Madam President, I am proud that the Senate unanimously

passed legislation late last night to extend the Iraqi Special

Immigrant Visa--SIV--Program. This program offers nothing short of a

lifeline for the Iraqi men and women who risked everything supporting

the U.S.' mission in Iraq. Despite the fact that there are thousands of

Iraqis still waiting for their paperwork to be processed, the program

expired last night, and we must take immediate action to renew it.

Given all that is on the line, I am hopeful that even in this difficult

political climate, the House of Representatives will take up and

swiftly pass this bill and we can send it to President Obama for his

signature later today.

Congress created the Iraqi SIV Program in 2008 to allow some of the

tens of thousands of Iraqis who served alongside U.S. troops the

opportunity to seek safety and a new beginning in the United States.

They were our translators and our guides. They were a critical resource

to our troops, helping them navigate complex cultural, political, and

geographic terrain. They literally risked their lives for us. Now, 5

years after the original legislation passed, less than 6,000 of the

25,000 available visas have been distributed, leaving many well-

deserving Iraqi allies in danger and American credibility on the line.

As chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and chairman of the

Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on State Department and Foreign

Operations, I worked hard to see that a reauthorization for the Iraqi

SIV Program is in the National Defense Authorization Act.

Unfortunately, that reauthorization will not pass in time to renew this

vital program. We also made significant efforts to include that

extension in the continuing resolution passed by the Senate last week,

but a congressional stalemate has eroded that path. The only option

that remains is for the House to take up and pass the bipartisan stand-

alone bill immediately.

I am hopeful that we can do just that. I have joined with Members

from both sides of the aisle in the Senate, including Senators Shaheen,

McCain, Grassley, and Graham, as well Members in the House, to resolve

any concerns. We have compromised on the length of the extension and

have covered any costs associated with it. Passage should be quick and

straightforward. Lives are on the line. Our word is on the line, and it

is time to act.

Among the many lessons of the Vietnam war is that we must not abandon

those who risked their lives to help us. We made a commitment, and we

must honor it. We must renew this critical program.