Madam President, today we take up a supplemental bill to

fund our troops in the field, to send a strong message about the

direction of the war in Iraq, to improve the veterans and defense

health care system, to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina rebuild,

to secure the homeland, and to provide emergency relief to farmers

impacted by major drought and freezes. We are now in the fifth year--

the fifth year--of the war, this terrible war.

I was against it. I voted against it. We are there. We are now in the

fifth year of the war in Iraq. The debate about the war has

deteriorated into a series of buzz words--preemptive war, mission

accomplished, exaggerated intelligence, inadequate body armor, and

surges--and on and on. Our job in the Senate is not to look backward

but to look forward.

The Constitution clearly gives the Congress the power--yes, it does;

it clearly gives the Congress, us, the power--to decide when this

Nation should go to war, and it gives Congress the power of the purse,

money. Money talks. Funding such conflicts is the responsibility of the

Senate Appropriations Committee, the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The buck stops here, and don't you ever forget it, the

Senate Appropriations Committee. Because of that power over the purse,

it is certainly our duty to debate the future of the war in Iraq.

The bill before the Senate includes a provision that would give the

war a new direction, and it points the way out--out, out--of the civil

war in Iraq. There is no restriction on funding for the troops--no

restriction on funding for the troops. We fully fund the needs of the

troops. We do that, yes. In fact, the bill provides more funds than the

President requested for the Department of Defense, with an increase of

$1.3 billion for the defense health care system, $1 billion for

equipping the Guard and Reserve, and $1.1 billion for military housing.

The language in the bill narrows the mission of our troops in Iraq,

keeps pressure on the Iraqi Government to meet benchmarks on national

reconciliation, requires the President--yes, hear me now; requires the

President--to send Congress a phased redeployment plan. It sets a goal

for the redeployment of most of the U.S. troops from Iraq by March 31,

2008.

This country was not attacked by Iraq on 9/11. There was not a single

Iraqi, not one, involved in the devastation in New York, Washington,

and Pennsylvania on that fateful day. According to our own Government,

the perpetrators of 9/11, Osama bin Laden and his organization, are

alive today and rebuilding in Afghanistan and Pakistan at this moment,

as I speak, so help me God. Language in this bill would allow the

President to refocus our military and our intelligence on the

terrorists who actually attacked us on 9/11.

During the debate on this bill, assertions will be made, yes, that it

is inappropriate to add to this bill funding to meet domestic needs. In

fact, the White House has claimed that efforts to add funding for our

veterans, for Katrina victims, and for homeland security will hold

hostage the funds for the troops. What nonsense--hear me--nonsense.

Just more buzzwords.

In fact, funding for the war is not the only critical need worthy of

supplemental funding this year. The war must not obliterate every other

concern. Last week, the Director of the Office of Management and

Budget, Rob Portman, said the President would veto the bill if the Iraq

language and additional spending remain in the bill. He said:

humbug--

Politics? Politics? I ask the Senate, is it politics to ensure that

the VA has a health care system that can provide first-rate care for

the wounded? Is it? No. It is a moral imperative--yes, a moral

imperative.

Is it politics to provide critical resources to help the gulf region

rebuild after Hurricane Katrina? Is it? Is it politics? No, it is not

politics. It is compassion--compassion.

Is it politics to help rural America recover from drought and freeze?

Is it? No. It is common sense, do you hear me, common sense and good

economics.

This bill meets some of the most urgent needs of our country. It

includes $1.7 billion to ensure that the VA has the resources it needs

to help the brave men and women wounded in the war. The VA needs

resources in order to provide first-rate care to profoundly wounded,

terribly wounded, horribly wounded soldiers. We are morally bound--hear

me; yes, we are morally bound, aren't we, to care for our wounded

troops. This is not politics. No. Shame. This is not politics; it is

common decency.

This bill also includes $3.3 billion above the administration's

request for the victims of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. The

President proposes to pay for the increased costs of repairing the

existing levees in Louisiana by cutting the funding that Congress

provided to improve the capacity of the levees to protect New Orleans

from future hurricanes. Shame. That makes no sense.

The bill provides new resources to repair the levees. We will not

follow a nonsensical strategy of repairing the existing levee system

that failed during Katrina by cutting funding already appropriated for

actual improvements to the levee system. We will not. We also include

funding for health and education, for law enforcement, and for transit

systems in the gulf region to help rebuild, to bring people back to

work, and to bring the region back to life. Not politics, just plain

old common sense.

The bill includes $4.2 billion for agricultural disaster relief. The

agricultural economy has been hit with drought and freezes. In 2006, 69

percent of all counties in the United States were declared primary or

contiguous disaster areas. Fourteen States had 100 percent of their

counties declared disaster areas by the Department of Agriculture.

I commend Senator Dorgan and Senator Feinstein and Senator Bond for

their hard work on this disaster package.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that a letter from

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger requesting agricultural

disaster assistance be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in

the Record, as follows:

Providing agricultural disaster relief is not politics, no.

It is good policy.

The bill that is before the Senate also includes $2 billion for

securing the homeland. In the State of the Union, the President said:

Despite hundreds of innocent people being killed in train bombings in

London, Madrid, Moscow, Tokyo, and Mombai, India, and despite the

aviation sector remaining at a high terrorist threat level since

August, the President did not request one extra dime--not one thin

dime--in the supplemental for securing the homeland. This bill includes

funding for purchasing explosive detection systems for our airports,

for grants to help secure our rail and transit systems, and for

securing our ports and borders. The money is needed now.

For 5\1/2\ years, since the attack on 9/11, this administration has

raised fears of another terrorist attack. The administration has

announced a high, or orange, threat level for possible terrorist

attacks on eight different occasions. In every State of the Union

Address, the President has stoked the fires of fear. Periodically, the

Attorney General, the Secretary of Homeland Security, or the FBI

Director helped to fan those flames. Yet the President consistently

sends to Congress budgets for homeland security that do not reflect

this perceived threat. Rather than spreading fear, the administration

should be reducing vulnerabilities by doing everything it can to deter

another attack. Providing funding to secure the homeland is not

politics; it is an essential duty.

The President's ``rob Peter to pay Paul'' approach to funding

domestic agencies has real and demonstrably severe consequences. The

failed response to Hurricane Katrina proved that. The inability to

provide first-class health care to our wounded veterans proved that.

But we never learn.

Another important aspect of this bill is in the oversight and

accountability that it mandates. For far too long--far too long--

oversight has been a lost cause, yes, around this Congress. Tough

questions are ditched in favor of softballs. Honest answers are buried

in political spin. This legislation says ``no more.'' Real oversight is

back, and it will not be denied. This legislation makes major

investments in inspectors general, from the Special Inspector General

for Iraq Reconstruction to inspectors general for the Department of

State, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Justice. Let's

hope we can begin to get the waste, fraud, and abuse in Government

under control. The legislation presses forward with GAO audits of the

use of these dollars as we try to put an end to the contractors'

bonanza of big dollars free from the prying eyes of Congress or the

public. Insisting that U.S. tax dollars are wisely spent is not

politics. What is it? It is our duty. Hear me. It is our duty.

The Appropriations Committee has made careful choices. The White

House assertion that spending in this bill is excessive or extraneous

or political--humbug. It simply has no foundation. The committee has

chosen to provide first-rate care to the war wounded, to provide

resources to help the gulf region rebuild after Katrina, to improve

homeland security, and to provide agricultural disaster assistance.

This is a good bill. I urge prompt action on this legislation.

Madam President, I yield the floor.