

Statement on Senate Amended Version of H.R. 2206, Emergency War Supplemental - - May 24, 2007

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<*>MR. CASTLE. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the Senate amended version of H.R. 2206, the Emergency War Supplemental spending bill. Our men and women in the armed forces have been waiting nearly four months for this critical funding and I commend my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for working together to find a responsible path forward. Like many of my colleagues, I have disagreed strongly with key aspects of our strategy in Iraq, but I have steadfastly opposed playing politics with crucial funding for our soldiers. Until recently, the Democratic leadership had insisted on holding this emergency troop funding bill in limbo in order to prompt a political confrontation with the White House. Fortunately, the proposal before us today does not include many of the contentious provisions that have previously delayed passage of this important legislation. Since 2003, over 3,000 American military personnel have been killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom and more than 20,000 have been injured. While we may disagree over the direction of our mission in Iraq, it is clear that the American people want a straightforward assessment regarding our involvement and long-term interests in the region. Therefore, I support the bill's requirements for regular reports regarding our progress in Iraq and the inclusion of key benchmarks to measure the Iraqi government's ability to improve stability within its borders. Furthermore, unlike past attempts to include language mandating an arbitrary deadline for troop withdrawal, this legislation bases our decisions on expert advice from military and foreign policy leaders. Additionally, although I am concerned that some non-emergency funding was included in this version of the bill, I am pleased that several of the most extraneous non-emergency funding provisions were removed from the final legislation. I also support language in the bill that would provide resources for hurricane recovery, veterans' medical care, children's health, and an increase in the minimum wage. I can think of no better way to honor the bravery of our men and women in the military than to provide them with the armor and equipment they have requested. Hopefully, the Senate will move swiftly to pass this emergency funding bill and the President will be able to sign it into law in time for Memorial Day. Mr. Chairman, it is my sincere hope that the bipartisanship we have seen today in passing this emergency funding bill will continue as Congress works on this important issue throughout the summer. For my part, I will persist in calling for a new intensive diplomatic mission in the Middle East and a true commitment to bipartisan unity based on the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. This is a fair bill and I call on my colleagues to join me in voting for its passage.