Mr. President, I rise today to speak to a bill to honor

our service men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan who have served and

continue to serve their country by working for a fee, independent and

stable Iraq and a new Afghanistan. These missions have been difficult

and the cost has been high; nearly 600 Americans have been killed and

almost 3,000 Americans have been injured in Iraq, while more than 500

Americans have been injured and more than 100 U.S. servicemen and women

have been lost in Afghanistan.

More than a year after the initial invasion, nearly 110,000 troops

are still stationed in Iraq, working to build a new, stable beacon of

freedom in the region. My fellow Senators, the liberation of Iraq is

turning out to be the most significant military occupation and

reconstruction effort since the end of World War II. We cannot

understate the importance of the work being done there today.

The administration's focus on Iraq leaves the mission in Afghanistan

incomplete. Despite constant progress there, the fighting is still not

over. Recent assassinations of government officials, car bombings, and

the lingering presence of terrorist forces and former Taliban fighters

force thousands of our troops to stay in-country.

For their courageous efforts, the Department of Defense has decided

to award our brave young men and women with the Global War on Terrorism

Expeditionary Medal--GWOT--and no other medal. This is despite the fact

that G.W.O.T. medal is meant for any individual who has served overseas

during the war on terror and may have come within a few hundred miles

of a combat zone. The dangers of serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are

greater; therefore, along with my colleagues, Senators Lott, Landrieu,

Inhofe, and Lugar, I propose to correct this mistake by passing

legislation authorizing the Iraq and Afghanistan Liberation Medals in

addition to the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal.

While some of us in this body have not shared the administration's

view on this war, we are united when it comes to supporting our troops.

These young men and women from active duty, National Guard and Reserves

are all volunteers and exemplify the very essence of what it means to

be a patriot. We believe that what they are doing in Iraq and

Afghanistan today differs from military expeditionary activities such

as peacekeeping operations or no-fly zone enforcement.

They continue to serve, even though they do not know when they will

return home to family and friends. They continue to serve despite the

constant threat to their lives and the tremendous hardships they face.

There is a difference between an Expeditionary Medal and a Campaign

medal. We only need to look at an excerpt from U.S. Army Qualifications

for the Armed Forces Expeditionary medal and Kosovo Campaign medal. In

order to receive the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, you don't need

to go to war. You only need to be

To earn the Kosovo Campaign medal, the standard is higher. A military

member must:

Many within the military agree that there is a difference. According

to the Army Times,

An expeditionary medal

like the GWOT does not necessarily denote combat. A campaign medal is

designed to recognize military personnel who have risked their lives in

combat.

Campaign medals matter.

My fellow colleagues, it is time.

We must recognize the sacrifice of our young men and women who

liberated Iraq, including great Americans like Army Specialist Joseph

Hudson from Alamogordo, NM, who was held as a prisoner of war. The

Nation was captivated as we watched Specialist Hudson being

interrogated by the enemy.

Asked to divulge his military occupation, Specialist Hudson stared

defiantly into the camera and said, Those of

us with sons and daughters were united in worry with Specialist

Hudson's family. The entire nation rejoiced when he was liberated.

We have also asked much from our Reserve and National Guard forces.

The reconstruction of Iraq would not be possible without the commitment

and sacrifice of the 170,000 Guard and Reservists currently on active

duty.

My colleagues, Senators Lott, Landrieu, Inhofe, Lugar, and I are

committed to honoring our over 200,000 heroes who liberated Iraq and

Afghanistan. We believe that current administration policy does a

disservice to our fighting men and women. Therefore we propose, in

addition to the GWOT medal, new decorations that characterize the real

missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, two that are distinctive and honor

their sacrifice, the Iraq and Afghanistan Liberation medals.

What we do today is not without precedent; Congress has been

responsible for recognizing the sacrifice and courage of our military

forces throughout history. Congress has had a significant and

historically central role in authorizing military decoration. Our

Nation's highest military decorations were authorized by Congress,

including: the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Air Force Cross, the

Navy Cross, the Army's Distinctive Service Cross, the Silver Star, and

the Distinguished Flying Cross.

We have also authorized campaign and liberation medals similar to

what we hope to accomplish with this legislation. A partial list

includes the Spanish War Service Medal, the Army Occupation of Germany

Medal, the World War II Victory Medal, the Berlin Airlift Medal, the

Korean Service Medal and the Prisoner of War Medal.

The list goes on and on. The great men an women of our military

forces are doing their jobs every day in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is

time to do our job and honor them with an award that truly stands for

their heroic service, the Iraq and Afghanistan Liberation Medals.