

SEC. _____. From funds available in this Act, an additional \$6,700,000,000 may be available to fund equipment reset requirements resulting from continuing combat operations, including repair, depot, and procurement activities.

Mr. DODD. I offer this amendment on behalf of myself, Senator REED of Rhode Island, Senator INOUE, Senator LEAHY, Senator BINGAMAN, and Senator KENNEDY.

I thank Senator INOUE and his staff for helping us craft this amendment. As I understand it, this amendment has been cleared on both sides for consideration. I will be asking for a vote on this amendment at the appropriate time, but I am not going to take a long time here because the substance of this amendment was discussed last evening when it was offered—part of this was offered by Senator STEVENS, along with Senator INOUE—and then earlier today Senator REED of Rhode Island and I had a discussion here on the floor about this issue, of what is occurring in terms of the equipment our military needs to operate effectively, the gap that exists, that we worry about here, in terms of the failure to provide the necessary support for our men and women in uniform, in the Marine Corps, the Army particularly, but also in the National Guard.

The Senator from Alaska offered an amendment last evening, as I mentioned a moment ago, to address critical capital equipment shortfalls long identified by the Army and Marine Corps.

As my colleagues know, Army Chief of Staff General Schoomaker has said that \$17 billion would be needed to begin repairing and replacing our fleets of trucks, tanks, and aircraft. Last night's amendment contained an additional \$7.8 billion for the Army to add to the \$2.5 billion in the underlying bill. It also contained \$5.3 billion for the Marine Corps. But the amendment still leaves a \$6.7 billion shortfall within the \$17 billion figure identified by the military's top uniformed officers.

I am offering this amendment, along with Senator REED and others, to make this remaining \$6.7 billion available to our military if it needs it. This is what we call a "soft mark." If the money is not needed, the resource would come back to the Treasury. But rather than waiting until next spring sometime when a supplemental might be asked for, we don't want to deprive our military leadership of the resources necessary if they can use them to replace and repair the deteriorated equipment being used in Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere.

This amendment is a soft amendment, if you will, in that regard. It will not detract from other defense priorities, and it will not contribute further to the deficit. It is part of our budget-neutral, if you will, proposal. All my amendment does is say that the Army is allowed at its discretion to use this appropriation for any available unobligated funds.

Up until now, the cost of war in Iraq has been mainly measured in the number of lives lost, which is tragic, and the U.S. Treasury spent—and rightly so.

In Iraq, 2,578 of our fellow citizens have been killed, and Congress has approved more than \$437 billion, with another \$50 billion now soon to be considered by this body. But there is another cost of this war that needs to be addressed, one we cannot afford to ignore. That is military readiness.

For months now, the Army's uniformed leadership has been sounding the alarm about the growing readiness gap, as it is called.

In March, Army Deputy Chief of Staff LTG James Lovelace testified to Congress that since the Iraq war's beginning, the number of Army units fully equipped for combat has steadily declined. According to General Lovelace and his Marine counterpart, LTG Jan Huly, military units have increasingly become less prepared for combat as they have seen their stock of functioning vehicles, aircraft, and equipment decline.

Last month, Army Chief of Staff GEN Peter Schoomaker put the problem in budgetary terms—the President's proposed 2006 supplemental request was \$4.9 billion short to address the equipment shortfalls caused by combat losses and wear and tear in Iraq. In the administration's 2007 budget request, there was an even larger \$12 billion shortfall, according to the leadership of our uniformed services.

Today we are announcing our commitment to meeting those generals' calls to address one of the most pressing challenges of the U.S. military—the growing readiness gap.

We must find resources necessary to repair and replace our military's critical equipment. This is a matter of the most urgent priority. By some accounts, these equipment shortfalls are leaving up to two-thirds of the U.S. Army's combat brigades unfit to perform basic combat duties. I do not know what could be more alarming, particularly as the United States confronts growing threats to peace and security throughout the globe, from the Korean Peninsula to the Middle East, and elsewhere.

While the sheer size and scope of the U.S. Army readiness remains classified, one thing is certain: Our military hardware is stretched thin and our fleets of aircraft, tanks, and trucks are wearing out. Those are facts—not ones I concluded on my own, but our uniformed services have warned us about this since very earlier this year.

Early this year in Iraq, U.S. tanks were being driven over 4,000 miles per year—5 times the expected annual usage of 800 miles. Army helicopters are experiencing usage rates up to roughly two to three times their otherwise planned usage. The Army's truck fleet is experiencing some of the most pronounced problems of excessive wear, with usage rates of five to six times

their peacetime rates, further exacerbated by the addition of heavy armor. This increased use shortens the life of equipment and demands larger investments in maintenance and procurement.

On top of that, our equipment is being further degraded by sand, extreme heat, rocket-propelled grenades, and explosive attacks.

Certainly, our military personnel's bravery and valor can never be exhausted. We know that. But the same could not be said of the fleets of humvees, trucks, and aircraft they depend upon. We owe it to them and to the American people to make certain that the U.S. Armed Forces are outfitted with the equipment they need to get the job done.

On three or four other occasions over the last several years, I have stood on this floor to offer amendments to deal with equipment used by our men and women in uniform. At one point, we were offering the necessary dollars to make certain that our service men and women were getting hydration systems, basic needs of a soldier going into combat. We lost those amendments, and we came back and offered a different idea—to reimburse the men and women in uniform, some of whom, by their own accounts, were scraping around in dumps in Iraq to find the hardware to armor up their humvees and equipment.

Whatever our politics may be on the issue of the war in Iraq, all of us believe we should never send a soldier into harm's way without giving them the equipment they deserve and need when they are in those kinds of situations. Those situations are important. This situation I have described here today outstrips the importance of those issues. This has to do with the very ability of our people to defend themselves and to prosecute their efforts successfully, and we are coming up woefully short.

I appreciate the leadership of this committee, Senator STEVENS and Senator INOUE, for supporting these additional funds we talked about here which Senator REED and I are offering. We think it is critically important that the uniformed services have the tools necessary to make sure the men and women in uniform are going to have the kind of equipment they deserve and need to have under these circumstances. I am very grateful to the leadership for supporting this amendment.

I will ask at the appropriate time for the yeas and nays on this amendment. In fact, I will ask for the yeas and nays at this point.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I do not know when we want to schedule these votes. Are we ready to go to a vote? I withhold moving that at that moment until the chairman of the committee