

his idea of reform, to stop reform. But it is certainly not my idea of reform.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the ethics bill that has passed the Senate and the House be sent to conference for consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mr. HAGEL. On behalf of the junior Senator from South Carolina, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I acknowledge my colleague on the other side of the aisle is standing in for the Senator from South Carolina, but if we are ever going to get to ethics reform, we clearly have to move to conference, and conference is going to require agreement on both sides of the aisle and the understanding—incidentally, the Senator from South Carolina characterized the conference committee as the secret conference committee. He is caught up in the old way of doing things. The new way is that the doors will be open. He can come. In fact, I hope the Republican leader will appoint him as a member of the conference committee. Regardless, it is going to be open for him to come and at least observe, if not participate, in this process.

It is a new day for the conference committees, and I certainly hope the Senator from South Carolina will reconsider, will stop his ethics filibuster, the DeMint ethics filibuster, which is now in its 12th day, and allow us to move to this ethics bill for its consideration.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1585, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1585) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2008 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 2011

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator LEVIN, I call up his substitute amendment, which is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Nebraska [Mr. NELSON], for Mr. LEVIN, proposes an amendment numbered 2011.

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the

reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I wish to begin my comments on this year's National Defense Authorization Act by thanking the members of the Personnel Subcommittee, and I would especially like to thank Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM. He and I have worked together for several years on the Personnel Subcommittee.

Mr. WARNER. Would the Senator yield, so I might propose a unanimous consent request?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator from Nebraska yield?

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Yes.

Mr. WARNER. I thank the Presiding Officer.

Mr. President, following the remarks of the Senator from Nebraska, I would like to ask unanimous consent that I be recognized so I can speak on behalf of the ranking member, Senator MCCAIN, with regard to the bill which is now being brought up.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator WEBB be recognized after Senator WARNER for Senator WEBB's comments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, as I was saying, Senator GRAHAM and I have worked together over these past several years—he has been chairman and I have been the ranking member—and I have always found our time on the subcommittee to be decidedly nonpartisan. All members of the Personnel Subcommittee have tried to do what is right by the servicemembers and their families. We are always focused on how best to serve those who serve us. So I say to Senator GRAHAM: Thank you very much.

This year, as in past years, the Personnel Subcommittee focused on improving the quality of life of the men and women in the armed services, including Active-Duty, National Guard and Reserve personnel and their families. There is an old axiom in the military that you recruit the soldier, sailor, airman or marine, but you retain the family. In the wake of the difficulties exposed at Walter Reed, we felt especially compelled this year to focus not just on the servicemember but also on his or her family and I am pleased with the bill and recommend it to my fellow Senators.

The bill before us authorizes \$135 billion for military personnel, including pay, allowances, bonuses, death benefits, and permanent change of station moves. The bill contains many important provisions that will improve the quality of life of our men and women in uniform and their families.

First and foremost, the bill authorizes a 3.5 percent across-the-board pay

raise, which is half a percent higher than the average pay raise in the private sector as measured by the Employment Cost Index. It is also half a percent higher than the administration's proposal of a 3-percent increase in pay. This increased pay raise recognizes the outstanding service and the sacrifice of the men and women of the armed services and their families.

The bill also addresses the administration's request to increase the end strength of the Army and the Marine Corps. The committee supports the requested increases in end strength for the coming fiscal year but funds the entire authorized end strength in the base budget rather than in a combination of the base budget and the war-related supplemental. The committee believes the increases in end strength are no longer uniquely tied to the war effort. The bill authorizes fiscal year 2008 end strengths of 525,400 for the Army and 189,000 for the Marine Corps.

The bill would expand combat-related special compensation to all servicemembers eligible for retirement pay who have a combat-related disability. This special compensation is currently denied to our wounded warriors who are medically retired with less than 20 years of service.

The bill would also reduce below age 60 the age at which reservists may begin to receive their retired pay by 3 months for every aggregate of 90 days of active duty performed under certain mobilization authorities.

The bill authorizes all servicemembers to carry up to 90 days of leave from one fiscal year to the next and allows certain servicemembers to sell back up to 30 days of leave under special leave accrual provisions affecting deployed servicemembers.

The bill would change the death gratuity and survivor benefit plan to allow servicemembers to choose to leave death benefits to a guardian or a caretaker of their minor child or children.

The bill also amends the Immigration and Nationality Act to make it easier for spouses and children accompanying servicemembers assigned overseas to qualify for citizenship.

The bill includes provisions that would allow the Department of Defense to continue to provide top quality health care to servicemembers and their dependents. The bill authorizes \$24.6 billion for the Defense Health Program and takes steps to ensure that TRICARE is available to beneficiaries who desire to use it.

The bill enhances the ability of the services to attract critically short health care personnel by authorizing a new bonus for referring to military recruiters an individual who is commissioned in a health profession, by authorizing an increase from \$50,000 to \$75,000 in the maximum incentive special pay and multiyear retention bonus for medical officers and by authorizing the Secretary of Defense to pay an accession bonus of up to \$20,000 to participants in the Armed Forces Health