Madam President, I come to the floor today to express

my deep disappointment and the disappointment of so many people in my

State with the President's expected decision to veto the supplemental

funding bill delivered to him by the bipartisan majority in Congress.

This bill provided our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan with all the

equipment and the resources they need to continue the duties they have

been so bravely performing for more than 4 years. The amount

appropriated by Congress rose well above the amount the President

requested to give our soldiers on the battlefield. Let it be clear:

Congress has given our soldiers on the battlefield all the funding they

need. It is the President who will now be blocking it.

A few weeks ago, I was driving in Minnesota. It was a beautiful

spring day outside of Ortonville, MN, and as has happened too many

times in my short time as a Senator, I called one of the mothers of the

Minnesota soldiers who died in this war. Of the 22,000 troops the

President has included in this surge, 3,000 of them are Minnesota Guard

and Reserves who were expected to come home in January and February and

now have been extended. Now the moms I am calling are the moms of these

soldiers who would have been home in January or February.

I asked this mother: How are you doing?

She said: You know, people keep asking me that, and I don't really

know what to say. Do you have any ideas about what I should say?

I thought, and I told her: Well, I can tell you what all the other

mothers have been saying. They have been saying that they wake up every

morning and they try hard to hang together for their family, and then

something happens. They see a picture or they remember something, and

they are never the same for the rest of the day. They have their good

moments, but their lives will never be the same.

I told her that her son stood tall, and that now is the time for

people in Washington to stand tall.

After 4 years of extensive American military involvement in Iraq, the

President refuses to accept the prudent change of course recommended by

the bipartisan Iraq Study Group and supported by a clear majority of

the American people. By passing this bill, we in Congress fulfilled our

constitutional duties to, first, continue funding for America's Armed

Forces in harm's way and, second, to ensure that our Government pursues

policies in the best interests of our soldiers and of our Nation.

As we work with the President in the days and weeks and months to

come, we must continue to advocate for the necessary changes in our

strategy in Iraq. It is with this spirit that we in Congress continue

to reach out to the President for a responsible change of course in

Iraq.

Last month, I visited Baghdad and Fallujah. I saw firsthand the

bravery and commitment of our troops. The very best thing we can do for

these young men and women is not only give them the equipment they

deserve but to get this policy right. This means sending a clear

message to the Iraqi Government that we are not staying there

indefinitely. This means, as recommended by the bipartisan Iraq Study

Group, that we begin the process of redeploying our troops, with the

goal of withdrawing combat forces by next year, while acknowledging

that some troops may remain to train the Iraqi police and special

forces to provide security for those who remain and to conduct special

operations. This means not a surge in troops but a surge in diplomacy

and economy and Iraqi responsibility.

When I was over in Baghdad and Fallujah, I saw many things, including

the bravery of our troops. I was struck a few weeks later when another

delegation of people from Congress went there, and one of the

Congressmen returned and said he had been visiting a market there. He

said it reminded him of a farmers market in Indiana.

Those are not the enduring memories of my trip to Iraq. My most

enduring memory is standing on the tarmac in the Baghdad Airport with

nine firefighters from the Duluth National Guard, who called me over to

stand with them while they saluted as six caskets draped in the

American flag were loaded onto a plane. As every casket was loaded on,

they saluted. They were standing tall for their fallen soldiers that

day. Now is our time for Congress to stand tall. Our troops have done

everything they have been asked to do. They have deposed an evil

dictator, and they gave the Iraqi people the opportunity to vote and

establish a new government. It is now the Iraqi Government's

responsibility to govern.

But stability and progress in Iraq depend on the political reforms

Iraqi leaders have promised many times yet failed to deliver. After 4

years, despite many promises, Iraq has yet to approve a provincial

election law. After 4 years, despite many promises, Iraq has yet to

approve a law to share oil revenues. After 4 years, despite many

promises, Iraq has yet to approve a debaathification law to promote

reconciliation. After 4 years, despite many promises, Iraq has yet to

approve a law reining in the militia. Our men and women in uniform

cannot deliver these kinds of reforms to Iraq. This is up to the Iraqis

themselves.

As the bipartisan Iraq Study Group recommended, Iraqi leaders must

pay a price if they continue to fail to make good on key reforms they

have promised the Iraqi people. After 4 years, what have we gotten?

Benchmarks

without progress, promises without results, claims of accountability

without any consequences. Why should we expect the Iraqi leaders to do

any better when they know the President continues to accept their

excuses for inaction and fails to impose any penalties for their lack

of progress.

That is why the bipartisan Iraq Study Group made clear that ``if the

Iraqi government does not make substantial progress toward the

achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security, and

governance, the United States should reduce its political, military, or

economic support for the Iraqi government.'' That report was issued 5

months ago. Meanwhile, the President has simply stayed the course he

has continued to pursue for the past 4 years and, not surprisingly,

little progress has been achieved in Iraq. The Iraqi Government will

understand and finally take responsibility only when it is crystal

clear to them that our combat presence is not indefinite and that

American combat troops are going to leave. That is the responsible

change of course we in Congress are seeking. The American people are

looking to their leaders in Washington at both ends of Pennsylvania

Avenue to work together to get this policy right.

Two weeks ago, I went to the White House and met with the President,

along with three other Senators, including two Republicans. I

appreciated the time he took to honestly discuss our points of

agreement and disagreement on the war. I told him that now is the time

to forge cooperation with our Democrats in Congress. But the President

has chosen instead to veto this bill.

As we move forward on the funding of this war, we in Congress will do

nothing that threatens the safety of American soldiers in the field.

But we must continue to fulfill our constitutional duty to exercise

oversight of American policies in Iraq. A critical part of this

oversight must be demanding accountability for the way in which funds

are spent on the reconstruction projects in Iraq.

For the past 4 years, the administration has demanded--and received--

a blank check to spend in Iraq. Now we are seeing the consequences of

this lack of planning, management, and responsibility.

On Monday, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction

released a report that details widespread failures in the most basic

reconstruction projects. The report finds that, in many cases, Iraq's

infrastructure and utility systems are worse off than they were before

the war.

On closer inspection, it turns out that even projects which were

declared ``success stories'' were considerably less than that. In fact,

seven out of eight of these projects which were called success stories

were not operating properly due to plumbing and electrical failures,

improper maintenance, possible looting, and the fact that expensive

equipment was available but never used.

Prior to the 2003 invasion, Iraq's power system produced 4,500

megawatts a day. Today, the same system produces 3,832 megawatts a day.

In Baghdad, the city enjoys an average of 6.5 hours of electricity a

day. A year ago, Baghdad received 8 hours of electricity a day. Before

the war, the city received an average of 16 to 24 hours a day.

Congress has provided $4.2 billion for reconstruction of Iraq's power

system, and the result has been a more than 50 percent decrease in the

length of time the citizens of Baghdad have access to electricity on

any given day.

Congress has provided nearly $2 billion to provide clean drinking

water and repair sewer systems. But according to the World Health

Organization, 70 percent of Iraqis lack access to clean drinking water.

The Defense Department has estimated that the unemployment rate in

Iraq is anywhere between 13.6 percent to 60 percent. In a recent

survey, only 16 percent of Iraqis said their current incomes met their

basic needs.

So after 4 years, we are facing a security situation that continues

to deteriorate, an economic situation that continues to stagnate, and a

reconstruction effort that cannot provide even the most basic services.

My colleagues and I have been asking the difficult questions and

demanding answers from this administration. The supplemental bill

demonstrates that Congress is reclaiming its rightful role in setting

Iraq policy and, more broadly, in our system of government. The

President's veto only strengthens our resolve.

Madam President, I also wish to speak briefly in support of a few

other provisions in this bill that I believe respond to critical

challenges our Nation faces and that the administration has deemed

unnecessary.

The White House and many of my friends on the other side of the aisle

have argued that this bill should not contain funding for anything

other than the current war. If we were sacrificing funding for our

troops in order to meet domestic priorities, I would agree. But having

given our troops all they need and continuing to ignore crises at home

would be irresponsible.

Veterans funding is one of the key parts of this bill. This bill adds

an increase in veterans funding that was long overdue. In the last 2

years in my State, veterans would come up to me--particularly from the

Iraq and Afghanistan wars--and they would tell me about how they had

difficulty getting treatment. They clearly had mental health issues. I

didn't know if there was truth to this. I wasn't sure, because of the

state of their minds, whether this was true. Then I got here, and I

started looking at the numbers.

In 2005, the Department of Defense estimated that about 24,000

soldiers coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan would need health care.

The actual number is four times that amount. Last year, they were

87,000 soldiers short in their estimate of how many soldiers would need

help coming back from this war. Now I know why those people were

wandering around asking for help. It is because they weren't getting

the help they deserve.

Another critical problem that has been ignored by this

administration--and one that is particularly important to the people of

my State--has been the tremendous damage recent national disasters have

been inflicting on our farmers and ranchers. The supplemental spending

bill was a combination of a 2-year effort to secure disaster assistance

for America's farmers. Minnesota farmers have been hit with heavy

losses for 2 consecutive years--storms and flooding in 2005 and, again,

drought in 2006. All told, they lost more than $700 million in crop and

livestock losses.

The supplemental funding would have provided $3.5 billion to

compensate farmers for a portion of their crop and livestock losses

over the past 2 years. Our farmers have waited too long for this

disaster relief. I am deeply disappointed that the President has turned

his back on the urgent need for their assistance.

The bill we sent to the President of the United States provided the

resources and support our soldiers need on the battlefield and after

they return home. A few months ago, I attended a funeral of one of the

brave men who was killed in the line of duty. The priest stood up, and

he said to the thousand people in the cathedral: You know, this was a

good kid. He was 6 feet 2 inches tall, but he was still our child.

When we send our kids to war and they are 6 feet tall, they are still

our kids and they are standing tall. We need to stand tall.

The traumatic brain injury victims I have seen at the veterans

hospital in Minnesota, even in their wheelchairs, are standing tall.

Those moms whom I talked to on the phone, as they struggle every day

just to get out of bed to deal with the loss of their kids who were

killed in this war, are standing tall.

Now it is time for the President of the United States to stand tall.

Madam President, I yield the floor.