Madam President, I will take my 10 minutes this morning.

I wanted to speak a little bit about the Iraq supplemental bill which

is really the issue that is pending. We are not going to be able to get

to it today, but nevertheless it is the pending unfinished business.

Despite what the majority leader has indicated, it is too bad we have

not been able to move this forward. The Senate went on Easter recess,

of course. The majority stressed the importance of completing the bill

before the end of March and getting it to the President without delay.

Democrats in the Senate, of course, have blocked votes on the amendment

to supplement the part that we could have--where they indicated they

wanted to speed up the process. Regrettably, we are now on the 64th day

since the President submitted his request to Congress, and we have

still not sent up a bill.

To make matters worse, we don't even have a conference committee in

place to work out the differences between the bill that has been passed

in the Senate and the bill that has been passed in the House. The

Senate is ready for a conference for this bill. The committee of the

conferees has been announced, and they are prepared to get this work

done. On the other hand, the House of Representatives is on recess and

no House conferees. So we are still held up, and will be, on the bill

that is really important and needs to be moved. While our troops at

home and overseas are facing funding uncertainties, the Democratic

House leadership is taking a couple of weeks off. This makes it very

difficult.

We talked about what we are going to accomplish. It is interesting to

accomplish it in the Senate, but it has to go through the House and the

Senate and then to the President to have the impact the bill is

supposed to have. The Speaker of the House should call the Members back

to Washington to complete the supplemental bill and get it to the

President by the end of the week. I would like to associate myself with

the letter that was sent to the Speaker of the House asking her to call

the body back to Washington.

It is important to remind people that our troops did not take the

week off.

Our military leaders are in the best position to know the needs of our

troops. They have left no doubt that the funding is urgent and needed

without strings and pork.

Last week, my staff met with General Mattis and General Lehnert of

the U.S. Marine Corps at Camp Pendleton. For those of you who do not

know General Mattis, he is a straight-shooter, my kind of marine. He

offered a grim assessment of the barracks the marines will be returning

home to. His report concluded that conditions are unacceptable for the

marines and sailors who have just returned from the combat environment.

Repairs and maintenance are needed. The service is ready to act.

Unfortunately, the first items that will be cut when funding begins to

dry up will be this maintenance. So, even though certainly we will have

to get money to the troops, this delay will have an impact on the

troops who are returning. More and more marines and their families will

be seeking counseling, and there will be cuts in the counseling

programs that are available for our returning service people. These

programs may not be available if we do not move forward. Of course, as

I said, it has been 64 days since the start of this issue. Certainly we

need to take care of our marines' mental health and see to it that they

are not living in dilapidated barracks and we are going to have to work

hard to get this done. It is very simple. We can do that.

Over the Easter break, I joined with others welcoming home the

Wyoming Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 300th Field Artillery

Unit. Let me tell you, to get these troops back home was one of the

great events I have seen in a very long time. Like those who came home

before them, I am so proud of their service and their sacrifices. Given

the lack of passage of the supplemental that was submitted to Congress

64 days ago, I am not sure their return would have happened if it had

been scheduled for a few months from now.

Our first and only priority should be the funding to our troops in

the field. Unfortunately, the emergency legislation is larded up with

pork and extraneous measures. Not only does the legislation attempt to

tie the President's hands by micromanaging, but the majority is trying

to push through pet projects at the expense of funding our troops.

When the House does return and finally appoints conferees, I hope

this Congress does the responsible thing and sends the President a

clean bill. Our troops deserve that the Congress give them the funding

they need to succeed.