Madam President, I wish to begin by stating very simply

that this amendment is literally, not figuratively, a matter of life

and death. I have been here for many years. I have never begun a

discussion of an amendment--and I have sponsored some serious

amendments and pieces of legislation--by saying something as graphic

and drastic as this is literally a matter of life and death. But it is.

This is not hyperbole. This is not an exaggeration.

What my amendment will do is allow the military to put 2,500 more

mine resistant ambush protected vehicles--known in the military by its

acronym, MRAP--in the field by the end of this year.

Now, let me explain what I am talking about. First, I want to point

out that the committee acknowledged the need for these vehicles and

included $2.5 billion in this bill. But what I propose in this

amendment is forward-funding money from next year's 2008 budget into

this supplemental. In that way, we can build more of these vehicles

which have one purpose--the specific purpose of saving lives, American

lives.

The fact is, as most of my colleagues know, 70 percent of American

casualties in Iraq are caused by improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

Many of my colleagues, including the Presiding Officer, have been to

Iraq. They have had the same experience I have in my seven trips--

visiting field hospitals. There, you see amputees and people with

serious head injuries who, because of the incredible skill and triage

capability of our military doctors and nurses, are able to be kept

alive. Most of those injured at Walter Reed and at Bethesda naval

hospital are victims of these devices, sadly now familiar to all

Americans from the nightly news. We have tried very hard--although this

administration has done so belatedly--to better equip our troops to

withstand IEDs. God forbid they find themselves victim of an IED

attack, but if they do, we want them to be able to survive.

MRAP vehicles provide four to five times more protection to our

troops than up-armored HMMWVs. That statement, that these MRAPs provide

four to five times more protection than up-armored HMMWVs, is not my

estimate. That is the judgment of our military leaders. The Commandant

of the Marine Corps, GEN James Conway, with whom I spoke as recently as

this afternoon, wrote on March 1 to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff. He said:

He went on further and said that even though the MRAP is not

expeditionary:

He concluded by saying:

Let me repeat that:

He went on to tell me today that although there is some disagreement

in terms of priorities within this building, he was speaking to me from

the Pentagon, he said, ``I believe this is a moral imperative.''

How many generals with four stars or three or two or one on their

shoulders have you heard use that phrase? How often is something so

fundamental it is called ``a moral imperative''? This is a man who is

heading back out to Iraq soon. He is talking about protecting his kids,

his troops.

On my last trip into Anbar Province last summer, I went to Fallujah.

I met with the commanding Marine general and roughly 30 to 40 of his

commanders and noncommissioned officers. I was taken outside a building

to see what they were trying to do to diminish the casualty rate of

American forces required to patrol Fallujah. They showed me what they

called a rhino, a big vehicle, looks like a Caterpillar bulldozer with

a great big proboscis on it, a great big arm that is used when an IED

is identified, to disarm it. It was interesting. I observed for the

first time--maybe others knew about it--the hull. The bottom of it

looked like a ship out of water. It had a V-shaped bottom. A humvee,

like your SUV or your automobile, has a flat bottom. In a humvee, even

if it is reinforced, it is still flat. The rhino had a V-shaped bottom

or floor. I asked why. They said it made them much more blast resistant

and it could protect the troops inside. That is the first time I heard

about this concept. They did not have MRAPs yet, but they had this

rhino, a much bigger vehicle for a different purpose.

As I talked to them, I remember asking the question, why aren't we

building more of these things? You know, the folks on the ground, these

kids and many not so young women and men who are climbing into these

coffins, know that even in an up-armored vehicle if they are struck,

deadly force may be exerted, scrambling their brains or outright

killing them. The number one requirement of the Commandant of the

Marine Corps is to get more of these vehicles. I respectfully suggest

to all who care--and every one of us cares about the fate of the

troops--if there is any place we should not consider the cost--

emphasize again, not consider the cost--it is when there is a consensus

that what we are purchasing can save lives. We have made no sacrifice

in this country to fight this war except for the families of those who

have gone to the war. We should not hesitate to save the lives of those

who are sacrificing because of cost.

A couple of my colleagues off the floor, none of whom are on the

floor at this moment, have told me it might not be cost effective

because the military is working on a new vehicle. Give me a break. Cost

effective? I wonder how many people asked, when we were talking about

the invasion of Normandy in World War II: You know, we better be

careful. We may build too many landing craft. We might have some left

over. What are we going to do with them after the war?

We have no higher obligation than to protect those we send into

battle. We have received a pretty good dose of this administration's

willingness to send people into battle not prepared. Rumsfeld's famous

comment: You go with the Army you have, not the Army you like or need.

That is paraphrasing him from a couple of years ago. When we find a way

to protect people better in battle, then it seems to me we have an

overwhelming obligation to act.

Let me explain the specifics of the MRAP. Each vehicle can hold 4 to

12 troops. Like the rhino, these vehicles have raised steel, V-shaped

hulls and chassis. The raised hull is valuable because it gives the

blast more time to expand, lessening the impact. The V-shape pushes the

blast up the sides of the vehicle and away from the occupants. With an

up-armored HMMWV or any humvee, the flat bottom sends the blast through

the floor right into the occupants. In addition, the vehicles have side

armor and bulletproof glass, and they also have tires that can be

driven when flat.

Ever since the military began using MRAPs in Iraq, the requirement

has grown, as commanders realize how much better they are at protecting

their personnel. In May of last year the requirement was only 185. By

July, it had risen to 1,185. By November, it had risen to 4,060. By

February of this year, after the supplemental request was submitted, it

rose to 6,738. One month later, the requirement went up again to the

current level of 7,774. At this point everyone in the military agrees,

we need 7,774 MRAPs.

The Marines are the executive agents for this program, meaning they

are

managing it for themselves and the other services. Every service has a

need for the vehicle for explosive ordinance units as well as regular

patrols. The Marines need 3,700 of them. The Army needs 2,500. The Air

Force needs 697. The Navy needs 544, and the Special Operations Command

needs 333. The cost of 7,774 MRAPs is $8.4 billion. This

administration's current plan is to spend $2.3 billion this year and

$6.1 billion next year. But I believe we can and must do much better,

and so do the Marines. If we simply put more funds up front, spend them

in the supplemental rather than allocate them a year later in the 2008

budget, the same money that we are going to spend anyway next year, if

we move it up, we can accelerate production drastically.

Some have said the extra production capacity does not exist. Again,

speaking to the Commandant of the Marine Corps today, he indicated that

there are eight companies they are dealing with and he has confidence

that they can build all they can purchase, all they can afford. That is

also what the Chief of Staff of the Army thinks.

On March 14, General Peter Schoomaker told the Appropriations

Committee that with the MRAPs, ``We can build what we get the funds to

build. It is strictly an issue of money.''

Let's assume the Commandant of the Marine Corps and General

Schoomaker are wrong. Let's assume they have made a mistake. Let's

assume we can't build as many as the money we give them. So what. So

what. We are not talking about building a highway on time. We are

talking about an informed judgment by the United States military, to

build not a new weapons system, but to build a new protection system

for their forces.

I respectfully suggest, if we are going to err on one side or the

other, for God's sake, for a change, let's err on the side of doing

something that will protect American fighting women and men.

Quite frankly, if the Marines believe we can do it, then my money is

on the Marines getting it right. If General Schoomaker says he needs

it, and more money will get the vehicles, then I take him at his word.

I would rather take a chance, and I believe the American people would

also, to protect more Americans under fire than not.

What does this mean specifically? Well, by adding $1.5 billion, which

my amendment does, to the supplemental today, the Marines will have $4

billion to work with. Based on their estimates, that will mean 2,500

vehicles get to the field 6 months sooner than under the current plan.

You may say: What is 6 months? Ten of thousands of lives is what 6

months is. Figure it out: Four to twelve people in 2,500 more vehicles.

Add up the numbers. That's 10,000 to 30,000 Americans. Look at the

casualty rates that come from IEDs striking up-armored HMMWVs. Do the

math, and tell me if their lives are not worth taking a financial risk

to protect.

If we move this money forward, on October 1 of this year, instead of

having only 2,000 MRAPs, we would have 4,500 in the field. On January

1, 2008, instead of 3,500 MRAPs, we would have 6,000 in the field. By

February, we would fulfill the entire requirement, instead of waiting

until next July. We are still going to spend $8.4 billion, but spending

it faster will make a major difference.

If you want to be callous about this, it would also save the American

taxpayers a whole lot of money because for every one of those injured

soldiers who comes back--to put it in Machiavellian terms--who needs a

lifetime of medical care, there are hundreds of thousands of dollars

committed per casualty.

I can find no logical argument for delaying this.

Let me end where I began. This is a matter of life and death. Madam

President, 2,500 more vehicles means literally that 10,000 to 30,000

more Americans will have a four to five times greater chance of

surviving a hit with an IED while on patrol than exists today if we do

not act. Madam President, 10,000 to 30,000 Americans will not be added

to the casualty and death numbers if we move this money up.

To use the phrase of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, at 3 or 4

o'clock today, on the phone with me:

I agree. It is a moral imperative that we protect these troops as

soon as possible.

So tomorrow, when I have my 1 or 2 minutes to speak to this issue

before we vote, I will urge all my colleagues to vote for this

amendment.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.