

He is hurt; lost his leg above his knee. He had scars that you could see on the one where he has a whole leg. He showed me the scars on that. He said it causes him more trouble than the one that is missing.

No matter what position we take on the war in Iraq, we should all agree on providing for these veterans and those who wore the uniform before them. That is a solemn responsibility we have now. This act we are trying to get on the Senate floor now helps fulfill the responsibility we have as Senators.

Every Senator has a right to oppose this legislation or try to change it. In my time as majority leader, I have tried to work with the Republican leader to reach consensus on legislation on which minority Members have objections. I have made repeated efforts to try to do so on the Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act. I am told my Republican counterparts—if the Republican side of the aisle doesn't like this, let's legislate it and take parts of it out. Unfortunately, the Republican leader has not responded positively. As a result, I was forced Thursday night to file cloture on the motion to proceed simply so we could start debating this legislation.

I would have preferred not to have had to file cloture. I wish we could just move forward on it, as we have wanted to do 65 other times. But when legislation to honor and care for our veterans languishes for 9 months because Republicans are unwilling to work with us or just simply legislate, I have no other choice. As dedicated Government watchers and C-SPAN watchers know, this is far from the first time the Republican minority has rejected our good-faith efforts on reaching compromise. Time and time again they have chosen obstruction over negotiation.

It seems to me what the Republicans want is a graveyard of no progress. We are going to continue to fight. We are going to do everything we can to get this legislation passed. We believe there should be progress; filing cloture as we have had to do is going to help us get progress. It is going to be slow, but we are going to continue doing it.

It seems in times like this our Republican friends would rather we accomplish nothing. Maybe they see political advantage in slow-walking. But the American people are left to suffer for their actions.

Some may not like provisions in the Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act. Let them move to change them. Some say: If it weren't for the Filipino veterans, we would allow you to move to this bill. Filipino veterans—they fought alongside U.S. troops during World War II. I do not think the valor of these Filipino troops should be questioned. These troops may have been born on foreign soil, but they served shoulder to shoulder under one flag, our flag, the American flag. It is our moral obligation to recognize the reward they are due. It is long past time we do so.

It is time for our Republican colleagues to choose. Will they stand in lockstep with an obstinate few, intent on dragging their heels on the care and support our veterans need? I hope not. We need just nine Republicans to join with us.

As you know, Mr. President, there are 51 of us. We need 9 of them to get to 60. I hope there are surely nine Republicans willing to stand on the side of our veterans, our troops. Tomorrow we will have a chance to pass the Veterans Benefits Extension Act. I extend my hand once more to the Republican leader and all my colleagues in the minority. If they would end their needless obstruction, we could get on this legislation today. We would deliver an important victory to the men and women who have served us—and will serve us today—with courage, valor, and distinction.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST—
S. 579

Mr. REID. I know there are some of my Republican friends on the floor, so I am going to ask unanimous consent now on the request I made, the Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Act.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 628, S. 579, the Breast Cancer Environmental Research Act, the committee-reported substitute be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read three times, passed, the motion to reconsider be laid on the table, and any statements be printed at the appropriate place in the RECORD as if read, with no intervening action or debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? The Senator from Arizona is recognized.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator COBURN, there is objection.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Mr. REID. I now ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to consideration of the same legislation, S. 579, the Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Act, at a time to be determined by the majority leader, following consultation with the Republican leader, and the bill be considered under the following limitations: that other than the committee-reported substitute, the only first-degree amendments be four amendments, two for each leader; these amendments be relevant to the provisions of the underlying bill and substitute, there be a time limit of 1 hour for general debate on the bill, and 1 hour on each amendment with all time equally divided and controlled between the leaders or their designees; that upon the disposition of all amendments, the use or yielding back of time, the substitute, as amended, if amended, be agreed to, and the bill, as amended, be read a third time with no further intervening action or debate, and the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill as amended, if amended.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator COBURN, there is an objection.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from North Carolina is recognized.

VETERANS BENEFITS
ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I would like to ask the majority leader before he leaves the floor—I know he has a very busy schedule—the majority leader alluded to a bill on which we will take up a cloture motion tomorrow. I want the majority leader to know before he leaves the floor that the only thing that is contentious in the veterans bill that he has referred to is a new special pension that has been created in this bill of \$300 to Filipino veterans who live in the Philippines, who have no service-connected injuries. If that were stripped from the bill, then this bill is one that I believe we could pass by unanimous consent on the Senate floor.

In the absence of that—

Mr. REID. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BURR. I am happy to yield for a question.

Mr. REID. I say to my friend, the distinguished Senator from North Carolina, I understand. I mentioned that in my prepared remarks, that people have a problem with that. But I say to my friend, we should go on the bill. If people don't like that, offer an amendment, and we will debate that, vote on it, and go about our way. I think that would be such a good way to do this.

Some of us feel very strongly about these Filipino veterans, as you know. I have mentioned this before. They fought valiantly. All you need to do to prove that is to see what happened in the Tom Hanks movie.

I would also say to my friend that we need to do something about this. The average age of one of these Filipinos is about 84 years now. It is not as if we are breaking the bank to help these people who fought side by side with us. I understand the concern of my friend, but I suggest, let's move to the bill, offer an amendment, it can be the first amendment. We will have you offer the first amendment, or whoever wants to.

Mr. BURR. Let me assure the majority leader, as ranking member of the committee, I do not intend to vote against cloture. I intend to proceed to the bill. I intend to offer an amendment that strips out the provision of \$300 of a special pension that I think prioritizes that group above our veterans who are coming back. My amendment would hold everything else in Senator AKAKA's bill in place, but we would also make additions by using that \$21 million for additional funding for our troops who are coming out of Afghanistan and Iraq.

I hope the majority leader would at least consider voting for my amendment when it comes up. We have a rich history on this issue. It starts with the conclusion of the Second World War, when the United States made some very important gifts to the Philippines—the total of two hospitals, equipment, grants to rebuild the Philippines—to make sure those who served were in fact taken care of.

I might also add for the majority leader, incorporated into Senator AKAKA's bill, which is a very good bill on balance, there is only one area that we have any problems with. We hold intact those Filipino veterans who are in the United States receiving full VA benefits. Those who are outside the United States, living in the Philippines but with service-connected injuries, they receive compensation. It is those who live outside the United States, in the Philippines, with no service-connected injury whatsoever, that creating a special pension is not the right thing to do, as we have troops who are coming back at this time.

I pledge to the majority leader my willingness to move forward to consideration of the bill—to have a spirited debate, I am sure, but clearly to try to address what I think are the priorities, or should be the priorities, of this Senate, and that is to focus on our troops.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if I could just say to my friend, I do not in any way question the seriousness of my friend's concern. The Senator asked me would I consider it? Sure, I will be happy to consider it. But let me just say this: Part of mine is basic frustration; that is, why in the world would we have to file cloture on a motion to proceed to this bill? It happens so many times. It is something that has not happened very much in the past, and now it happens on every piece of legislation.

Again, it sounds like we agree on this legislation. Why could we not just move to it and save the 30 hours and all the wasted time on filing this motion?

Understand, I am not at all upset at my friend for having a concern about this bill—not whatsoever. I just am frustrated with the need to have to file cloture to proceed to the bill.

Mr. BURR. I share the leader's frustration and do not think, in that case, cloture was necessary. But with the restrictions that are placed on me as ranking member, that I can only agree

to a bill if there are no amendments and there is a limit set of debate time and I have to speak for 48 others who might not share that limited debate time or a set amount of amendments, I think the leader knows that is something that is impossible for me to do and impossible for me to suggest to my leadership.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I would just go back and say what I said earlier. We have suggested over the 9 months there be limited amendments, there be relevant amendments. We are not there. We cannot go back where we want to be. We are where we are.

I hope we would not even need to do the vote tomorrow at 12 noon. I hope maybe you can talk to your folks and we can start legislating this bill in the morning. That would be the best thing to do because we have a lot to do. I ask my friend to check that out and maybe that is something we can do.

Anyway, I am glad you are here. I appreciate your concern for the bill—part of it. I know you are not the only person who is concerned about that. I know that. But I repeat, there is a thing we call offering an amendment. You have one ready to go, and I will look forward to debating that amendment.

Mr. BURR. I have had the amendment ready to go for months. I think it is a shame the majority in the committee was not willing to talk about any changes to the bill. Now I think we are to a point where it is healthy for the Senate in total to debate the merits and priorities of our country.

Were Filipino veterans promised a VA benefit? According to all the information I have researched and the information provided in 1998 at a congressional hearing with the Department of the Army—it examined its holdings of the Douglas MacArthur and President Franklin Roosevelt papers and found no references by either of those wartime leaders to postwar benefits for Filipino veterans.

Let me be very specific. This bill, S. 1315, does two things: No. 1, it enhances some benefits for our veterans.

I think that receives unanimous support in the Senate. But, two, it diverts \$221 million over the next 10 years to create a special pension for a very specific slice of Filipino veterans, those who live in the Philippines, those who had no service-connected injury, those who have gone post the war with the understanding that the United States stepped in by gifting two hospitals, by gifting medical equipment, by gifting everything, and rebuilding the Philippines.

At a time of war where we are fighting on two fronts, Afghanistan and Iraq, I believe the important thing and prudent thing is to take the \$221 million, over 10 years, and devote it to our men and women who are coming out of combat. S. 1315 has the wrong priorities. So I put together a substitute proposal, S. 2640. I will offer that as an amendment at the appropriate point in the debate.

In that bill, we do one specific thing: We increase what is in S. 1315, minus the special pensions, and we propose increasing housing grants for profoundly disabled veterans who need their homes modified to accommodate their disabilities; we increase the auto grants for profoundly disabled veterans who need that freedom of the platform, the platform for mobility to live independently; it improves the education benefits for our Guard and Reserves; it increases the burial benefits to lessen the financial burden on families of deceased veterans.

I did not come over today to debate the merits of S. 1350. I see the chairman, Chairman AKAKA, is here. The chairman has known since last year that I had problems with that portion of the bill, and we have tried to work out the differences. But as I said earlier, for it to be communicated that we have reached this point because of stall and delay and because we are against things, it is flatly wrong. I am for 99 percent of the bill. Drop the part that prioritizes someone else in front of our veterans, and I am ready to go forward, I am ready to pass it by unanimous consent.

But by the same token, I believe when given the responsibility to make sure our veterans are taken care of, to make sure that those with severe disabilities are taken care of, to devote \$221 million to a new special pension, I believe, is the wrong priority at this point in time.

I believe we should look at the history and find out: Did we make a commitment? Well, I cannot find that. I cannot find where we promised somebody something we have not fulfilled. Tomorrow, I will take the opportunity to go through a very indepth bit of research, not just done by me but done over the years that goes back to 1946 in great detail; looks at what the promises were that were made by the United States; but, more importantly, again, the generosity already displayed by this country to the Philippines to reward them for their participation, and, by the way, our help to liberate their country from the siege of an enemy.

I am convinced the right thing to do is to prioritize that \$221 million for our troops, for our kids from Afghanistan, for our kids from Iraq, to make sure that those who have paid a sacrifice, and in some cases the ultimate sacrifice, are the beneficiaries of this money.

I am committed to come to the floor and debate, as I have made a promise to the chairman. I am not going to block the motion to proceed. By the same token, I am not going to vote for limiting the amount of time Members want to spend on this because I think it is too important. Our veterans deserve as much time as it takes for us to debate where our priorities on money are. If at the end of the day this body votes we send it in the form of a special pension to Filipinos in the Philippines who have no service-connected injury, I will live with that.

But I will not live with it by agreeing to less than the amount of time that is needed to debate an issue about the future of our kids, our service personnel, the men and women who put on a uniform and risk their lives every day. I believe they should sit at the top of the list. And S. 1315 does not put them there. S. 1315 puts at the top of the list a new special pension program for people who have never had a service-connected injury.

I am as sympathetic to those who fall into the category of having helped us. I might mention again, the Filipinos who live in the United States who fought in the Philippines for us, we take care of; we have integrated them fully into the Veterans' Administration. They receive every service our veterans do. To those Filipinos who live in the Philippines who have service-connected injuries, we have made sure compensation is in this bill to take care of them.

But for those who do not have service-connected injuries, I cannot see where they fit at the top of the list of \$221 million and our kids go below it, as it relates to what they need for the severely disabled injuries they have been faced with.

I have a number of soldiers in North Carolina, at least they are stationed in North Carolina, that fall into this category. When we see Eric Edmundson's family spend \$47,000 on a van, and \$14,000 of that comes out-of-pocket, I have to ask: Where are our priorities? Where are the priorities of the Congress in defense of these kids? Well, they are in \$221 million getting ready to go to the Philippines. That is where they are. That is the debate we are going to have over the next several days. If it takes a week or if it takes a month, then we will have that debate. At some point, we will take a vote. I believe the American people will see the advantage, the need, to make sure the No. 1 priority is our kids in uniform, our veterans who come back who will be serviced by this very important piece of legislation.

I am committed to Chairman AKAKA that once we can dispose of the issue of this special pension, I am more than willing to vote for the rest of the bill because it is a good bill. It brings some needed benefits to our veterans.

It never should have been locked up for the length of period this was. But make no mistake about it, no matter how good a bill is, if you want to structure it in a way that debate does not flourish in the Senate, then we have done an injustice to the American people. The most deliberative body in the world is supposed to be one that you are not corralled into agreeing to a certain amount of time to debate on an issue; it is where everybody's voice is heard, it is where every bit of information about an issue can be presented. It is where charts can display what words cannot explain.

That is what the next several days will be about with S. 1315. I am con-

vinced that at the end of this process, not only will Members in this body be enlightened by what we are able to talk about, but the American people will be enlightened, and hopefully this body will vote, hopefully in the majority way, that the priority, the No. 1 priority is our men and women in uniform when they come home.

VETERANS BENEFITS ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2007

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support consideration of S. 1315, as reported by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the proposed Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act of 2007. This is a comprehensive bill that would improve benefits and services for veterans, both young and old, and it should be debated and voted on.

I believe that a brief recap of how we came to seek cloture on this veterans bill would be helpful in assisting my colleagues in their deliberation on cloture.

Last June the committee held a markup during which the then-ranking member, the Senator from Idaho, offered an amendment that would have modified a provision of the bill relating to Filipino veterans of World War II. This amendment would have reduced the amount of pension that Filipino veterans residing in the Philippines would receive.

I stress that the amendment was not to eliminate pension benefits for these veterans from the bill entirely—it was merely to reduce the benefit in line with what the Senator from Idaho viewed as appropriate. I disagreed with his assessment and we debated the issue. Ultimately, his amendment was not adopted.

As that markup concluded, the Senator from Idaho noted that he intended to bring his amendment regarding the pension issue to the floor during consideration of S. 1315, a step I certainly understood and accepted.

The report on S. 1315 was filed in August and I expected that it would come to the floor in September. However, there was an unexpected change in the committee's Republican leadership in early September, with the Senator from Idaho being replaced by the Senator from North Carolina. I did not push for consideration of S. 1315 while the new ranking member took over the responsibilities of the position.

When in October, committee staff began, at my direction, to seek agreement for the bill to be brought to the floor, those efforts were not successful.

Later in the fall, despite his suggestion that there was need for debate, the former ranking member curiously objected to my attempt to gain unanimous consent to debate the bill. I wrote to my colleague in an attempt to find a middle ground between the level of pension benefits in the bill as reported, and the level that he had sought during the June markup.

On December 13, 2007, I received a letter from the former ranking member that indicated that he did not feel that we were far apart from finding a compromise on the bill, and that he looked forward to working with me to gain final passage.

However, my optimism was short-lived. On that same day, the majority staff received a counteroffer from the minority staff, on behalf of the committee's new ranking member, the Senator from North Carolina, which proposed to entirely eliminate pension benefits for Filipino veterans residing in the Philippines from the bill.

Shortly thereafter, I was surprised to learn that this counteroffer was embraced by the committee's former ranking member—rendering his offer to negotiate null and void.

Additional efforts earlier this year to find a compromise or, at a minimum, to enter into an agreement for debate, were again rejected.

Now, after over 7 months of obstruction in bringing this bill to the floor, we have to resort to a cloture vote on the motion to proceed to the bill, an action unprecedented in the history of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

I am dismayed that, along with the Filipino veterans provisions included in the bill, a number of other worthy provisions have not been enacted because of obstruction by the minority.

Among other things, S. 1315, as reported, would: Establish a new program of insurance for service-connected veterans; expand eligibility for retroactive benefits from traumatic injury protection coverage under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program; increase the maximum amount of veterans mortgage life insurance that a service-connected disabled veteran may purchase; recognize that individuals with severe burn injuries need specially adapted housing benefits; and extend for 2 years the monthly educational assistance allowance for apprenticeship or other on-the-job training.

This is by no means a comprehensive recitation of the 8 titles and 38 provisions that are in this omnibus legislation. However, I hope it gives our colleagues an overview of the types of benefits that servicemembers and veterans stand to gain by passage of this legislation.

I ask our colleagues to vote in favor of cloture so as to bring this measure to the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip.

SADDAM HUSSEIN AND AL-QAIDA

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, it has been commonplace for critics of the war in Iraq to minimize, if not actually dismiss entirely, the links between Saddam Hussein and terrorists generally and al-Qaida specifically. This is part of a systematic effort by some, especially now that there are irrefutable signs of progress from the military