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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable BILL NELSON, a Senator from the State of Florida.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O God, our Father, You are our light and our salvation. Whom then shall we fear? We thank You for all of life's positive things. Help us to see them and to count them and to remember them, that our lives may flow in ceaseless praise.

Use our lawmakers. Control their minds that all of their thoughts will be guided by You. Shine Your light upon their path and strengthen them to walk according to Your will. Give them a sense of duty that they may leave nothing that they ought to do undone. Teach them to follow You, and lead them on the right path.

We pray in Your strong Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable BILL NELSON led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, April 22, 2008.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable BILL NELSON, a Sen-

ator from the State of Florida, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. NELSON of Florida thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of Senator MCCONNELL, we will be in a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 1 hour, with the time controlled by the leaders or their designees and Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each. The Republicans will control the first half, and the majority will control the final half.

Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1315, the veterans' benefits bill. We are going to have that vote at noon today.

Today, the Senate will recess from 12:30 p.m. to 2:15 p.m., as we do every Tuesday, for our weekly caucus luncheons, and we will also recess from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. for the unveiling of former Majority Leader Daschle's portrait.

Tomorrow, the Senate will be in recess from 11 a.m. to 12 noon for a Gold Medal ceremony in the Rotunda honoring Dr. DeBakey and from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. tomorrow for a Senators-only briefing by Admiral Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. That will take place in S-407.

VETERANS' BENEFITS ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, yesterday I spoke on the floor indicating that I

thought it was really too bad that the Republicans held up another bill, this one dealing with veterans health benefits. We have hundreds of thousands of veterans returning from Iraq. Twenty percent of them have severe problems as a result of post-traumatic stress syndrome, many of them caused by those terrifying explosions over there that occur all the time, around them and to them. We have 150,000 men and women now in Iraq serving our country bravely.

The veterans' benefits legislation was reported out of the committee 9 months ago, and we have been trying to get permission from the Republicans to bring it to the floor, and they have refused. It expands eligibility for traumatic injury insurance; extends eligibility for adapted housing for those who have been severely burned; it increases benefits for veterans pursuing apprenticeships or on-job training programs; and 80 other provisions that are very important. But we learned yesterday from the ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee that the reason they have held this bill up and intend to continue holding it up is because this legislation restores veteran status to Filipino veterans who served under U.S. command during World War II.

This legislation is important. While our Republican friends are stalling for time, trying to maintain the status quo, our veterans—men and women, young and old—who served with distinction continue to wait for the support, care, and services they have earned. They are waiting for Congress to act.

As I have indicated, the Republicans have followed the lead of the ranking member of the committee and opposed the provision in the bill that provides pensions to Filipino veterans who fought by our side in World War II.

I say what I said yesterday: If you know nothing else about World War II, watch Tom Hanks' documentary of

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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World War II, what went on in the Philippines. We depended on the Filipinos. They fought bravely, valiantly by our side. So I find this opposition baffling. With threats emerging from every corner of our complex world, America needs allies. We need to set an example that we stick by our friends. We should be sending a message to the world that we need you to stand with us. We cannot fight the global war on terror alone.

What kind of example does this set? What better message can we send to our global allies than we will honor the past service of men and women born on foreign soil who rallied around our flag and fought for our freedom?

My friend from North Carolina, distinguished Senator BURR, argues we should not be providing pensions for Filipino soldiers who served our country but who were not injured during World War II.

World War II was a different war from the war we are fighting now. In Iraq, everybody is fair game to the terrorists. It was not that way in World War II. Only 20 percent—one in five—served on front lines taking enemy fire. The other 80 percent provided support services and engaged in intelligence gathering. They transported and maintained equipment. They took care of the ammunition. They repaired combat vehicles. They were in the Quartermaster Corps making sure the uniforms and other equipment the soldiers needed got to where they were supposed to go. They cooked the food. They acted, as we know, as nurses. It cannot be argued those 80 percent were any less a part of that war. It cannot be argued that sacrifices do not count. It cannot be argued that these men and women are less entitled to the benefits of veteran status. This legislation would give them \$300 a month. Don't they deserve that? Doesn't this country owe that to them?

I urge my Republican colleagues to break away from this foolishness and join us in providing a pension for the brave Filipino troops who stood with us, fought with us, and helped us win World War II. I hope the Republicans will support all components of this legislation. It is good legislation, but it should be known that I have reached out to Republicans on this issue on many occasions, with no takers.

As I said to Senator BURR on the floor yesterday, if he does not like this provision, why hold up the whole bill? We should have been on the bill Thursday night, Friday, Monday. It is Tuesday now. Offer an amendment. Say: I don't believe these people who were not front-line soldiers deserve anything. They are old. The average age is 84. They do not deserve anything. Let's strike that with an amendment.

Let's have a debate on it and vote on it, not hold up the whole bill. But that is what is being done. If a majority of the Senators vote for the amendment, the bill will be altered. That is how the legislative process is supposed to work.

We should not have to invoke cloture on a motion to proceed simply to begin to legislate.

So I hope cloture will be invoked and, if it is, we do not have to use the postcloture 30 hours to sit around and do nothing. We should be able to start legislating on this bill. I am not even asking Republicans to support the bill at this point, just support allowing us to move to the bill so we can start legislating.

This is an example; almost 70 times in a little over a year, the Republicans have stopped us from moving legislation. Is it any wonder that today it is reported "Bush's disapproval rating worst of any president in 70 years"? That is no surprise. Holding up legislation, even legislation with which they agree, hold us up, just to stall, to maintain the status quo. What is the status quo giving the American people? Nothing. And that is how they feel about President Bush. That is why we see this headline in today's paper.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

VETERANS' BENEFITS ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, of course the bill is not being held up, and of course the majority does not need permission from us to take up the bill. Today we will, in fact, vote on the cloture motion to proceed to the Veterans' Benefits Enhancement Act of 2007. It is my belief cloture should be invoked and will be invoked.

There is actually much to commend in this bill. It will improve the lives of our veterans by supplementing the level of assistance for disabled veterans for the purchase of automobiles and increasing assistance for those veterans who need to modify their homes to accommodate their disabilities.

I wish to recognize with admiration my colleague from North Carolina, the ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and thank him for his hard work on this bill. Yesterday, he made clear that he will offer a substitute that seeks to correct the one glaring flaw contained within S. 1315, a provision that would divert \$221 million over the next 10 years to create a special pension for Filipino veterans of the Second World War living in the Philippines who have no service-connected disability. That money, of course, would be diverted at the expense of American veterans living in America. The Senator from North Carolina spoke eloquently about the fact that diverting these resources from our veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan represents misplaced priorities, and I agree with him.

My expectation is the Senate will have a healthy debate concerning this

provision. Senators on my side of the aisle will have ample opportunity to amend the committee bill so we can have a bill that will pass with bipartisan support and be signed into law. It is my hope we can work together on this bill and produce another strong, bipartisan achievement for our veterans. I expect that to happen certainly in the very near future. We will have an opportunity in our conference at noon to discuss going forward, but we anticipate moving forward with the Burr amendment early in the process. I think we are going to be able to get a strong, bipartisan accomplishment in the very near future in the Senate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I want the world to hear what the Republican leader just said: We are not holding up the bill. That simply is without any basis of fact. That is why we are going to vote at noon on being able to move to the bill. In years past, it was done automatically. Rarely did we have to file a motion to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed. It is Orwellian, what my friend just said. Of course they are holding up the bill. And we have asked other times to move to this legislation, as far back as November 2007.

So, Mr. President, I now ask unanimous consent that following morning business, we move to the bill, we vitiate the need to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed, that all germane amendments would be in order—and certainly what Senator BURR said he wanted to do would be totally germane. It is a striking provision.

I ask unanimous consent that following morning business, the Senate move to the bill that is before the Senate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I really think any observers will find all of this quite silly, really. We are going to discuss the measure at noon. Many in my conference are not on the Veterans' Affairs Committee and have not had an opportunity to hear from Senator BURR about this issue. Yesterday was a no-vote day. Members were not around. We are going to discuss the matter at noon.

I already indicated to my good friend the majority leader that we are going to be able to move forward, I think, with dispatch on this issue, and we are going to get a bipartisan accomplishment. No amount of trying to steamroll the minority into giving up its rights is going to work. Maybe that is one of the reasons this Congress has a lower approval than the President of the United States. My good friend the majority leader never misses an opportunity to talk about the President not being very popular. Every time in the future the majority leader wants to bring up the President's popularity, I will bring up the popularity of this new