Mr. President, I strongly support legislation that would

increase the number of visas available for Iraqi and Afghan

translators.

America has a strong obligation to keep faith with the Iraqis and

Afghans who have worked so bravely with us--and have often paid a

terrible price for it. Translators have been the eyes and ears of our

military, and they have saved American lives. They now have a target on

their backs because of their service to our country, and we need to

protect them by granting them safe refuge in the United States.

Under the current program, only 50 translators a year from Iraq and

Afghanistan are eligible for admission to the United States. So far

this year, we have already admitted 50, and 450 more are waiting for

admission under the program. At the current rate, that is a 9-year

backlog.

These men and women are in mortal danger every day and they should be

permitted to come to the United States without delay. They have been

recommended by the American military. The Department of Homeland

Security agreed that they are eligible for admission to the United

States. To ensure that these courageous allies are able to come to America this year, the

Lugar-Kennedy bill authorizes 500 visas a year for the current fiscal

year 2007 and for the next 2 years so that this critical lifeline will

continue to be available. Under the bill's provisions, persons who

served as translators or interpreters either for our military or for

the Department of State can qualify.

The bill is not intended to address the much broader massive refugee

crisis unfolding in Iraq. Already more than 2 million Iraqis have fled

the country, and nearly 2 million more have been displaced internally.

Each refugee is a personal story of courage, loyalty, heroism, and

tragedy. We have a special duty to protect all of them and their loved

ones who are being targeted by insurgents and sectarian death squads

either because of their faith or because of their association with the

United States. Obviously, we cannot take all of these refugees into

America, but we have an obligation to lead an international effort to

solve this dangerous crisis as well.

Legislation is essential to address this problem, and I am hopeful we

can enact it soon. But it is especially urgent that we act now to

protect the lives of the translators who have served us so well in Iraq

and Afghanistan.