Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for

the quorum call be rescinded.

Mr. President, 3 months ago, the President of the United

States asked Congress to pass an emergency war spending bill that would

provide our brave men and women in uniform with the funds and the

flexibility they need to succeed in what has been called the central

front on the war against al-Qaida in Iraq. Instead, this body helped

pass a bill that substitutes the opinions of politicians for the

judgment of our military commanders. The bill Congress passed was, in

my view, unacceptable, and late. Eighty-five days after the President

had requested the funds on an emergency basis, Speaker Pelosi finally

forwarded the bill to the President yesterday. It was no surprise that

the President vetoed the bill within hours because he had said he

would, and so the outcome was predictable.

The President, in his address to the Nation last night, made it very

clear that it remains his desire to work with Congress to resolve this

matter as quickly and expeditiously as possible. Today, he is holding a

bipartisan meeting with congressional leaders at the White House for

that purpose.

We have known for weeks that this legislation was flawed and that we

would find ourselves in this place--a bill that included a surrender

date, when we tell our enemies we would simply give up, and one larded

with porkbarrel spending in order to secure the votes of recalcitrant

Members who were unwilling to vote for this flawed bill on its merits.

The President outlined these shortcomings last night.

First, he said the bill would mandate an artificial deadline for

troops to begin withdrawing from Iraq. The withdrawal could start as

early as July 1 and would have to start no later than October 1

regardless of the situation on the ground. The language in the bill

defies sound military logic and, I would say, common sense itself. It

makes no sense to tell the enemy when you plan to start withdrawing.

Setting a deadline for withdrawal is setting a date for failure, and it

would be irresponsible. As the President made very clear last night,

setting this deadline for withdrawal would also demoralize the Iraqi

people and encourage the killers across the broader Middle East, such

as al-Qaida, and send a signal that America will not keep its

commitments.

Second, the bill would impose impossible conditions on our commanders

in combat. After forcing most of our troops to withdraw, the bill would

dictate the terms on which the remaining commanders and troops could

engage the enemy. American commanders in the middle of a combat zone

would have to take fighting directions from politicians thousands of

miles away in Washington, DC.

Third, as I mentioned, the bill is loaded with billions of dollars of

nonemergency porkbarrel spending that has nothing to do with fighting

the war on terror and which demeans the importance of this particular

legislation, designed as it is to support our troops who are literally

in harm's way.

Democratic leaders know that many of us in Congress disagree with

their approach and their desire to use this bill as an opportunity to

make a political statement about their opposition to the war. Yet we

know there are not enough votes to override a veto. It is time to put

politics behind us and support our troops with the funds they need.

Some have confused the need to debate, which I agree with, with cause

for delay, which I disagree with. There should be no cause for delay in

getting these emergency funds to our troops, and the debate will indeed

continue.

In February, we began sending the first of the reinforcements that

General Petraeus, the new commander in Iraq, requested. Not all of

these reinforcements have arrived; roughly half of them have. As

General Petraeus said just last week, it will be at least the end of

the summer before we can assess the impact of this new operation, the

Baghdad security plan, or surge. We ought to give General Petraeus's

plan a chance to work.

In the months since our military has been implementing this plan, we

have actually begun to see some important results. General Petraeus

noted that one of the most important indicators of progress is the

level of sectarian violence in Baghdad. He reported that, since

January, the number of sectarian murders has dropped substantially.

Spectacular suicide attacks that have caused great suffering in Iraq

continue because these attacks are largely the work of al-Qaida, the

Sunni extremists--the enemy that everyone agrees we should be fighting,

or at least some say we should be fighting. At the same time, they

would impose arbitrary deadlines, imposing a surrender date on our

troops.

The objective of these al-Qaida attacks is to reignite the sectarian

violence in Baghdad and breaking support for the war here at home. That

was the goal of al-Zarqawi, whom we were fortunate to be able to take

out of the fight, and that is the fight now of the remaining al-Qaida

extremists in Iraq. General Petraeus explained it this way:

It just boggles my mind, Mr. President, for some of us to stand here

on the floor and say we ought to withdraw our troops from Iraq when, in

fact, al-Qaida--the enemy that hit innocent Americans and killed 3,000

of them on September 11, 2001--considers Iraq to be the central front

in their campaign against the West. Al-Qaida's role makes the conflict

in Iraq far more complex than a simple fight between Iraqis. Many also

belong to the same terrorist network, as I said, that attacked us on

September 11, 2001. Were we to leave prematurely, were we to leave a

power vacuum in Iraq, al-Qaida would no doubt, as they did in

Afghanistan earlier, use that power vacuum as an opportunity to

regroup, to plan, to train, to recruit, and then to export additional

terrorist attacks against the United States here on this continent.

We need to give our troops all of the equipment and training and

protection they need to prevail. Without a war funding bill, the

military has to take money from some other account--notably, the Air

Force or Navy--just in order to make sure the Army has the resources

they need, so the troops can have the equipment they need, so they can

rotate back on a timely basis and come home to the loving arms of their

families, to repair existing equipment. And worst of all, in one sense,

failing to send this money on a timely basis to the military hurts the

military families who are waiting behind, anxious, as we all

understand, for the welfare and safety of their loved ones. Our troops

and their families deserve better.

So I hope that after the last 86 days, which have been characterized

by political theater and gamesmanship, where some have been more

focused on the 2008 election and trying to find ways to gain political

advantage, I hope Republicans and Democrats, the legislative branch and

executive branch, can come together and do what we should have done

months ago--get the funds to the troops as soon as possible, without

the surrender deadline, without tying the hands of our military

commanders and making their opportunity for success impossible, and

without the porkbarrel spending that demeans the noble sacrifice of

these brave men and women.