Mr. President, I do want to start our morning

business time to talk about the President's speech last night, when he

was talking to those wonderful soldiers at Fort Bragg, NC, and laying

out for the American people not only the victories and the successes we

are having in Iraq but also talking about the hard pull that we are

making, that those soldiers are making.

I thought the President's candor was refreshing. He did not say: This

is all hunky-dory. He said this is a long, hard road. He said: In the

beginning, I said it would be. It has certainly proven to be. I think

he was candid about exactly where we are, that we have had some great

successes, and we have had some setbacks. Certainly, the vote of the

Iraqi people was a huge success. That has set the stage for the next

phase of trying to secure Iraq and making a difference in the Middle

East.

When people talk about what is happening in Iraq, I do not think we

hear enough about how much better off the Iraqi people are today. Oh,

yes, it is hard to see suicide bombers taking innocent lives. It is.

But remember how many innocent lives were taken by Saddam Hussein.

When Saddam Hussein was taking innocent lives, there was no hope for

those people. There was no way out. Today innocent lives are being

taken, but they are not being taken in vain. They are being taken in a

cause for freedom that will end in democracy for Iraq. That is what the

President laid out last night. The President has taken the Iraqi people

from a despot who was torturing and killing innocent people--sometimes

for sport--and is turning Iraq into a country that is trying to get its

own feet on the ground and establish the roots of democracy.

When I look at some of the improvements that are being made in Iraq

that I hear about from our armed services personnel returning from

Iraq--and I have been to Iraq, but I always like to talk to the people

who have been there most recently--when I talk to the young men and

women on their R&R leave in the middle of their term, then I see that

there are roads being built. The oil industry is being repaired. The

electricity grids are being restored and improved. Schools are being

opened. The Iraqis see Americans teaching in the schools and providing

medical care, rebuilding their infrastructure. Within

a year after the fall of Saddam Hussein, electricity generation was

higher than prewar levels, and it has increased since then. Water

supplies have been repaired and sewage systems have been fixed. It is

incredible the progress that has been made.

We have to look at the big picture. What the President was saying

last night is that we are on the cusp of beginning to show people

throughout the Middle East that self-governance is something all people

can achieve. We are beginning to see the seeds of that self-governance

today.

Our distinguished assistant leader, Senator McConnell, is here. I

want him to have his full 5 minutes, so I will close my remarks.

I am proud that our President especially chose to go to Fort Bragg,

NC, and give his report to the American people in front of those

wonderful soldiers who are protecting freedom for America, just as

those in World War I and World War II did. The people of America will

stay the course. We will protect freedom for our children, and we are

being led by our President to do so.

I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Alaska. He

has been such a strong leader as chairman of the Appropriations

Committee and chairman of the Defense Appropriations Committee as well.

No one knows better how the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are

performing their duties and how this administration has stepped up to

the plate to make sure they have what they need to do the job. He has

been to Iraq and Afghanistan. He has visited the troops, as have I, and

his words were very helpful in talking to the American people about

this subject.

Mr. President, as we begin this day, we are also going to have a very

important amendment that will help our veterans be able to have the

service they need as they are coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan, as

well as many of the veterans of previous wars who are now in the

Veterans' Administration system.

Secretary Jim Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, came to the

Congress just this past week and said that there has been a surge in

the use of veterans facilities that has caused the ability to determine

what will be needed in the future to be skewed. All of the patterns of

the past are now not in place for use today because we have more

veterans coming into the system. That is not a bad thing.

We owe the veterans the care they thought they would receive when

they entered the military service and which they so richly deserve.

Whether they fought in a war or not, they were there to serve, and many

of them did fight in wars--brutal wars. The one we are in now is a

brutal war. There are actually more injuries and fewer deaths in the

kind of war that we are fighting. That means that many people are

coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan injured.

Our President has said unequivocally that we are going to take care

of those people who have served, and we are going to treat their

injuries because they deserve to have that treatment. So Secretary

Nicholson has come to us and asked for an emergency appropriation. We

are going to give Secretary Nicholson, of course, an emergency

appropriation.

Senator Murray and Senator Byrd are working on an amendment. I have a

second-degree amendment with Senators Santorum, Kyl, and Craig. It is a

leadership amendment because we put it together with the White House,

the OMB, and the Veterans Affairs Department, to try to get the

numbers. We wanted to know what we will need for this year, going into

next year.

I am chairman of the Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. I

have worked with Senator Craig, who is the chairman of the Veterans'

Affairs Committee, which authorizes the policies that affect veterans.

We have put together a second-degree amendment to Senator Murray's and

Senator Byrd's amendment that will put $1.5 billion into the system

immediately, and it will be there until it is spent. It will take us

into the next fiscal year, because we are not going to scrimp on

serving our veterans. We need more prostheses; we need improved ability

to help people who have lost arms or legs, or who have been burned. We

are going to provide that help, Mr. President, and our amendment is

going to be a consensus that will come together with everybody at the

table.

We are going to do the right thing by our veterans with an emergency

appropriation that will come to the Senate floor this afternoon. It

will be put on the Interior appropriations bill. We worked with Senator

Burns and his staff to put this emergency in at the first possible

vehicle, and the first vehicle is on the Senate floor today. We just

got the numbers this week. That is why we are going to immediately put

in force an emergency appropriation that will assure that our Veterans'

Administration has the funds it needs to treat these veterans. It also

is going to assure that we don't take from the building funds because

we know there are many veterans facilities in the process of being

built or promised to be built. We need more veterans facilities, not

fewer. So taking from maintenance accounts or capital accounts didn't

seem like the right thing to do.

We worked together with the Veterans' Administration, with the

leadership of our President, with Democrats and Republicans, to come up

with the right numbers to put it on the first bill that will go through

the Senate this week. We hope the House will work with us to fund this

appropriation and that nothing will be, in any way, delayed or denied

to a veteran, either one coming back from Iraq or one coming back from

Afghanistan or from anywhere in the world, or a veteran who has served

previously.

Mr. President, I so appreciate the President's speech last night. I

appreciate that he gave his speech at Fort Bragg, NC, in front of those

men and women serving our country in the most noble way. I appreciate

that the President said we hope more people will volunteer for the

Army. We need more volunteers right now. We are ramping up the end

strength of the Army by 30,000. This is part of our ongoing effort to

revamp the Army. The Army is doing a fabulous job in Iraq. So are the

Marines. The Navy and the Air Force are helping. But we need to have

America come together.

I was so pleased that the President asked Americans to do something

next week, on July 4, Independence Day. He asked every American to

reach out to a family of someone serving today in Iraq or Afghanistan.

I know the people of America will respond. I know they will go to that

Web site and start the process of finding out how they can do more to

give those young men and women with boots on the ground overseas

fighting terror the opportunity to talk to their folks back home, to

talk to their families.

The President is taking the lead, and the Senate--Republicans and

Democrats--must come together to lead our country to do the right thing

in the war on terror.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.