Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about an issue

that seems to be the most pressing of any we have before us; that is,

to fund our troops in Iraq.

I came to the floor on the 64th day following the President's

submission to the Congress of legislation for funding our troops in the

field. I believed it was important that we urge Congress to complete

its work on this legislation immediately. How could there be anything

more pressing than making funding available for our troops? Certainly,

the time is now.

It is now day 77, and we still don't have a bill to send to the

President. It is time we do so. In fact, the conference committee has

not even met. Even though both houses of Congress have passed the

measure, they have yet to come together between the Houses in order to

do something. Our military leaders are people in the best position

to prioritize the needs of our troops. They are the ones who know what

needs to be done and what the timing is. They have left no doubt that

this funding is urgently needed, without arbitrary deadlines or

unrelated pork, both of which are in the bill.

Unfortunately, there are a number of Members who want to call the

shots and micromanage the execution of the war. I understand there are

different views about the war. There are different views about what our

role should be. But the fact is, we are there now. We have had a change

in direction. We have some new ideas, new leadership. But we have the

troops there. They need to be supported financially so they cannot only

do their job, certainly, but protect themselves. If we don't get this

funding to the troops, the first thing to be cut without this

supplemental will be facilities maintenance throughout the services,

particularly the Army.

In addition, counseling programs for both troops and their families

will have to be cut back. As to this idea that there is no hurry, that

we can find the money somewhere else, Members need to be sure they

understand that finding it somewhere else takes it away from someone

else who has earned it, either through service or families of service

people. More and more troops and their families are seeking counseling,

and reducing funding at this critical time certainly needs to be

avoided.

Failing to act immediately will have real-life impacts on military

personnel. I should think we could come to that understanding. I don't

know quite what the timing is seeking to do--apparently, impress on the

President the points of view being made on the other side of the aisle

or whatever. But he has made it clear what he is going to do. We know

that. We know we have to go there and get it vetoed, come back and find

something that is acceptable. All that takes time. All the time we

spend puts more risk on the military and their families.

I believe failing to enact this legislation very soon will have real-

life impacts on our military personnel. I can't find much reason for

that. If we can't take care of our troops' mental health and see that

they aren't living in dilapidated barracks, we will have a hard time

ensuring they are able to fight when the Nation calls. I hope we can

continue to remember what giving these people are doing, what they are

sacrificing. We need, of course, to support them.

It is very simple. If our troops don't have the training to deploy,

then our soldiers and sailors overseas cannot come home, and that is

kind of the situation we are increasingly in now. At this point the

only priority should be funding our troops in the field. Even though we

have other work to do, certainly if we look at priorities, what could

be more important than dealing with the needs of our troops overseas.

I don't know if James Baker would have been any clearer when we

reiterated that the Iraq Study Group report does not set timetables or

deadlines for the troop withdrawal.

James Baker said:

Several months ago the President indicated he would establish a new

direction in Iraq. General Petraeus is back in Washington today to

report on the counterinsurgency plan. Certainly, it isn't doing

everything we want it to yet. It hasn't achieved success yet. But it is

moving in the right direction. We have a change in people. We have a

change in leadership. We have a change in the plan. It has only been 3

months since we installed the general and only 60 percent of the troops

are in place he had wanted and suggested were necessary. Despite these

modest improvements, the other side wants to pack up and admit defeat.

They are also claiming the war is lost, and that is unfortunate,

especially when our troops hear those comments. In any event, I hope

this Congress does what is responsible and sends the President a bill.

Our troops deserve to know Congress will provide them with the funding

they need to succeed.

I wanted to talk on that issue. It is one of the most important we

have. I look forward to proceeding with what will be before us on the

floor now, education. Sharpening up our competitiveness is very

important. I am hopeful we can assure Members that this program with

this money and additional spending will have some impact. As we look at

it, we have lots of programs that are designed to strengthen education,

yet we don't have a very good measurement of whether those dollars are

causing things to happen that we hoped they would.

I look forward to that.