which is affecting the readiness of our Armed Forces.

The fact is, predatory payday lenders are targeting American troops and are trying to make a buck off of their service to our country. We rely on the military to protect us, and we have just taken a significant step to protect them from predatory lenders. The Nelson-Talent amendment limits the annual percentage rate that payday lenders can charge soldiers and their spouses to 36 percent or about 1½ to 2 times what credit cards typically charge. I recognize that payday lending can be a risky business, but a triple-digit interest rate, which is commonly charged today, is simply too much.

Some estimate that the average APR on a payday loan today is over 400 percent, and there have been reports of payday loans with more than 800 percent interest rates. This is a national problem. Predatory payday lenders set up shop near our military bases throughout the country and prey on our servicemembers. We know about this problem in Missouri. We have the unfortunate distinction of having a relatively large number and high density of payday lenders around our largest military base, Fort Leonard Wood, in Pulaski County. It is a great base with a lot of service men and women in it. As a result, there are a lot of payday lenders around. St. Robert, which is a small gateway town near the base, only has 5,200 residents but has eight payday lenders. Examples such as St. Robert led professors at the University of Florida and California State University to say that ''irrefutable geographic evidence demonstrates that payday lenders are actively and aggressively targeting U.S. military personnel.'' Military families pay an estimated $80 million annually in payday loan fees.

The problem not only affects military families' financial well-being, it directly impacts troop readiness because these young men and women, many of whom are just out of high school, are not financially sophisticated and fall way behind in these payments. They have to go bankrupt, and then that affects their ability to get security clearances.

In this month's issue of Seapower magazine, Admiral Mike Mullen, Chief of Naval Operations, U.S. Navy, said, ''A sailor's financial readiness directly impacts unit readiness and the navy's ability to accomplish its mission . . . I am concerned with the number of sailors who are taken advantage of by predatory lending practices, the most common of which is the payday loan.''

The Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, John Molino, has also said this problem ''affects unit readiness.''

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, Terry Scott, has said ''the No. 1 reason our sailors are forced from one job to another is because they lose their security clearance . . . and the No. 1 reason they lose their security clearance is because of financial difficulties.''

The number of security clearances of sailors and Marines that were revoked or denied due to financial problems have soared from 124 in FY 2000 to 1,999 in 2005. The total for the 6-year period is 5,482. And, that's just for one of the departments.

The impact on readiness is one of the serious ramifications of this problem. But, another consequence is that some servicemembers have ruined their financial lives by taking out payday loans—that automatically rollover—at exorbitant rates they can never payoff.

Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Jason Withrow, stationed on a nuclear submarine at Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base in Georgia, took a $300 payday loan in summer 2003. He borrowed more to service the fee, and by February 2004, he'd paid about $5,000 in interest on $1,800 in payday loans at four different lenders.

Army Specialist Myron Hicks, stationed at Fort Stewart, GA, borrowed $1,500 for a car repair. He paid back $3,000—twice what he borrowed. I could give a hundred stories like that.

Cristie Worrow, a 29-year-old petty officer second class at the Naval Air Reserve in Jacksonville, FL, took out a $500 payday loan in 1998. Over 3 years she had two more loans and was paying fees that sometimes reached $200 per month. Eventually, she had paid $2,400 in fees.

Our troops deserve uniform, national protection against abusive financial practices that target them. This is clearly a step in the right direction.

An impressive list of military and veteran service organizations, with over 5.5 million members, support the legislation. The Military Coalition includes the Association of the United States Army (AUSA), Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Navy League of the United States (NLUS), Air Force Association (AFA), and Marine Corps League (MCL).

The Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Dr. David Chu, has expressed his support for the legislation. He has said the legislation ''provides reasonable and appropriate limits.''

Numerous consumer groups like the Center for Responsible Lending, Consumer Federation of America, and Institute of Consumer Financial Education also support the bipartisan amendment.

Mr. President, I feel strongly that we can hold this amendment in conference. I thank the chairman and ranking member. They know how bad this problem is. I am grateful for their help in getting this in the bill. Chairmen CRAIG and SHELBY of the Veterans' and Banking Committees were cooperative in getting this on the bill. I trust our colleagues and friends in the House will understand the importance of holding this amendment.

This abuse of payday lending is compromising the readiness of the U.S. military. The problem has become that big. It is ruining the financial lives of thousands of our service men and women who unknowingly, because of their lack of sophistication, get into debts from these abusive lenders, far greater than they are able to pay.

We have put a stop to that with this amendment. We need to hold it in conference committee. I am confident we will be able to do that. I look forward to working with the Senate and the House to pass this provision into law on behalf of our troops.

I yield the floor.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank our colleague from Missouri. He worked very diligently on this amendment. It is another example of how we must reach down from time to time and provide a caring hand for particularly those young men and women in uniform today who, unfortunately, can be victimized because of their individual needs and requirements at a special time. I believe this amendment will go a long way to remedy that situation. I congratulate the Senator for his hard work.

Mr. TALENT. Mr. President, I thank the chairman and appreciate his and Senator LEVIN's work on this amendment.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein.

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

The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR JOHN WARNER

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I have come to the floor this evening to congratulate my esteemed colleague, the very distinguished and able and honorable and highly respected chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, on the completion of his final Defense authorization bill.

He is my chairman, Mr. President. His tenure at the helm of the Armed Services Committee, on which I have the privilege to serve, has been eventful and very distinguished. But then distinguished tenure is not unusual for this Virginia gentlemen—another term I use lovingly and fondly and respectfully because it means something to me, having been in this Senate now for almost 48 years, having been on the Appropriations Committee for almost 48 years, having been on the Armed Services Committee for almost that long. This is a very special man—a Virginia gentleman in every sense of the term. I say this with the utmost admiration. Distinguished tenure is not unusual for this Virginia gentlemen, whose entire life has been spent in the service to his country, to his great State, the Commonwealth of Virginia, the cradle of Presidents.