Vigorous debate is absolutely a part of who we are as a Nation. A lot of people who have been critical of our war efforts in Iraq have made suggestions that have been good. A number of their criticisms have been correct, and it is certainly welcome and a part of our heritage that we would have that kind of debate. I don't mean to suggest otherwise. But the delays we have been seeing now in actually providing the funding necessary for our military men and women in harm's way has been too long. I believe it has had a tendency to embolden our enemies and raise questions in the minds of our own soldiers.

So as I have said a number of times on the floor of the Senate, those soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan today are there for one reason, and that is because we sent them. They are doing tough, hot, demanding, dangerous work. I have been there six times. I have to tell you, I have never been more impressed. They don't complain. They do their work with professionalism. They care about what they are doing. They believe in what they are doing. They want to succeed, and I tell you that with every fiber in my being. It is their desire to help the country of Iraq achieve stability and progress.

They are executing lawful policies of the U.S. Government. That includes the Congress—the House and Senate—as well as the President of the United States. We have, through lawful processes, deployed them to execute policies that we have decided on. This Congress, of course, has the power to bring them home at any moment that we desire. I think people are wrestling with that. Some think they should come home now. Some think that is not the appropriate decision. The President believes that is not the appropriate decision. We have accepted and have fundamentally affirmed the surge that has sent additional troops there. They are there to execute our mission. That is all I wish to say. They are there to execute our mission.

I talked to a mother not long ago whose son was killed in Iraq. She told me her son told her he believed in what he was doing. He told me when they went into neighborhoods, the women and children were glad they were there. They wanted them in the neighborhoods. That is all I am telling you. You can read what you want to in the newspaper. But because it brought a sense of security there, they wanted them there. I know there are limits to our ability to achieve what we would like to achieve, no matter what we would like to achieve; I know we are not unlimited in our ability to achieve it. We have to be realistic, and we cannot commit a single soldier to an effort a single day longer than we conclude is an appropriate thing for them to be doing. If we think it is not justified and worthwhile, we need to bring them home. I certainly agree with that.

This is a serious discussion we have been having, and I don't dispute the people who have different views of how this ought to occur. I will say again that real support of the soldiers in harm's way means we affirm them and their mission as long as we fund their mission, as long as we order them there. You may say we didn't order them there, but we did order them there. We have funded them to stay there, according to the President's tactical decision. But we authorized him to do so, and we can end that authorization as we choose.

But the truth is, we have invested a tremendous amount in Iraq. General Petraeus—what a fabulous general he is—told us the truth, I believe. The truth is it is hard, but it is not impossible. He also has said what we are doing there is important. It is important that a stable, decent government be maintained in Iraq. That is not a little thing; it is a very important thing. The soldiers who have been there—the soldiers who serve—would be, indeed, in pain and be hurt if we prematurely give up on what they have sacrificed to achieve and what so many of them truly believe in, if you talk to them.

I have to tell you that the surge of troops into Iraq was a bitter pill to me. I remember distinctly when General Casey said in late 2005 he believed we could start bringing home troops in 2006. That was absolutely music to my ears and what I wanted to hear. Then he said he had to delay the troops coming home because the sophisticated, sustained effort by al-Qaida to attack Shia individuals in holy places had created a reaction by Shia, with the formation of a Shia militia, and they were killing Sunni individuals and that broke out into a spate of violence in Baghdad, the capital city, the central focus of Iraq, and that was extremely unfortunate.

So my thinking is this: Benchmarks for the Iraqi Government—if we write that correctly and don't do it in a way that is unwise and counterproductive, as I believe this language is, at least it would be language the President can accept, and I would be prepared to accept the demand that they do certain things. That is all right with me. Our commitment is not open-ended. We cannot continue to try to lift a government that cannot function effectively. We want them to function. We want them to have a healthy, prosperous government. There are some good things that have happened—really and truly, there have been good things. But there are very difficult things also that are not going well. This is a challenge to the Iraqi Government.

I truly hope the benchmarks and language in this funding resolution will be such that it will be a positive spur to the Iraqi Government to confront their reconciliation difficulties, spur them to reach agreements on other constitutional questions that are critical, and be an effective step in helping that Government stand up and assume responsibility for its own fate.

I have to say I am not comfortable and am indeed uneasy with high troop levels sustained in what would be considered an occupation or a stand-in for the democratically elected Government of Iraq. That Government has to stand up and assume greater and greater responsibility. I do hope and pray that they will because it is exceedingly important that they do.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I think it is important that, in response to the comments of my friend Senator ENZI, I set the record straight for the Senate and the American people regarding the practice of including unrequested emergency funding in war supplementals.

The emergency supplemental bills approved by Republican Congresses in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 included emergency funding for many of the same issues that are in the emergency supplemental, such as: agriculture disaster assistance—fiscal year 2006 war supplemental—$500 million; border security—fiscal year 2006 war supplemental—$1.9 billion; pandemic flu—fiscal year 2006 war supplemental—$2.3 billion; wildland fire suppression—fiscal year 2005 Defense Appropriations Act, which carried $25.8 billion war supplemental—$500 million; airline security—fiscal year 2003 war supplemental—$2.396 billion; and fisheries assistance—fiscal year 2006 war supplemental—$112 million.

The White House has complained about Democrats including agricultural disaster assistance in the war supplemental. Not only did the Republican Congress approve a targeted agriculture disaster package in 2006, but there is also precedent for including assistance to a sector in the economy that has been hard hit by a disaster. In 2003, Congress approved $515 million of relief for the aviation industry.

The White House has also complained about Democrats including other matter in a war supplemental, such as the minimum wage increase.

Yet under Republican control, war supplemental laws included such unrelated matters as the REAL ID Act, fiscal year 2005, a temporary worker program, fiscal year 2005, and budget process provisions, fiscal year 2006.

So I am glad to have the opportunity to clarify for my colleagues the real record when it comes to meeting the needs of the American people in emergency supplemental appropriation bills.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, while there are many aspects of this conference report that I cannot support, I am pleased that it will finally allow us to get a minimum wage bill to the President's desk. The minimum wage has been stuck at $5.15 an hour for more than 10 years, but now—finally Americans across the country will get the raise they need and deserve. For the millions of working families who will benefit, this increase may be long overdue, but it is nonetheless something to celebrate.

Mr. President, 13 million Americans will see more money in their paychecks