying these

necessary funds from reaching our troops. It is absolutely regrettable

that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle voted to include this

defeatist language on this critical funding bill for our soldiers.

I have heard a lot of my colleagues speak out against this war

because of the duration of the war, that we have been in Iraq longer

than in World War II, and that because of the duration of our efforts,

we should simply retreat and come home. The fact is, we are not engaged

against a standing Nazi German Army. While the United States continues

to base large numbers of soldiers in Europe and on the DMZ in South

Korea, we are told by some of our colleagues in the majority that we

need to remove our footprint from Iraq completely and immediately, and

allow these radical fundamentalists to butcher each other in our wake

and create a new safe haven for terrorism in the Middle East.

Our soldiers in Iraq are fighting an insurgency that wears no uniform

and fights with remote-controlled devices so they remain hidden on the

battlefield making the job of our soldiers that much more difficult,

but also making it that much more important that our Government

continue to support their mission. No, this is not World War II. But

the seriousness of this war is just as critical to the security of our

country and the world.

I have stood on this floor several times this year talking not only

about the implications to Iraq if we were to suddenly pull our troops

out without a stable government and security forces in place, but about

the implications to our own national security and the larger Middle

East. If we were to pull our troops out tomorrow, the kind of

humanitarian crisis we would see in Iraq, which would spill into

neighboring countries in the form of violence and refugees, would be

astronomical.

What then? Do we send more troops back in? Do we rely on an

ineffective United Nations to send in corrupt officials and

peacekeepers in an attempt to regain some sort of control? No, I do not

believe that the United States should nor can afford to do that, and I

will not cast a vote on this floor to allow that to happen.

Stability in Iraq, my colleagues say, is merely a pipe dream.

However, we have already seen this new strategy start to work. Violence

is down in Baghdad and the insurgence and terrorists are pulling out of

the capital city and fleeing to the outskirts. Without a stable

Baghdad, the Iraqi Government cannot rule. Our soldiers, aided by the

reinforcements sent to Iraq by President Bush, are working very hard to

provide the stability they so desperately need. Like every Member of

this Chamber, I believe that we need a political solution to the

situation in Iraq. However, a political situation cannot be met if

there is not stability in the capital city of Baghdad. Some of my

colleagues believe that if we pull our troops out of Iraq immediately,

the violence will cease and the Government will stand up. It is my

belief that the exact opposite will occur.

As I mentioned, our success in Iraq does not contain itself within

the borders of Iraq. Our moderate allies in the Middle East are also

counting on our success in the region to ensure that radical states,

such as Iran, do not expand their powerbase to the entire Middle East.

Without success in Iraq, and stability in the Middle East, our security

and that of our allies will be in serious jeopardy.

We are already seeing what an instable leader of Iran is capable of

doing. After defying U.N. resolution after resolution, the Iranian

Government is moving forward with the enrichment of uranium; a move

that could someday soon give them nuclear weapons. Can we trust the

Iranian Government not to use those weapons against Israel, a country

that their President has blatantly stated should be ``wiped off the

map'', or Europe, or elsewhere around the world? No, I do not believe

we can trust their Government to live peacefully with nuclear weapons.

And our presence in the Middle East, along with success in Iraq, will

go a long way to prevent that and keep the Iranian Government

contained.

To those who contend that the United States does not have a very real

interest in the Middle East and in a stable Iraq, I would say you are

wrong. We have both security and economic interests in this part of the

world and we cannot ignore that fact. I have been actively engaged in

our Nation's energy debates to break our dependency on foreign oil.

However, I recognize that this is not a problem that can be achieved

over night. Our Nation has a real dependency on Middle Eastern oil, and

a destabilized Iraq or a Middle East dominated by Iran would cause

serious turmoil in the world's oil market and the economies of the

United States and the world. I am working very hard to move our economy

away from this dependency on foreign oil, and move towards more

domestic production; but I also realize that if we leave Iraq before it

can be stabilized and allow the Middle East to fall into the hands of

radical fundamentalists, our economy will be in very real trouble.

We live in very serious times, a world where our enemies do not

observe internationally recognized sovereign boundaries or governments,

but instead choose to rule by terror and fear. If we allow these

tactics to govern our way of life instead of standing up to them, we

are essentially inviting the fight to our own backyard. We have the

battleground established and we are taking the fight to our enemies;

yet we are being pushed by the Democrats to pull back from the fight,

come home to our shores, and hope that our enemies do not cross the

oceans and follow us home. In our modern world, the vast Pacific and

Atlantic Oceans are not the barriers they once were, and we need to

ensure we do not end up fighting our enemies at home, when we could

fight them abroad.

I would like to close by saying, again, unequivocally, that I believe

the vote yesterday to retreat from Iraq was a serious mistake. Our

enemies now look upon the United States as a country with no resolve, a

country that will cut and run when things get tough. That, I firmly

believe, is a very dangerous message for this country to be sending to

our enemies and our friends. The Congress has a responsibility to

conduct oversight over wars and to provide the necessary funding for

our soldiers; but Congress does not have, nor should it have, the

responsibility to dictate war strategies and tactical decisions. Those

decisions should and must be left to the Commander in Chief and our

expert military commanders. The President has made very clear that this

bill will be vetoed, and I will vote to uphold that veto. The Senate

cast a dangerous precedent yesterday with a vote to play general in

war, and I hope that future Congresses choose not to go down this path.

Mr. President, the senior Senator from Washington, the manager of the

bill, and I have worked cooperatively together over the last several

years for VA funding. But as to the VA funding that is in this bill,

while I am not going to quibble with the amount, I am going to discuss

with you for a moment what it does and how it does it.

Before I explain to my colleagues the amendment I was going to

offer--amendment No. 672 that the majority will disagree with, and I

will not offer that amendment--I wish to talk about the context of what

is being offered. Does that sound technical? Well, it is, and it is

not.

Under the current appropriations law, VA's health care system is

funded through three separate accounts: the medical services, the

medical administration, and the medical facilities accounts. That may

sound simple

enough. However, similar to a lot of things in health care, it is not

simple at all.

Consider paying a chief of radiology at a VA hospital. You might say:

Well, he is a health care provider and, therefore, should be paid out

of the medical services account. However, some of what a chief does--

monitoring credentials, overseeing reviews, ordering equipment, et

cetera--is administrative in character. So some portion of his salary

is literally charged to that account.

That is not simple accounting. It is literally two financial

transactions from two separate accounts--just to pay one person's

salary.

VA has tens of thousands of employees just like this one who must be

paid out of at least two accounts. How cumbersome is this three-account

structure? Consider this: Prior to the enactment of the three-account

structure that we currently operate under, about 5 years ago, VA

averaged 25,000 financial transactions each year to run its health care

system--25,000 transactions.

Since we enacted the three-account structure, VA is averaging 70,000

transactions per year in operating the same system. I know some of my

colleagues believe that three accounts help Congress better track VA

spending in certain areas. However, we can track spending very

effectively through VA's budgeting process; we do so on a quarterly

basis today, and we are doing it effectively. We do not need 70,000

financial transactions to do that.

When you are talking bureaucracy, folks, this has become one of the

biggest bureaucracies of the Federal Government. What is being offered

in this supplemental is simply going to make it more bureaucratic.

Unfortunately, the legislation before us would exacerbate the

problems associated with the three-account structure. That is because

the bill carves out more accounts for specific types of care or care to

specific populations.

For example, while the bill provides $454 million for the medical

services account, it requires that VA ``quarantine'' $202 million of

that money for use only in treating veterans of OIF and OEF. Further,

the bill requires that $100 million be fenced off and used only for

mental health care, $30 million only for substance abuse treatment, and

$20 million on readjustment counseling.

That all sounds great. But here is the problem: The problem is that

as the money makes its way down to the VA facilities in all our States,

be it in Spokane or Walla Walla or Boise, ID, all the States and local

managers will be confronted with the task of trying to find out which

account to charge when, for example, providing care to an OIF veteran

for substance abuse treatment and anger management counseling.

Which account do I charge? If I charge the wrong account, I

complicate the process. Does that visit get charged to an OIF or an OEF

account? The mental health account? The substance abuse account? The

readjustment counseling account? Who knows?

Under what is happening tonight, we are complicating that process

dramatically, and the issue goes on and on.

I respect very much the right of Congress to give direction to the

executive branch on how to spend the public's money. But I would

respectfully suggest that specificity of this type in the operations of

a health care system belongs more appropriately in report language, not

in bill language.

I realize that this is a small amount of money in the larger scheme

of a $36 billion VA budget. But, it sets a precedent for funding that I

believe is wrong and we must stop. Unfortunately, Republicans have been

complicit in this type of budgeting already--over my objections.

A few years ago, the House of Representatives sent the Senate an

Appropriations bill that required at least $2.2 billion of VA's overall

budget be spent on mental health treatment. In spite of my private

objections to the Appropriations Committee at the time, that language

was retained. Congress just had to show it cared about mental health

treatment.

Well, here we are now carving out money not just for mental health

care, but also substance abuse, blind rehabilitation, readjustment

assistance, et cetera.

Where does it end? I think it should end here. If we do not stop this

type of appropriating, we are very soon going to find ourselves

inundated with special funding requests for ``politically popular''

types of health care. What we must remember is that VA clinicians

provide comprehensive medical services to all of their patients--even

the kind that isn't considered ``politically special care''.

We simply should not get in the business of feeding the politics of

health care by carving out specific accounts for certain types of care.

I realize it is good politics. But it is bad government and very bad

medicine. And it creates even more complications with the actual

financial operations of the VA health care system. We will soon

approach 100,000 transactions to do the same job.

I urge my colleagues to stop this bad trend from continuing.

Mr. President, the reality is, I was not going to change the money; I

was simply going to simplify the process. To be politically correct, we

are making this process so complicated the question is: What account do

I charge so I am not in violation of the law?

I yield the floor.