

companion effort on the House side, as well as Senators CARL LEVIN of Michigan, JOHN MCCAIN of Arizona, and JOHN WARNER of Virginia for leading the Senate negotiations.

We owe the deepest thanks to the almost 500,000 members of the National Guard. Their ability to balance their full-time jobs with their family responsibilities and Guard commitments is simply remarkable. They are indispensable to our national security structure, at home, and abroad. Their sense of pride, professionalism and duty represents the very best qualities of our military and our country. I am simply in awe of what they have done to protect this Nation, and I know the whole Congress and the country share this heartfelt gratitude.

Throughout this whole process, we have been guided by the fact that the Guard is always there for the people of the United States of America. Our part is easier than theirs: We cannot afford to let our Guard down. The Guard Empowerment provisions of this bill will help us honor that commitment to the men and women of the Guard.

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, I commend the conferees for including the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act as part of this conference agreement.

I am grateful to the chairman and ranking member for supporting this needed provision, and I also appreciate the support of Senators SMITH, HAGEL, BIDEN, BROWNBACK, LIEBERMAN, LEAHY, SNOWE, VOINOVICH, FEINSTEIN, COLLINS, OBAMA, DOLE, MENENDEZ, MIKULSKI, and CLINTON, who joined in sponsoring the original amendment when it was adopted by the Senate by voice vote during our debate on this bill.

The Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act requires the Secretary of State to establish a refugee processing program in Iraq for Iraqis threatened because of their association with the United States. Applicants must demonstrate they have a well-founded fear of persecution. Iraqis who will now be able to apply directly to the United States rather than going through the United Nations referral system,—include: Iraqis who were or are employed by or worked for the United States Government in Iraq; Iraqis who were or are employed in Iraq by a media or non-governmental organization headquartered in the United States, or by an organization that is closely associated with the United States mission in Iraq and that has received U.S. Government funding through an official documented contract, award, grant, or cooperative agreement; and Iraqis who are members of a religious or minority community with close family members in the United States.

The act allows the Secretary to suspend in-country processing for periods of 90 days, with a report to Congress on the reasons for any suspension.

In addition, the act makes available 5,000 special immigrant visas each year for the next 5 years for Iraqis who have worked for the U.S. Government in

Iraq and are endangered as a result. Applicants must have a positive recommendation or evaluation from a senior supervisor and be approved by the U.S. Ambassador in Iraq or his designee. The provision sunsets after 5 years. These visas, because of their special status, are not counted against immigrant caps nor are they counted against U.S. Refugee Admissions Program caps.

Under the act, Iraqis granted special immigrant visa status are eligible for 8 months for the full array of benefits traditionally provided to refugees by the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and the Health and Human Services Department's Office of Refugee Resettlement. The provisions under the act would defray the cost of transportation and provide prearrival admissions assistance and up to 8 months of postarrival resettlement assistance to those Iraqis who come to the U.S. on special immigrant visas. Senators CARDIN and LEVIN are the primary authors of this provision and, have spoken eloquently for it.

The act also allows reapplication by Iraqis in the United States who have been denied asylum, in part, because conditions in Iraq changed after the fall of Saddam Hussein's government.

In addition, the act directs the Secretary of State to designate a high-level special coordinator at the Embassy in Baghdad to handle issues related to Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons. The coordinator will be responsible for overseeing in-country processing of refugees and special immigrant visa applicants, and will have authority to refer persons directly to the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Similar positions would be designated in the American embassies in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

The act also requires the Secretary of State to consult with other countries about resettlement of refugee populations and to develop mechanisms in countries with significant populations of displaced Iraqis to ensure the refugees' well-being and safety. U.S. financial assistance would be provided in such cases to help meet the cost of caring for the refugees and protecting them.

These measures are urgently needed to address the immense human costs of the war in Iraq and its tragic effect on the millions of Iraqis—men, woman, and children—who have fled their homes and often their country to escape the violence.

A significant number of courageous Iraqis have worked with the American military, the staff of our Embassy, or with American organizations to support our mission in Iraq. Their support and loyalty have cost too many lives already, and their families have often been forced to flee their communities or even their country because of the danger.

The target of the assassin's bullet is on their back, and we owe them enor-

mous gratitude. But instead of giving them needed help and protection, we have too often offered only bureaucracy and dubious hopes.

Regardless of where we stand on the war, Congress is united in believing that America has a fundamental obligation to assist Iraqis who have courageously supported our forces and our efforts in Iraq and whose lives are in peril as a result. The provisions in the agreement are a long-needed attempt to fulfill our commitment to them.

Despite the clear and present danger faced by many Iraqis because of their ties to the United States, their religious affiliation, or their work with media, nongovernmental or humanitarian organizations, the vast majority of Iraqi refugees must go through a long and complicated referral process of approximately 8 to 10 months, in which the United Nations serves as an intermediary outside Iraq. This act cuts through much of that redtape.

Obviously, we cannot resettle all of Iraq's refugees in the United States. But we need to keep faith with the Iraqis who have worked so bravely with us and for us and supported our mission in Iraq, and whose lives are in serious danger now because of it.

A few months ago, I had the honor of meeting SGT Joe Seemiller, a young man who is haunted by the military motto, "Leave No Man Behind." Sergeant Seemiller is dedicated to helping the translator he was forced to leave behind in Iraq. On countless occasions, his translator helped to avoid serious American and Iraqi casualties. He braved innumerable death threats and the horrific murder of his brother. Finally, he had to flee to Syria, where he waited more than 2 years for the opportunity to be resettled in the United States.

The Refugee Crisis Act, makes clear that America has a fundamental obligation to assist Iraqis whose lives are in danger because of their close ties to our Nation. I look forward to working with the administration in the months ahead to implement this important humanitarian legislation.

I urge my colleagues to support the conference agreement.

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Madam President, I want to take the opportunity to applaud the leadership of the Senate Armed Services Committee for their efforts on the Defense authorization conference report. Chairman LEVIN and the ranking member, Senator MCCAIN, have done a Herculean job of working through the hundreds of conference issues in this bill with the House companion bill. The work and effort of all parties involved is one of the shining examples of the Congress working together in a bipartisan, bicameral effort to support our men and women in uniform.

As a signatory to the conference report, I support this bill. There is much to like in this bill. We provide necessary benefits to keep our recruiting and retention on the right track. This