Mr. President, I am here to speak on the floor today

because American lives, American security, and America's future are on

the line in Iraq. The American people know it. They sent a clear

message last November. The Iraq Study Group has told us. They gave us

honest assessments and recommendations to move forward in Iraq.

Generals have spoken out.

The numbers speak for themselves. More than 3,300 Americans have died

in Iraq and nearly 25,000 have been wounded. A few days ago, 9 more

U.S. soldiers were killed in a bombing, and 20 more U.S. troops and an

Iraqi soldier were injured.

Americans have heard the military experts, they have heard the Iraq

Study Group, they have seen the sacrifice of our troops and their

families, and now they are demanding a change in course. But, sadly,

the President refuses to listen. He is ignoring the military experts,

the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, and the American people.

It is clear the Iraqi civil war requires a political solution, not a

military solution. Our service members have done everything we have

asked them to do. They deserve better than to be stuck in the middle of

a civil war.

Four years into this war--starting the fifth year--the President is

still tossing around heated rhetoric while trying to convince the

American people that Democrats do not support the troops. I reject that

rhetoric, and I call on him to put politics aside and begin to put our

troops first. We can all agree, it is long past time for that.

Now is the time to show our troops we support them with the funds and

supplies and armor they need but that we also support them enough to

change direction when the current course simply is not working.

Now is the time to show our troops we respect our military, and we

refuse to decimate the world's finest fighting forces through extended

deployments, limited time at home, and the destruction of valuable

equipment in another country's civil war.

Now is the time to show our troops their lives mean more than an

open-ended commitment to an Iraqi Government that has repeatedly failed

to meet deadlines and take ownership for their own future.

Now is the time to show our troops we understand that America needs

them, not in the middle of an Iraqi civil war but in places such as

Afghanistan, where al-Qaida is growing in strength.

And now is the time to show our troops their Government is about more

than promises and rhetoric. We must stand together to say we will meet

the needs of our injured service members and our veterans who have paid

the price for this administration's failure to plan for the war and its

aftermath.

Congress is moving forward now to pass a supplemental bill that shows

our troops they come first. All the President has to do is sign on the

dotted line. Unfortunately, because the Bush administration failed to

plan and failed to understand the centuries' old tensions in this

region, we now, more than ever, need a political and diplomatic

solution in Iraq.

As the past 2 months have brutally revealed, the escalation is not

working. The civil war has intensified and our troops are stuck in the

middle of sectarian violence and find themselves the target of

insurgent attacks. It is hard to argue that the situation on the

ground--both for our troops and for Iraqis--has gotten better.

It is time to transition our mission in Iraq from that of policing a

civil war. Our troops are trained for combat, not for refereeing

warring factions with a long and complex history. It is time to focus

on strengthening America's security and bringing our troops home.

Transitioning the mission should center on three realistic and

achievable goals for our military: Training and equipping Iraqi

security forces, conducting targeted counterterrorism operations, and

protecting our remaining U.S. forces and interests in Iraq.

The second part of the equation is a surge in diplomatic and

political efforts. This is a necessary task the President has refused

to undertake. America alone does not own the keys to Iraq's future.

Iraq's neighbors must help as well. They should play a larger role in

training the Iraqi military and police and in reconstruction. They

should play a larger role in convincing Iraqis they must make

compromises and take responsibility for their future. Without a

targeted and serious regional effort to stabilize Iraq, the country's

future will remain in question.

The cause of continued insecurity and destruction has not been our

military, but, rather, the political and policy failures of a President

who has hid in his bunker and stubbornly refused to pursue a strategy

needed to bring stability to Iraq.

As we all saw vividly in November, the American people have lost

patience with the President's go-it-alone strategy. It is simply

wrongheaded to continue on with an open-ended commitment to an Iraqi

Government that has repeatedly failed to meet deadlines and to take

responsibility for their own country.

The supplemental bill we will send to the White House requires the

President to send a report to Congress by July 1 of this year

certifying whether Iraq is meeting responsible benchmarks. The American

people deserve to know if the sacrifices made by our troops are being

met by the Iraqi Government.

Specifically, the American people deserve to know if the Iraqi

Government has given U.S. and Iraqi security forces the authority to

pursue all extremists, including the Sunni insurgents and the Shia

militias.

The American people deserve to know if Iraq is making substantial

progress in delivering necessary Iraqi security forces for Baghdad and

protecting those forces from political interference.

We deserve to know if Iraq is intensifying efforts to build balanced

security forces throughout Iraq that provide evenhanded security for

all Iraqis.

Specifically, we deserve to know if the Iraqi Government is making

substantial progress in meeting reconciliation initiatives, including

enacting laws to equitably share oil revenue

among all Iraqi regions, whether they are adopting laws for provincial

and local elections, whether they are reforming their laws banning

members of the Baath party from public service, and whether they are

shouldering the cost of reconstruction through allocation of oil

revenue.

Those are reasonable benchmarks Americans should require of Iraq if

we are asking our young Americans to put their lives on the line. That

is why Congress is about to send this supplemental request to the White

House with language that begins the phased redeployment of our troops

no later than October 1 of this year, with a goal of removing all

combat forces by April 1, 2008--with the exception of those who will

remain to train and equip Iraqi security forces, to continue targeted

counterterrorist operations, and to protect our remaining U.S. forces.

From sending our troops to war without critical armor, to housing

them in squalor at Walter Reid, to leaving them to fend for themselves

when they need mental health care, the Bush administration has utterly

failed our service members, our veterans, and their families.

As we rightfully change the mission of our troops in Iraq and prepare

to redeploy, we cannot--and we must not--forget about our veterans when

they come home. Nowhere is that failure more apparent than in the

handling of what will one day become known as the signature wound of

this war: traumatic brain injury. It is now estimated that 10 percent

of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have suffered traumatic brain injury

during their service in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the biggest

problems with traumatic brain injury, or TBI, is that it is an unseen

wound. Often, because of that, it is misdiagnosed. In too many cases

today, unless a service member is involved in an IED incident and is

bleeding, he or she is not documented as even having been involved in

that explosion, if he was 100 yards away or 200 yards away. So as a

result, the actual number of OIF and OEF veterans with TBI could be

even much higher than the statistics today even indicate.

Now, I know many of us are familiar with ABC News anchor Bob

Woodruff's experience with traumatic brain injury. I personally was

moved by Bob's struggle with his injury. His family had unrelenting

hope for his recovery, and their ongoing work toward triumph was so

apparent throughout this horrible situation. Bob Woodruff has seen a

tremendous recovery from his horrendous injury, but I fear the care he

received has not been duplicated today for thousands of other troops

with similar injuries when they have returned home.

He detailed for us several cases of soldiers who were suffering from

injuries, not unlike his own, and the lack of care they received when

they left flagship care centers for our smaller, local hospitals.

Our wounded warriors and our veterans have faced massive budget

shortfalls. They have faced horribly long waiting lines and sickening

hospital conditions. But this administration continues to be reactive

to this problem to this day. It is time for that posture to end. Taking

care of our troops, taking care of our veterans, taking care of their

families has to be a part of the cost of this war.

When it comes to caring for our troops and our veterans, this

administration--from the White House, to the Pentagon, to the

Department of Veterans Affairs--has consistently waited until

conditions reached a critical stage before taking action to remedy

them.

In this supplemental conference report we are sending to the

President, Congress is saying: Enough is enough. We are finally

providing more funding for our troops than even the President himself

has sought. The bill we are sending includes over $100 billion for the

Department of Defense, which I should note is nearly $4 billion more

than the President's request for our troops. We provide critical

funding for vehicles that will help our troops be protected from these

horrible IEDs.

This military has also been brought to the brink by a President who

has, time and again, extended their tours and called upon our National

Guard and Reserve to join combat brigades in Iraq. This supplemental

bill will rebuild our overburdened military and calls for an end to the

deployment of nonbattle-ready troops. It provides $1.8 billion for the

VA to provide first class health care to our wounded and $2.5 billion

for military health care.

For the last 4 years, this administration has conducted this war with

little regard for the tremendous strains it is placing on the VA, on

our veterans, and their families. Today, we are putting an end to their

neglect. The days of ignoring our wounded warriors as a cost of this

war are over.

As the President acknowledged in a speech last September, our

terrorist enemies are more dangerous than ever. On that point, the

President is correct. Unfortunately, he fails to acknowledge that

terrorists are rapidly growing and gathering strength outside of Iraq,

and he fails to acknowledge that having our forces in the middle of a

civil war is making Iraq sap our ability to combat terrorism in other

parts of the globe. It is clear that terrorist cells with heavy anti-

American bents are gaining power and continue to grow in places such as

Afghanistan and Pakistan. If we turn a blind eye to those anti-American

cells and focus only on Iraq, the consequences for America's future

security are dire. By redeploying our forces, we can reconcentrate on

the war on terror. We can devote our resources toward pursuing those

who would do America harm.

As we deal with the situation overseas, we cannot neglect our needs

at home. That is why the supplemental bill provides $1.8 billion for

veterans health care; $20 million to repair Walter Reed Hospital; $6.9

billion to repair the gulf coast after Hurricane Katrina, long past

due; $650 million for the SCHIP children's health program; and $2.25

billion to secure our homeland, a vital need--securing our ports and

borders, transit security, screening for explosives at airports--vital

needs that are included in this bill.

Somehow the White House is claiming that all of those investments are

unnecessary. I think most Americans would disagree. I know most

Americans want us to take care of our citizens at home.

In recent weeks we have heard some false claims about the

supplemental that I want to take a moment to correct. First of all, we

are moving this bill to the President at a rapid pace. In fact, we are

moving even faster than the Republicans did last year and the year

before that.

Secondly, we are doing our job in meeting the needs at home. Anyone

who thinks that domestic needs should be ignored in an emergency

supplemental ought to look at the last four supplementals, all written

and passed by a Republican Congress signed by a Republican President.

The emergency supplementals approved by Republican Congresses in

2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 included funding for domestic needs.

Interestingly, during those years, the President never complained about

domestic funding in supplementals.

As our Government spends billions in Iraq, I believe it is our job to

also meet our needs at home. If the President vetoes this bill, he is

going to have to explain to the American people why he is delaying

funding to our troops overseas, why he is blocking funding to care for

our injured troops, why he is ignoring the will of military experts,

the Iraq Study Group, and the American people. He is going to have to

explain why he is ignoring the needs of our hard-hit communities that

are struggling to recover and why he is standing in the way of security

needs at home that are so critical.

Congress has agreed to a supplemental bill that shows our troops they

come first. The President has repeatedly reminded Congress that he is

the Commander in Chief and he is the one with the authority to make the

military and policy decisions that impact not only our troops and

veterans but the well-being of our gulf coast, our borders, and the

future of America's security. The President is alone in his bunker. If

he truly cares about getting this funding to our troops as soon as

possible and providing them with the supplies and the health care and

direction they deserve, he will quickly sign this bipartisan

supplemental bill.

Mr. President, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is just a short distance from

Capitol Hill, but if the President vetoes this sensible legislation to

give our troops a successful path forward in

Iraq, then he is miles away from the will of the American people whom

he serves.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.