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# Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable EDWARD J. MARKEY, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God our shield, we rejoice in the beauty of Your salvation. Let the people of the Earth look to You with reverential awe. Lord, look with favor upon our Senators today, delivering them from fear and guiding them around the obstacles that hinder their progress. Unite them for the common good of this great land. Manifest Your purposes to them, making clear Your plans and guiding them with Your love. Give them the wisdom to have confidence in Your power, as You inspire them to use their talents as instruments of liberation and healing. Enable them to go from strength to strength, as they fulfill Your purpose for their lives.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

## PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
*Washington, DC, February 26, 2014.*

*To the Senate:*

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable EDWARD J. MARKEY, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
*President pro tempore.*

Mr. MARKEY 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 the Republican leader, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 2 hours. The Republicans will control the first half, the majority the final half.

Following that morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1982, the veterans benefits bill postcloture.

I hope we can reach an agreement to begin consideration of amendments on the bill today. I will have more to say about that in just a minute.

## AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, over the last many months millions of Americans have signed up for affordable health insurance, many for the first time ever, many for the first time in many years.

Millions of young people have stayed on their parents' insurance plans while they pursue higher education to start their first jobs.

Millions of senior citizens have saved money on prescriptions—these prescription bills, they average about $1,200 they have saved, each senior—and tens of millions of women have access to free preventive care.

Across the country, Americans who were once denied insurance because they suffered from something like cancer or something as simple as acne were able to buy affordable, quality health insurance they could afford and they could trust.

Despite all that good news, there are plenty of horror stories being told. All of them are untrue, but they are being told all over America.

The leukemia patient whose insurance policy was canceled and would die without her medication—Mr. President, that is an ad being paid for by two billionaire brothers that is absolutely false; or the woman whose insurance policy went up $700 a month—ads paid for around America by the multibillionaire Koch brothers, and the ad is false.

We heard about the evils of ObamaCare, about the lives it is ruining in the Republican stump speeches and in ads paid for by oil magnets, the Koch brothers.

But those tales turned out to be just that—tales, stories made up from whole cloth, lies, distorted by the Republicans to grab headlines or make political advertisements.

Mr. President, these two brothers are trying to buy America. They not only funnel money through their Americans for Prosperity, they funnel money into all kinds of organizations to do the same thing that they are doing. They are trying to buy America. I do not believe America is for sale. But we will see. But do not take my word for all this. How about taking the word of a Noble Prize-winning economist who wrote last week in the New York Times:

What the right wants are struggling average Americans, preferably women, facing financial devastation from health reform. So those are the tales they're telling, even though they haven't been able to come up with any real examples.

Paul Krugman writes, Republicans are ''just making [this] stuff up.'' It is easy to do if you have billions of dollars to spend and you are trying to buy America.

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



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But, Mr. President, we have our own stories to tell—true stories—true stories of average Americans whose lives have changed for the better because of the Affordable Care Act, true stories of families that can rest easier knowing insurance companies can never again put profits first and people second.

Take the story of a couple from Henderson, NV. I went to high school there. Their names are Jane and Brett Thomas. These are real stories. This story is true.

Jane wrote to me recently to say she is ''ecstatic''—that is her word—to be saving $1,200 every month on a top-of-the-line family insurance plan thanks to ObamaCare.

For years Jane was locked into her job as a school teacher because she, Brett, and their two teenage children needed guaranteed health insurance, and it cost a lot.

But Jane was able to quit her teaching job to spend more time with her children and help her husband at the family small business. Jane says the Affordable Care Act has literally changed her life and the lives of her loved ones. This is what she wrote:

> Everyone on the news keeps talking of all the people the law has hurt.

An editorial comment from me: Koch brothers' lies.

I will go back and start over:

> Everyone on the news keeps talking of all the people the law has hurt, but I thought I should share our joy. The best part is our insurance covers so much more and pays better on every front. . . . I can't thank you and your colleagues enough for fighting for people like me and my family.

Republicans may need tall tales and outright lies to convince people that ObamaCare is bad for them, but Democrats do not have to make things up. We have the support of lots of people, including a Nobel Prize-winning economist, not ''OilCare'' magnets who are trying to benefit their businesses by spreading lies about things that do not matter to them.

Millions of real Americans, like Jane and Brett Thomas, are benefiting from ObamaCare every day. Their premiums are lower. Their prescriptions are cheaper. They cannot be denied a policy or discriminated against. Their benefits cannot be cut off because they get sick or reach some arbitrary cap that some insurance executive dreamed up. They are no longer locked into jobs they do not love or do not need because they cannot get insurance anywhere else.

The Koch brothers are spending hundreds of millions of dollars telling Americans that ObamaCare is bad for them. It is easy to do if you have no conscience and are willing to lie, like they are, through the ads they are promoting. But the Koches should stick to what they know—the oil business—the oil business—where they have made their multibillions of dollars. The truth is simply more powerful than any myth, any legend or any false political ad.

## GROUNDHOG YEAR

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I said I would talk about what we are doing here today. You talk about ''Groundhog Day.'' This is groundhog year. The Republicans in the Senate refuse to allow anything to take place.

Prior to our noon break yesterday—every Tuesday Republicans meet and Democrats meet—one of the senior Republicans came to me and said: Harry, are you going to have amendments? I said: Of course we are going to have amendments. We have talked about amendments on the veterans bill. I have had Republicans come to me and say: Let's try relevant amendments. So I said: Fine. Come up with some. They said: How many? I said: I don't care.

The first amendment is what they have been doing all along. They offer an amendment that has nothing to do with this bill, the veterans bill. It is partisanship at its best. It is obstruction at its best.

We got cloture on this bill. Virtually everybody voted to allow us to start debate on this bill. But that is only a subterfuge. The Republicans obviously have no intent of doing anything for the veterans as outlined in this bill.

The chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee has worked for months coming up with a bill that is good—a bipartisan proposal. Republican proposals are in this bill.

One of the Republican Senators here came and talked for some length yesterday about ways he would like to improve the bill. Offer amendments. He is not going to be allowed to do that.

The bill advanced yesterday should be bipartisan—a measure that would help the veterans who have given so much to defend our country. As I indicated to my friend, the Republican Senator, before their lunch: Sure, let's look at relevant amendments. Why not? It is the right thing to do. But the first amendment the Republicans demand is an unrelated issue on Iran.

Everyone knows that there are negotiations taking place between the United States, the European Union, and others to prevent Iran from having a nuclear capacity. I have said many times—I will repeat it here today—we will not let Iran have nuclear capabilities. The sanctions that we have put in place have brought them to the bargaining table.

You would think that if there was any validity to what the Republicans are trying to do, the organization that is more supportive of Israel than any organization I know—AIPAC—said publicly they do not want a vote on this now—publicly. They do not always put stuff out in the press, but that is what they said.

The audacity of what they are doing is an effort to stall, obstruct, as they have done. This is, I repeat, not ''Groundhog Day,'' not groundhog month—groundhog year. The Republicans have been doing this on every issue. It does not matter if it is an issue that 90 percent of the American people support.

Republicans say they want to help veterans—a strange way of showing it. We introduced a bill that would do just that. Republicans immediately inject partisan politics into the mix, insisting on amendments that have nothing to do with helping veterans.

So I am terribly disappointed again—not surprised. What are we doing here today? Nothing, nothing.

Under the rules, they have 30 hours postcloture and they can sit around and do nothing. That is what they do all the time. We have spent months and months sitting around doing nothing because of procedural roadblocks put up by the Republicans.

## RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

## IRAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, there is a broad bipartisan majority in the Senate that would like to vote on Iran sanctions. The dilemma we have here is that the majority leader does not want this vote to occur. So I would like to start this morning with a few words about an issue that should be of grave concern to all of us; that is, the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.

It is no exaggeration to say that this is one of the significant foreign policy challenges of our time and one we simply have to get right. That is why a strong bipartisan majority has sought to pass legislation in the Senate that puts teeth into the negotiations that have followed November's interim agreement. The challenge we have had is the majority leader does not want us to vote on it. It could be that he is afraid it will actually pass. Republican Senators—and hopefully some Democratic Senators as well—are going to continue to press the majority leader to allow a vote on this legislation before these negotiations end.

The Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act is a perfectly reasonable bill. This is a Menendez-Kirk bill. It does not disrupt ongoing negotiations. It simply provides an incentive for Iran to keep its commitment under the interim agreement. It says that if Iran does not keep its word, then it will face even tougher sanctions at the end of this 6-month period. In other words, it does not disrupt the negotiations at all, even though the big—sort of the high leader, the Supreme Leader in Iran says he is not paying any attention to these talks. Nevertheless, it does not disrupt these talks, which seem to be going nowhere.

But it does say at the end of the 6-month period: You are going to get tougher sanctions if nothing comes of the discussions. It puts teeth into the talks that are already taking place. It is a recognition of the success we have already had as a result of prior sanctions. After all, there is a good reason

to believe sanctions are what brought the Iranians to the table in the first place. They were hurting. So it stands to reason that if the Iranians break the interim deal, they should get tougher sanctions. If nothing happens, we should send a message: You cannot keep talking forever. Something will happen at the end of the interim period.

That is especially true given the fact that we are actually running out of tools here short of the use of force. This bill is the best mechanism we have to keep the Iranians at the table until we get the right outcome and to ensure they are sticking to their end of the agreement. We should not fall victim to Iran's efforts at public diplomacy.

Let me repeat that a strong bipartisan majority in both Houses of Congress agrees with this approach, so there is simply no good reason for the majority leader to prevent a vote on this crucial legislation. He is gridlocking the Senate, preventing the Senate from working its will on a bill that enjoys broad bipartisan support, makes elementary good sense, and is the best hope we have to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. There is no excuse for muzzling the Congress on an issue of this importance to our national security, to the security of Israel, our closest ally in the Middle East, and to international stability more broadly.

I know many active members of AIPAC—the majority leader mentioned AIPAC. They want to have this vote. They will be coming to Washington next week from all over the country. I will bet this is a vote they want to have.

This is a rare issue that should unite both parties in common purpose. There is no question that it would if the majority leader would simply drop his reflexive deference to a President whose foreign policy is focused on withdrawing from our overseas commitments, a foreign policy that at worst poses a serious threat to our own security and that of our allies.

So once again I call on the majority leader to allow the Congress, allow the Senate to serve its purpose and express itself in our Nation's policy toward Iran. Let our constituents speak on this all-important issue on which so many of us in both parties actually agree.

In the Joint Plan of Action, the President made clear that he opposes additional sanctions. Why don't we let Congress speak? Let Congress have a voice. Let's stand together for a forward-deployed, ready, and lethal force that makes our commitments real in the eyes of friend and foe alike. Let's hold Iran accountable—actually hold them accountable. Let's do the right thing—approve this legislation and send it to the President's desk. The clock is ticking. The time to act is now.

## CHANGE IN POLICY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Earlier this year I came to the floor to pose a simple question about President Obama's final years in office: Did he want to be remembered as a hero to the left or as a champion for the middle class? That is the question. I asked the question this way because for the past several years the left has basically had its run of this White House. During that period the politically connected and the already powerful have clearly prospered. But what about the middle class? They feel as though they have been shut out altogether as household income has plummeted and families who were struggling to pay the bills have gotten left behind by a President and a party who claimed to act in their name.

So I wanted to know: Did the President plan to continue down the same ideological road he has taken us on or would he change course and embrace effective proposals that would make a real difference in the lives of middle-class Americans? Would he reach across the aisle to jump-start job creation and make the economy work for the middle class again?

Well, over the last few months we appear to have gotten our answer. Once more, the real concerns of ordinary Americans have been pushed aside in favor of the preoccupation of the political left. Yet again we have seen the truth of the old saying that a liberal never lets the facts get in the way of a good theory. Once again we have seen how liberal policies end up hurting the very people they claim to help.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the debate over the minimum wage. As a recent CBO report made clear, the President's bill basically amounts to a terrible real-world tradeoff, helping one group of low-income Americans by undercutting another group of low-income Americans. How is that fair? Americans are crying out for jobs. Job creation is the top issue in our country. Our unemployment and underemployment rates have remained abysmally high more than half a decade after this President took office. What is the White House's solution? A bill that might sound good in theory but could cost as many as 1 million jobs, according to CBO.

The Congressional Budget Office released another report, this one on ObamaCare. There is a similar story: 2.5 million fewer Americans in jobs thanks to ObamaCare; huge disincentives to work thanks to ObamaCare. That is what CBO says.

Of course, Washington Democrats—the same folks who promised you could keep your health plan if you liked it—told Americans not to believe their own eyes, that ObamaCare would simply liberate them from jobs. ObamaCare would simply liberate them from jobs. It is just unbelievable, especially when we consider that the law's medical device tax alone is projected to kill as many as 33,000 jobs and that 60 percent of business owners and HR professionals recently surveyed said ObamaCare will negatively impact jobs. As a member of that group recently put it, ''Small businesses have an incentive to stay small'' under ObamaCare. That is because ObamaCare can punish businesses that choose to hire more workers.

In my home State of Kentucky, the tension between the priorities of the left and the needs of real people is on full display. That is because the Obama administration has trained its sights on some of our most vulnerable citizens. One administration adviser actually used the words ''war on coal'' to essentially describe what the administration is doing or, in his view, probably should be doing to hard-working miners who just want to put food on the table.

Those were his words, not mine. Here is why: Because according to liberal elites in Washington, these folks are standing in the way of their theories. A practical approach that actually takes the concerns and anxieties of those people into account would promote clean energy even as it acknowledged the real-world benefits of traditional sources of energy.

My point is this: The administration has broken faith with the middle class, and it has stirred up strong emotions, especially among those who actually want to see a better life for those struggling to make it in our States. Almost everyone feels let down. A lot of folks are very angry.

It is a real tragedy, not only because of the missed opportunities and the human cost of these policies but also because when the President ran for office, he promised a very different approach.

It is tragic because the very folks he has talked about helping are the ones who seem to suffer the most under his Presidency.

It is tragic because it appears as if he has answered the question I posed in January: that he is prepared to double down on the left and throw in the towel on the middle class. How else can you explain the obsession with all of these peripheral ideological issues at a time when Americans are demanding good, stable, high-paying jobs and a new direction, at a time when folks' wages are stagnant but their costs always seem to be rising, at a time when younger Americans seem to be resigned to a harder life than their parents had? How else can you explain why the President has refused to sign off on projects such as Keystone Pipeline that would create thousands of jobs or why he refuses to push his own party to join Republicans and support trade legislation that could create even more jobs?

This cannot be the legacy the President really wants to leave, but it is the legacy he will be ensuring for himself if he does not change. There is still time to alter the course. There is still time for the President to acknowledge that there is no reconciling the demands of his base and the concerns of the middle class. It is one or the other.

The real solution here is liberating the private sector. The real solution is to implement policies that will increase wages for everyone instead of pursuing policies that essentially seek to distribute slices of a smaller pie to some. Of course, making a turn toward authentic job creation might make the left mad, but it is the only way to get the gears of our economy working again and college graduates off their parents' couches and onto a path of earned success.

Maybe the President will show some change of heart in Minnesota today. Maybe he will recognize, for instance, that killing thousands of high-tech jobs in the medical device industry is not worth the pain it is causing. Who knows? Who knows? I sure hope so because if you have entered the sixth year of trying to fix an economy and you are still talking about emergency unemployment benefits, it is time to recognize that your policies have not worked for the middle class. It is time for a fresh start.

Before I go, I would like to highlight one more dividing line between the dreams of the left and the well-being of our constituents. It is a topic I spoke about yesterday; that is, Medicare Advantage.

As I asked then: Why would the administration want to raid a program that is working, such as Medicare Advantage, to fund a program that does not work, such as ObamaCare? Why would Senate Democrats vote time and time again to do that? They must have known that taking $300 billion from Medicare Advantage to fund ObamaCare would have real-world impacts on seniors, such as losing choices and coverage and doctors they now enjoy. It is not fair. It is not right. Several of my colleagues will be coming to the floor to speak more about this issue this morning.

I yield the floor.

## 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 be in a period of morning business for 2 hours, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska.

## HEALTH CARE

Mr. JOHANNS. Yesterday I had the opportunity to come to the floor of the Senate and talk about ObamaCare's broken promises for our Nation's seniors.

The administration's most recent proposal to significantly cut Medicare Advantage is certainly not news to my colleagues on the floor today. During the health care debate, we warned over and over again that cutting $½ trillion from Medicare to fund ObamaCare would have disastrous consequences and that it certainly would not strengthen Medicare. The law drains $308 billion from a very well-received Medicare Advantage Program.

The stories from Nebraskans illustrate how these cuts are hurting senior citizens. I heard from a couple in Carney, NE. They wrote to me saying that the Medicare Advantage plan they had for several years was something they liked. It was a plan that worked for them, but that plan, because of ObamaCare, was cancelled. She went on to say to me that another plan was going to cost more money and higher rates were coming for them.

She said: ''I have not been shy about telling people that we lost our insurance plan thanks to ObamaCare!''

I could add to that that she has lost her insurance plan—and thousands of others, tens of thousands of others across the United States—because of the votes of the majority and the President.

A Nebraskan from Hastings shared that her Medicare Advantage plan was discontinued and her new Medicare Advantage plan option was, get this, 357 percent more expensive. Is that fair treatment to that senior citizen?

When ObamaCare was passed, we tried to get amendments done that if there were any savings in Medicare, it would go back to Medicare to protect the system. That was voted down by the majority.

What we ended with is a situation where those funds were pulled out of Medicare and used to finance ObamaCare. For millions of Americans and about 35,000 Nebraskans who rely upon Medicare Advantage, this law has not delivered on its promises.

As I have said over and over since this debate began, I have been committed to ensuring that Medicare is sustainable for decades to come, not only for the current generation but for our children and our grandchildren. The health care law does not accomplish this goal, and I believe strongly it needs to be repealed.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. I come to the floor also to talk about a letter I got from Wyoming from a constituent, Traci, who lives in Rock Springs, WY. She is very concerned about the health care law. It is interesting because she writes after hearing on the news last week a clip of Secretary Sebelius. It is a clip where Secretary Sebelius claims there is no indication that the ACA is responsible for any job loss.

Traci in Rock Springs, WY, sees Secretary Sebelius on television and wants to let the country know—and I am doing that for Traci today—that the Secretary is wrong.

Traci says: ''My life is a prime example. Let me explain just how the ACA has destroyed my life.''

The quote she is referencing is Secretary Sebelius last week said: ''There is absolutely no evidence, and every economist will tell you this, that there is any job loss related to the Affordable Care Act.''

It almost seems like a deliberate deception, an effort by the Secretary to mislead the American people, saying: Who are you going to believe, Secretary Sebelius or your own two eyes when you see what is happening in your own communities?

That is why Traci wrote to me from Rock Springs, WY.

Traci said she works full time. She also maintains a number of part-time jobs. She has a master's degree.

She says: ''Once the ACA was passed, I saw the writing on the wall, and so did the companies I work for.''

Isn't it interesting that Traci in Rock Springs, WY, could see the writing on the wall, the companies she worked for could see the writing on the wall, and yet the Democrats in this body who voted for this law couldn't see the writing on the wall.

She said she had health insurance and that these companies wouldn't have had to provide her with anything because she had insurance—wouldn't have had to provide her with anything. But they didn't know who might and might not have insurance, and they weren't taking the chance that they would have to offer health care to a large number of people. So what these companies basically did, she said, was hire a specific number of individuals full time and thus those of us who remained part-time employees have been cut way back. This is obviously impacting her wages, her take-home pay, the things that matter to her, and it seems that Democrats, including Secretary Sebelius, couldn't care less.

It was interesting. I came to the floor yesterday with an article from the New York Times last week about all of these public jobs, people working for public schools, people working for community colleges, sanitation workers for communities, counties—all of these people having their hours cut, their take-home pay cut, their wages cut, and it is because of the health care law, specifically because of the health care law.

Traci continues:

> I can't believe in a country my grandfather came to and lived the American dream is actually actively trying to prevent me from being able to do the work I want to do. The kind of work I am good at. The kind of work that others benefit from. What was the comment last week about how I am being liberated from my job to do what I truly want.

It is astonishing. What she says is: I was doing what I truly wanted.

But yet, according to the Democrats, according to NANCY PELOSI, the former Speaker of the House, she is now being

liberated from the job to do what she truly wants to do—when we have somebody with a master's degree, someone who loves to teach, and not being able to do what she truly wants to do.

Continuing:

And now this government is actually preventing me from what I want to do, doing what I like to do, doing what I am meant to do.

This is a woman in Wyoming doing what she wants to do, what she likes to do, what she wants to do, and was meant to do as a teacher—because of this health care law.

It is not only in Wyoming. I read a story on the floor yesterday of a school district in Connecticut, Meriden, CT, where the superintendent, who is on a national board of school districts, said: What am I supposed to do? If I am going to provide by law all of these part-time workers—who are working over 31 hours—health insurance, what I am going to have to do is fire five reading teachers. How can I make that decision and that tradeoff?

Instead, they cut their hours to less than 30 hours a week, but yet Kathleen Sebelius says there is absolutely no evidence relating to job loss in the Affordable Care Act.

My friend Traci writes: ''So Obama care—has cost me a lot of jobs, has cost me about half of my income.''

When the President of the United States is saying we need to raise the minimum wage, why is the President of the United States ignoring Traci, her income, her wages, and her take-home pay? Why is his health care law making her life worse?

She said: ''So Obama care—has cost me a lot of jobs, has cost me about half of my income.''

She continues:

And by the way I was one of those taxpayers that don't have any deductions generally to take other than my mortgage, so when you used to get a lot of taxes from me, by decreasing my income in half, your tax revenue is decreasing in half as well. So next time Sec. Sebelius claims that there are no indications of any job loss, you can tell her that I have lost multiple jobs and I am not being ''liberated.''

That is what the American people are facing. That is what the President of the United States denies every day when he refuses to give voice to the suffering that his health care law is causing all across this country in all 50 States. It is time that we work together, get solutions for the health care needs of this country, and not continue under what is happening with the President's health care law—which, case after case after case, is not yet giving the American people what he promised them and is giving them a lot worse. It is hurting their lives, it is hurting their health, and it is hurting their take-home pay.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip.

Mr. CORNYN. I thank the Senator from Wyoming, who is one of the most knowledgeable, eloquent Members of our side of the aisle or in this Chamber on the subject of health care law. As a former practicing orthopedic surgeon, he knows the subject better than almost anyone I know.

But we are on the floor today to talk about the cuts to the only real choice that seniors have when it comes to their health care coverage under Medicare. There are basically two choices. One is called Medicare Advantage, which I will talk more about in a minute, and the other is Medicare, traditional Medicare, which is a fee-for-service program that many people find is less advantageous to them than Medicare Advantage.

Close to 16 million people currently receive health care benefits through Medicare Advantage—about 1 million of them in Texas, the State I am honored to represent. Of course, they represent roughly 30 percent of all Medicare beneficiaries.

Why would somebody choose Medicare Advantage rather than traditional Medicare? Because it gives a lot more flexibility and greater patient choice. It actually delivers better results than traditional Medicare. It has been one of the main sources of innovation when it comes to health care, producing better outcomes for seniors under Medicare. Medicare Advantage is the primary driver.

Unfortunately, the President's health care law, known as the Affordable Care Act, or ObamaCare, slashed about $300 billion from Medicare Advantage. My constituents are already going to start to see premium increases to their Medicare Advantage policies. Many of them will have to then question whether they can afford that, whether they will drop Medicare Advantage, lose the choices, the flexibility, the innovation that goes along with it, and end up basically turning to traditional Medicare fee-for-service.

In Texas, about two out of every three doctors will see a new Medicare patient because it actually reimburses physicians at a lower rate than regular health insurance does, so many doctors have found that they have to limit their practice, much as they have under Medicaid as well.

But we know that the $300 billion that has been taken from Medicare Advantage, and these seniors—who rely on it to shore up the Affordable Care Act or ObamaCare—know that the news on ObamaCare continues to unwind and bring us bad news almost every day. Not only have millions of people lost their existing health care coverage, even though they were promised by the President of the United States that if you like it, you can keep it—I lost count of how many times the President made that statement, but I think it is somewhere in the high twenties. Of course, now we are finding out that more and more people are having to pay higher premiums as a result of ObamaCare.

Another promise the President made is he said that a family of four would see a reduction of $2,500 in their average premiums, but they are seeing their premiums go up. Indeed, on Friday, in a late-afternoon news dump—that has become a new art form for the administration, they dump news on Friday afternoon and hope nobody notices, or it won't be covered—we learned that roughly two-thirds of the people who work for small businesses will see an increase in their premiums as a result of ObamaCare, some 11 million small business employees.

The people who are concerned about Medicare Advantage aren't only on this side of the aisle. In fact, we have had bipartisan accolades for Medicare Advantage, called a great success by both Senators from New York, for example, and the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee from Colorado. They recently joined me, along with a couple of dozen colleagues, to urge CMS Administrator Marilyn Tavenner to ''maintain payment levels that will allow [Medicare Advantage] beneficiaries to be protected from disruptive changes in 2015.''

This bipartisan support for this important choice for seniors, known as Medicare Advantage, is in real jeopardy as they are going to see as a result a $300 billion cut from Medicare Advantage in order to shore up this failing experiment in big government known as ObamaCare.

People's existing health care arrangements are in serious jeopardy and they are concerned and they are calling and writing us and wondering what we are going to do. Unfortunately, those calls and letters seem to fall on deaf ears, as far as the President and the people who voted for this bill are concerned. The American people have seen they are whistling past the graveyard and hoping that what will likely happen in November—which will finally be the day of electoral accountability—is that their voices will actually be heard.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise to speak on behalf of the 35,000 Nebraska senior citizens who are enrolled in Medicare Advantage. These Nebraskans are going to face fewer choices, increased premiums, and decreased benefits because of ObamaCare's latest cuts. I am especially concerned with how these cuts will impact rural Nebraskans who may be forced out of the program altogether due to the lack of available plans.

The administration has already taken over $700 billion from Medicare to prop up ObamaCare, and $308 billion of that is from the popular Medicare Advantage Program to fund this failed health care experiment. These cuts to health services for seniors only hasten the demise of this successful program, a program that has improved the lives of millions of seniors across this great country. Medicare Advantage works for them.

Too many promises have already been made and broken, so let's not break another promise to America's seniors.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I think nearly every Member of this body shares the goal of increasing access to affordable health insurance and helping American families receive the best coverage to meet their specific needs. So the question before us today—and the question before us this entire Congress—is how are these goals being achieved. This has been an issue we have been debating since 2010, when ObamaCare was signed into law.

Based on the extraordinary feedback from Hoosiers, regardless of party affiliation or ideology, the overwhelming number of messages that have been sent to my office, and that I have heard while traveling across the State of Indiana, suggest that the Affordable Care Act has turned out to be a dismal failure. It is hurting more families than it is helping.

To top it all off, the administration, late last Friday afternoon once again cut one of the most popular programs available to seniors—Medicare Advantage. We have 230,000 Hoosiers enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans who could be told major cuts will be made to their plans in order to pay for ObamaCare.

What an irony. We pass a program to provide health care coverage for senior citizens. They sign up for the program. They make the choice on their own to pay higher costs for Medicare Advantage so they get better coverage, and the administration simply says: We need to rebalance things so we are going to do everything we possibly can to make it more difficult and more expensive. This was their choice, but the administration is saying: We are going to make it our choice that this program is going to be reduced and much harder to engage in.

Consider what is happening. This administration is cutting billions of dollars from Medicare Advantage—an extremely popular program not just in my State but across this country—to pay for ObamaCare, which is extremely unpopular. So the administration takes a plan that works, a plan that people support, because it is their choice and they are willing to pay for it, and the administration says: No, we are going to take that away from you so we can cover the cost for a plan that is not popular. This is the irony of ironies, particularly in terms of meeting the goal that I think all of us want to meet.

So we have yet another broken promise. The President so famously said over and over again: If you like your plan, you can keep it. If you make a choice as to how you want to be covered, what benefits you want to have, what premium you want to pay, you can keep that—but now he is saying, well, no, effectively, you can't keep it because we are going to take that away from you.

It is no wonder I receive tens of thousands of pieces of mail and phone calls from Hoosiers all across my State saying: I got duped here. I got lured into something that supposedly was going to make medical care less costly; that I would be able to keep my doctor, I would be able to stay with my hospital, I would be able to keep the benefits in the plan I chose, and now I am being told, no, none of that is going to work.

As was just stated by Senator CORNYN of Texas, there is a bipartisan effort underway to send a message to the President. It urges the President to preserve Medicare Advantage and the incentives to join it. I know the President doesn't want to listen to Republicans and have them tell him what is happening in their States, what their suggestions are as to what to do to fix this disaster of a health care plan, but maybe he should listen to Members of his own party. There is a significant number of Democrats who have said: We don't want these cuts to be imposed on Medicare Advantage. We don't want to go home and tell our constituents they can no longer have their Medicare Advantage plan.

So if the President doesn't want to listen to us, I fully understand that. He has made that very clear. But perhaps he should listen to Members of his own party and listen to what they are saying. Let's give people the ability to make choices and keep the plan they have chosen and not have it taken away by a bureaucracy that simply makes decisions for them.

With that, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I compliment my colleagues who have been talking about Medicare Advantage today. It is amazing to me that this administration will take money from Medicare Advantage—a program people love and that works well, where they can have their own doctors and their own health care providers—and put it into ObamaCare—a program that is not working and people are not happy with—and we wind up with a lot of dissatisfied people in this country and with good reason for their dissatisfaction.

So I rise to join my colleagues in speaking out against the harm ObamaCare is already causing to seniors throughout the country who rely on Medicare Advantage. I have heard from many seniors in my home State of Utah who are worried about the impact further cuts to the Medicare Advantage Program could have on their personal health care.

For example, James and Maureen of Spanish Fork, UT, sent a letter describing how they have been personally affected by the hundreds of billions of dollars taken from Medicare Advantage to pay for ObamaCare—to take money from a program that works, that people are happy with, that they pay for, and put it into ObamaCare where it doesn't work, they are not happy with it, and it even costs the government more money.

James and Maureen were informed some time ago that their current doctors and most providers in their area will no longer be covered as a part of their plan's network. In Maureen's words:

> If further funding is taken from the Advantage programs, more and more providers will stop accepting these plans. Where will we go to seek medical treatment?

Maureen also said that similar to many other seniors, she and her husband ''worry about what will be next.''

These are common stories. Seniors throughout Utah and the Nation are seeing their health care options dwindle because President Obama and the Democrats in Congress raided Medicare Advantage to pay for their misguided ObamaCare and what they call their health care law.

We all remember when the President promised under ObamaCare if you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor. Yet because of the law's cuts to Medicare Advantage, people such as James and Maureen are being forced to find new doctors and health care providers. As each day passes, fewer and fewer options are available to them. This is just another example of broken promises that came part and parcel with ObamaCare.

On top of the problems with Medicare Advantage, a new report issued late last week from the Chief Actuary from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services had even more troubling news. Buried in the report—which was 2 years late, by the way—is the confirmation that ObamaCare will raise insurance premiums for 11 million employees of small businesses.

You heard that right. The Obama administration's own actuary found that under the President's health care law 11 million workers will see their premiums rise. As I said, this report was 2 years late, and it is no wonder why the administration sat on it for as long as they did.

This is just the latest in a long line of bad data we have seen about this misguided law. Yet the administration refuses to step away from its talking points and acknowledge the truth—that the health care law is fundamentally flawed and is not working as promised.

All of the problems we are seeing are confirming over and over that the best path forward would be to repeal ObamaCare and replace it with patient-focused, commonsense reforms that will actually lower costs and expand options for the American people. I hope eventually that is the path we take.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in July of 2009, President Obama said: ''If you like your doctor, you keep your doctor.

If you like your current insurance, you keep that insurance. Period, end of story.'' Then later, in September of 2009, the President said: ''Now these steps [ObamaCare] will ensure that you—America's seniors—get the benefits you've been promised.''

Well, Mr. President, last Friday we saw yet another group of Americans fall victim to the Democrats' broken ObamaCare promises, and this time it was America's seniors. ObamaCare cuts of over $300 billion to Medicare Advantage are already hurting seniors who rely on that popular program for their health care needs. More than 15 million seniors, close to about 30 percent of all Medicare recipients, are enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans.

The Wall Street Journal reports that approximately one out of every two new Medicare enrollees chooses Medicare Advantage. Seniors often choose Medicare Advantage because it is a more comprehensive and cohesive way to get health care services and it offers seniors the chance to pick a plan that is right for them instead of a one-size-fits-all approach picked for them by Washington, DC.

The administration's additional cuts to Medicare Advantage announced last week will make it even harder for America's seniors to keep their benefits, plan, and preferred doctor. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that more than one-half million seniors will lose their current plans in 2014, which is a direct violation of the President's promise.

This administration's cut to Medicare Advantage in order to try to pay for ObamaCare is having real-world impacts on people throughout the country.

A constituent of mine, Cheryl from Box Elder, SD, wrote to me this past week and said:

> My husband and I both pay for a Medicare Advantage Plan. . . . We have already had our original policy cancelled because of ObamaCare. And our prescription costs have increased for the same reason. So I am practically begging you to do all you can to keep our Advantage Plan from being cut.

Every Senator who voted for this train wreck owes America's seniors such as Cheryl an explanation for these Medicare cuts, which are already resulting in canceled plans, higher costs, and reduced access to the doctors they had and liked.

When the ObamaCare legislation was being debated and these proposed cuts to Medicare were being advanced, many of us said this would be a big mistake because what they were essentially doing was cutting Medicare—particularly Medicare Advantage, which is especially helpful to a lot of seniors across this country and which is working out there—taking the savings and then using them to pay for a whole new entitlement program.

At the time we talked about this—and, of course, because of the weird conventions used in trust fund accounting here in Washington, the hundreds of billions of dollars that were cut from Medicare were not only then used to pay for this new entitlement program, ObamaCare, but were also credited to the Medicare trust fund. Their argument was that they were preserving and extending the lifespan of Medicare, and at the same time they were using these savings from the cuts coming in Medicare Advantage to pay for a whole new entitlement program. I think for most Americans this would be spending the same money twice. It would be double-counting revenue.

Essentially what they are saying is this: We are going to put an IOU into the Medicare trust fund which at some point in the future we are going to have to redeem to pay benefits, and this is going to require us to borrow more money.

It is intergovernmental debt. We talk about publicly held debt, which is debt held by the public, but there is also intergovernmental debt, which adds to the total debt burden we place on American citizens and which is debt that we are going to have to pay back in the future.

Essentially, all they have done is put a promissory note—an IOU—into the trust fund. At some point in the future when we need to be able to pay benefits to beneficiaries, we are going to have to borrow the money to redeem that IOU.

Essentially, they were able to argue that we were somehow extending the lifespan of Medicare at the very time these cuts were being made and also at the same time paying for a whole new entitlement program under ObamaCare. It was spending the same money twice. It was double-counting revenue—something which anywhere else in the country would probably land most Americans in jail.

That being said, these Medicare Advantage cuts are now having real-world impact—something we predicted all along.

The reason Medicare Advantage is a popular program and the reason one in two new beneficiaries is signing up is that it gives you options. It gives you choices. It provides competition, which is something we need to have more of, not less of, in health care today.

If you want to put downward pressure on prices, if you want to constrain utilization in health care, then create competition out there. Give people more ownership, more skin in the game. Give them some personal investment in their own health care decisions.

As it is, with the traditional Medicare Program we have a fee-for-service Medicare Program. Many seniors are enrolled in that. But Medicare Advantage gave them another option—an option that presented choices and opportunity to cover things they want to see covered in their health care plans. And it has worked. It has been an effective program, one that I think most people point to as a success.

So we are going to cut the very program that is working perhaps the best out there in terms of meeting the health care needs of America's seniors in order to fund a whole new entitlement program, ObamaCare, and in the meantime end up with these higher premiums, canceled coverages, and all the dislocations that are coming as a result of these Medicare Advantage cuts to seniors across this country. That is the wrong way to approach this issue.

There is a much better way, one that relies more on the very things on which Medicare Advantage is based—more competition, more choice, more options—and wouldn't lead to canceled coverages, higher premiums, higher deductibles, and fewer doctors and hospitals to choose from for America's seniors. But that is exactly where we are, and American seniors are now experiencing the very thing a lot of other Americans have already experienced. People who get their insurance on the individual marketplace have seen a lot of these canceled coverages already. They have seen these huge increases in premiums.

Many of us have been here on the floor reading constituent mail and emails from families and individuals who have been adversely impacted and harmed by ObamaCare because of canceled coverage, higher premiums, higher deductibles, and loss of doctors and hospitals. We have seen this in the individual marketplace. We are starting to see this—and we will see more—in the small business, employer-provided marketplace.

But now, as of last week, the real impacts are being felt as well by seniors across this country who in big numbers have been signing up for Medicare Advantage. Close to 30 percent of all Medicare recipients—15 million seniors—as a result are going to see higher premiums and reduced access to health care because of the cuts that will occur to Medicare Advantage in order to pay for a new entitlement program, ObamaCare, which, based on the number of delays the administration has made, has already demonstrated it is not working. And I, as have many of my colleagues here, have argued for a long time that it can't work because it is built upon a faulty foundation.

There is a much better way to do this. We should do away with this approach, go back to the drawing board, and use a step-by-step approach to reforming health care in this country, realizing the status quo doesn't work but realizing as well that the best way to get lower costs, more affordable health care, and more accessible health care for more American citizens is to create downward pressure on prices. That requires giving people choices and creating competition in the marketplace. Those are the things we ought to be advocating and advancing rather than this top-down, government-knows-best, one-size-fits-all solution coming out of Washington, DC, which is hurting more and more Americans and most recently American citizens who are now experiencing the adverse impacts of

ObamaCare because of the cuts to their Medicare Advantage plans.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. AYOTTE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

## IRAN

Ms. AYOTTE. Madam President, I come to the floor today to talk about a grave threat to the United States of America, a grave threat to the world, and a grave threat to our friend and ally, the State of Israel; that is, the threat of Iran's nuclear weapons program.

As we stand here today, pending has been legislation filed by Senator RICHARD BURR which contains important sanctions which are essentially an insurance policy to make sure that Tehran does not play the United States of America and that they are, in fact, serious about stopping their nuclear weapons program. Unfortunately, there is a long history with Iran where we talk and they enrich. This is why it is so important right now that we have this insurance policy.

These sanctions pending would only go in place if Iran violates the interim agreement that has been entered into between the administration and other countries in the world and Iran and if they fail to reach a final agreement that is acceptable to the security interests of the United States of America and to our allies in the region to make the world a safer place.

We cannot accept a nuclear-capable Iran. Why is that? Iran is a country that has threatened to wipe the State of Israel off the face of the Earth. Iran has called our country ''the Great Satan.'' Iran is the world's worst state sponsor of terrorism. They have supported terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. They have, unfortunately, obviously worked against our strong ally Israel. They have supported the murderous Assad regime, providing Assad arms so he can murder his own people.

Unfortunately, there are so many examples of the danger of Iran having nuclear weapons capability. If Iran gets this capability, unfortunately we will also find ourselves in a position where we are in a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, a Sunni-Shia arms race, which would then also threaten the world and make that region even more of a tinderbox.

So we now find ourselves at a critical moment. I am deeply worried that the sanctions regime this Congress has worked so hard to put in place on a strong bipartisan basis is unraveling and we need an insurance policy to make sure Iran knows they are not going to play us and unravel these sanctions. The way we can do that is by having sanctions legislation passed which is prospective.

If Iran is serious about a nuclear weapons agreement that takes away their capability of having a nuclear weapon, then they should not have a problem with prospective sanctions by this Congress. Again, those sanctions would only go in place if they violate the interim agreement. If their words mean anything, then they shouldn't have a problem with the fact that we are just saying: If you violate it, we will impose additional sanctions. We will not allow this sanctions regime to unravel.

What is the significance of this sanctions regime? The work done by this Congress on a bipartisan basis and with our partners around the world is what has brought Iran to the table. All of us want a diplomatic resolution that stops Iran from having a nuclear weapon, but we need to go into this with clear eyes, which is why having this insurance policy is so important. A final agreement with Iran will only be meaningful if it ensures they will not have the ability to enrich because their ability to enrich makes it easier for them to immediately ramp up to nuclear weapons capability.

I recently attended a security conference in Munich and met with some representatives of the Arab nations. They were asked in an open forum: If an agreement is reached and Iran is allowed to enrich, what will the rest of you want to do? Their answer was that they will want the right to enrich too.

This final agreement must stop Iran's ability to enrich. If we do not stop them, we will not only face the risk of Iran being able to quickly ramp up to a nuclear weapon and its capability to harm the world but also the risk that the Arab nations themselves will also enrich. Even if they don't have a nuclear weapon capability, they are all right at the point where they could break out to that capability, and that is just as dangerous for the world.

The amendment we have makes it clear that we are going to protect the United States of America and protect our allies and the world. It has to be clear. It should prevent Iran from that enrichment capability. This agreement should stop their capability at the Arak facility to produce plutonium. Our agreement should absolutely make sure we are given access to their military facilities so we can stop them from their programs where they are working on weaponization of nuclear materials.

I serve on the Senate Armed Services Committee. The Director of National Intelligence and others have told us that by 2015 Iran could have ICBM capability. Can you imagine if they were to continue with this nuclear program and have ICBM capability? This is a true risk to the world.

An agreement is only meaningful if it is an agreement we can rely on, that is open, transparent, verifiable, and absolutely stops them from having a nuclear program that could be a threat to the world. We need to make sure they stop enrichment and put a stop on the Arak plutonium reactor and weaponization program. We need full and open access.

We should be addressing Iran's acts of terrorism throughout the world. One of the grave dangers I worry about is that if Iran has a nuclear weapon, they may not use it, but they may pass it on to the terrorist groups that Iran is associated with, and that is a grave danger not only to our ally Israel but also to the United States of America.

One of the reasons I believe the sanctions legislation that is pending is so important is because some of the statements that have been made recently by the regime in Tehran are very troubling and harken back to their prior behavior of we talk, they enrich. We have to question how serious they are about a verifiable, transparent, and real agreement to stop their nuclear weapons program.

For example, on February 18—in talks between Iran and the P5+1 that were held in Vienna—Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the talks ''will not lead anywhere.'' In advance of the talks, President Ruhani, whom Prime Minister Netanyahu has described as a wolf in sheep's clothing—and I would agree with him on that—has stated that peaceful atomic research would be pursued forever.

Iran's Foreign Minister recently clashed with a lead U.S. negotiator, Wendy Sherman, over the Arak and Fordow facilities. Sherman stated that Iran had no need for either facility. Make no mistake, if Iran is serious about giving up its nuclear weapons capability—or the pursuit of that capability—then she is absolutely right; there is no need for the Arak facility that allows them to produce plutonium. There is no need for these underground facilities such as Fordow, where they are trying to hide their program from the rest of the world.

The Foreign Minister of Iran, in reaction to her comments, described her statement as ''worthless'' and reinforced Iran's position that their ability to produce atomic energy at the plutonium reactor at Arak is not negotiable.

This is deeply troubling, and it is one of the reasons we need to send a clear message here and now. They came to the table because of sanctions. The sanctions were having a deteriorating effect on their economy. Yet recently we have seen—and this has been my fear—the sanctions regime unraveling. They are actually using this negotiation with the administration to further unravel those sanctions in order to get what they want without an insurance policy to ensure that we will get what we want, and that is what this sanction legislation does.

One of the issues that came up in February, a French trade delegation—representing 116 French companies—

traveled to Tehran. I recently met with one of the Arab nation's Foreign Ministers, and he told me that the hotel rooms in Tehran are filled with business men and women looking to line up to do business with Tehran.

This is a real issue that the sanctions regime is starting to unravel, and the legislation we have pending with 59 cosponsors is an insurance policy to say: If you are not serious about this agreement, we will impose further sanctions to make sure we do everything we can to stop you from having nuclear weapons capability.

This is a critical moment in the history of this country. This is a critical moment for the safety of the world. We want to stop Iran from using diplomatic means as a way to have nuclear weapons capability because of the risk it presents to the world.

We cannot be naive. We have to understand the prior behavior of Iran because the prior behavior of Iran will allow us to go in with our eyes wide open rather than just taking their assurances that they are serious about a nuclear weapons agreement that will stop them from having this capability.

As we stand on the floor, I ask the majority leader to allow a vote on this legislation so we can send a clear message to Iran and the rest of the world that they should not think they should do further business with Iran unless Iran is serious about giving up its nuclear weapons program through a transparent, verifiable agreement that will ensure they cannot threaten the State of Israel and the rest of the world with a nuclear weapon. I ask the majority leader to allow a vote on this important legislation.

There are so few pieces of legislation that come through the Senate which actually have 59 cosponsors. This is one of them. It certainly has strong bipartisan support.

I don't buy the argument that if we were to pass this legislation, somehow Iran would walk away from the negotiations. If Iran walks away from the negotiations because we pass prospective legislation as an insurance policy to make sure they are serious about a real, verifiable agreement that stops their nuclear weapons program, then, frankly, we know they have been playing us. Because the reality is, if they are serious, they should not care if we put an insurance policy out there. If they are serious, they will follow through and will do what the interim agreement requires and will agree to a final agreement that stops their nuclear weapons program in a transparent, verifiable way once and for all.

On the other hand, if they are just going to walk away with a threat of prospective sanctions, how serious can they be? We will still have the sanctions in place that will continue to put pressure on them to say the United States of America and our allies will not accept a nuclear-armed Iran because of the threat it presents to us.

We cannot allow the largest state sponsor—and most serious state sponsor—of terrorism around the world to have this capability. We cannot allow a race in the Middle East—a Sunni-Shia race—to see who can have a nuclear weapon first because of the danger it presents to the world.

Finally, we cannot allow Iran to continue to threaten our friend and ally, the State of Israel. I understand and appreciate that when Iran and its leaders have made statements they want to annihilate Israel from the face of the Earth, our friends in Israel take that very seriously. They have vowed never again. We stand with them not only for their friendship but also for the safety of the world.

We have legislation pending on the floor that gives us an opportunity to make it clear what the United States of America stands for and that we will not accept a nuclear-armed Iran. They must be serious or there will be consequences in terms of economic sanctions.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

## HEALTH CARE

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, yesterday we received news that 4 million people have now signed up in private health care exchanges all across the country. In addition, it was released that about 12 million people have called the call centers in January alone, and 1.1 million people signed up to receive health care through the Affordable Care Act during that time. Young enrollment—the group of individuals for which there has always been a question as to whether they are going to sign up for these exchanges—grew by 65 percent.

It is time for this body to recognize the Affordable Care Act is working. It is working for people who have been desperate to get insurance. It is working for people who have been getting the short end of the stick from insurance companies, and it is working for millions of seniors all across this country who have been paying far too much for prescription drug costs and for preventive health care.

We have known this from the very beginning in Connecticut. Despite the hiccups over enrollment in the fall period, States such as Connecticut that had made a commitment to making this law work, rather than undermining it, have seen the success from day one. Connecticut, at the outset, said that we were going to try to enroll between October 1 and March 31 about 80,000 people. That was our goal. We just announced in Connecticut—a State that is working to implement the law, not undermine the law—that we didn't just hit 80,000, we didn't just hit 100,000, but we have enrolled 126,000 Connecticut residents in our health care exchanges and in Medicaid. Our projection is that we are going to enroll 150,000 people by March 31. That is nearly double our initial estimate. Last week, traffic on Connecticut's Web site rose 31 percent, and the daily enrollments rose by 67 percent.

The stories just keep on coming into our office about the lives that are being changed as people, for the first time in their lives, get access to affordable health care. People such as Susie Clayton, who has been dealing with a cancer diagnosis for over a decade—a crippling, preexisting condition that for most of her adult life has kept her out of the ranks of the insured. I have known Susie for probably two decades. Almost every single conversation I have had with Susie over those 20 years has been about her daily struggle to try to deal with her illness and her preexisting condition. Every single day, every single week, she has thought about whether she is going to be able to pay for her health care if she has a reoccurrence of her cancer and whether during that time she is going to have a job that provides her with insurance.

Susie had been paying about $1,700 a month at last count for an insurance plan she could afford. Her life changed on January 1. She now is paying a couple hundred dollars a month in premiums. She finally gets to wake up every day not having to worry about whether she is going to be able to afford coverage, whether she is going to be able to see a doctor to deal with her very difficult diagnosis. With 4 million people now enrolled in these exchanges across the country, that story can be replicated over and over.

A bunch of our Republican colleagues have come to the floor over the last couple of days—I was in the presiding chair yesterday listening to some speeches—regarding some new information about Medicare Advantage. Everybody knows by now that included in the health care bill was an end to the subsidies given to Medicare Advantage plans. The private sector in health care and in other industries always tells us they can do things more cheaply than the Federal Government—and a lot of times they are right about that—but it was exactly the opposite when it came to Medicare Advantage. We were paying private insurance companies 13 percent more than it costs the Federal Government to run Medicare. This was a source of enormous profit for the insurance companies. It didn't make sense to oversubsidize insurance companies to run a program the Federal Government itself was running for 13 percent less money. So we ended those subsidies, and part of the elimination of those subsidies has gone into effect.

But the story that is being told on the floor today isn't true. The fact is that since the Affordable Care Act was

passed, even as we have been implementing these cuts to these overly generous, unjustifiable subsidies to insurance companies, Medicare Advantage enrollment has gone up by 30 percent. Thirty percent more seniors are now enrolled in Medicare Advantage, even as these cuts have been imposed. Premiums are down. Medicare Advantage premiums have been reduced by 10 percent.

Over the course of the debate on the Medicare Advantage cuts, I heard Republican after Republican, when I was in the House of Representatives, come to the floor and tell us that the sky was going to fall when we ended these subsidies to insurance companies. I will be honest. A lot of them are in my State of Connecticut. Not only has the sky not fallen, it has risen, with 30 percent more seniors in Medicare Advantage with 10 percent less in premiums. To the argument I have heard on this floor that there will be less choices available to seniors because of these cuts going into effect, let's just be honest: The average Medicare beneficiary has 18 different Medicare Advantage plans to choose from—18 different plans. That is a pretty robust market.

Let me just add that Republicans have voted for these cuts themselves. The Ryan budget, which has essentially been the budget standard for Republicans in both the House and in the Senate—endorsed by hundreds of Republican legislators—the Paul Ryan budget included the cuts to Medicare Advantage subsidies because Republicans have agreed with Democrats that there is no reason to subsidize insurance companies instead of subsidizing beneficiaries.

So what happened when we decided to stop subsidizing Medicare Advantage? Enrollment went up 30 percent. Premiums went down 10 percent. The average beneficiary still had the choice of 18 different plans. But we took that money we saved in padding the pockets of health care insurance companies, and we told seniors that when they show up to get a preventive health care visit, they are not going to have to pay anything out-of-pocket. So since the ACA has been passed, here is how much a senior has to pay for their annual checkup: Nothing. So 25 million people have gotten free preventive care since the Affordable Care Act has been passed.

What else did we do? We decided that this doughnut hole in the prescription drug bill, whereby people got coverage up front and then they had to pay for a certain amount of drugs themselves and then they got catastrophic coverage, didn't make sense. So we eliminated the prescription drug doughnut hole. It will be gone by 2020. It has been cut by more than half already. Since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, the average senior has saved $1,200 in prescription drug costs thanks to the Affordable Care Act.

So as I listen to my Republican colleagues come to the floor and complain about the cuts to Medicare Advantage—cuts, in fact, that many of them have supported—I think we have to ask ourselves: If we had a choice to provide a 13-percent subsidy to for-profit insurance companies or pass along $1,200 in savings to American seniors and eliminate the costs that many of these fixed-income seniors pay when they go in to get preventive care, what would we choose? This is really all about choices in this body. It is about choices in terms of where we put the money we spend on behalf of Medicare beneficiaries. To me, it is a no-brainer. To the American public, it is a no-brainer. Instead of subsidizing insurance companies, let's subsidize hard-working seniors, who have built this country, with $1,200 in drug savings and 25 million people who have gotten free preventive health care.

For Republicans who have come down to the floor and said they want to repeal the Affordable Care Act or that they want to repeal the cuts to Medicare Advantage plans, essentially they are saying they want to return billions of dollars to the insurance companies and take away that money from seniors in this country. I do not think that is a choice the American people are going to accept.

This week a group of us in the Senate are launching the ACAworks campaign. Later today I will be joined by a number of my colleagues around the corner as we launch a new effort to make clear to the American people that now, with 4 million people enrolled, and millions of people saving money—notwithstanding the legitimate difficulties that were encountered in the first days of the Web site—the Affordable Care Act is working. It is working for millions and millions of people across this country who are finally getting care.

We will be joined today, as well, by a couple of Medicare recipients who are glad they now have the protection when they get into the doughnut hole. They are glad they now get free preventive care. And they will take the choice any day of this Congress and this government investing in them instead of investing in big for-profit insurance companies.

None of us deny there are bumps in the road as you rework one-sixth of the American economy, which represents our health care economy. None of us will deny there is no excuse for the fact that for the first few months there were a lot of people who were not able to enroll who wanted to. But now that the enrollment site is working, now that outreach efforts are up and running, record numbers of people are signing up for health care because there is an almost insatiable demand for quality, affordable health care that is now being met as the Affordable Care Act is working.

I yield back the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I want to begin by thanking my colleague and friend from Connecticut, Senator MURPHY, for the very eloquent and powerful remarks he has just made, showing America the Connecticut experience with health care, which shows that the Affordable Care Act is working and is expanding opportunities for health care across the country. Once the myths are exploded, once the truth is told, Americans will appreciate how fortunate we are to have this reform in the way that health care is insured and delivered for the American people.

There are bumps in the road, as Senator MURPHY has just said. There will continue to be issues to be overcome in achieving success. But the enormous potential to make America healthier, to eliminate the anxiety and anguish Americans experience in seeking a quality of life that health care affords, is an opportunity and obligation we cannot shirk. I am proud to join with him in speaking this truth and clarifying for people across the country the great promise of this program.

A lot of the promise still has to be fulfilled. A lot of the realization about that promise has to be educated. But we will succeed in that effort. I thank him and my other colleagues who are joining us in seeking to make America realize the great potential and promise that we have, and already the great accomplishments that have been made.

Connecticut stands as a model for both the promise and the accomplishment in the 130,000 people who have already enrolled in the benefits for young people now permitted to stay on their parents' policies, and, indeed, the elimination of preexisting conditions as an obstacle to insurance.

I know about many of these issues and obstacles from my time as attorney general when I fought insurance companies that denied basic opportunities and failed to fulfill their obligation and impose these kinds of obstacles. Now, hopefully, insurers will be a partner in this effort, and so will the medical community and business community across the country.

So I look forward to continuing this effort and thank him for the exposition he has given, and my other colleagues who will join us later today.

I want to focus on a group that particularly needs health care in this country, and that is our veterans. We are here to talk about the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014—a measure that seeks to address comprehensively the challenges our veterans face today.

There are more and more veterans. We are losing some of the ''greatest generation.'' In fact, we are losing them tragically and unfortunately

every day. But the next greatest generation needs the same benefits and services we have given to the ''greatest generation.'' The next greatest generation is serving right now and has served recently in the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan.

We must be unwavering in our commitment to our veterans. We must determine that this big and broad bill is necessary to keep faith with them and to make sure we meet the diverse and urgent needs they present.

We all talk in this body about our commitment to veterans. But all too often, our Nation has failed to keep faith. I have learned that we all have expressed here our admiration and commitment to our Nation's veterans. I have introduced, as have many of my colleagues, veterans bills based on input from my constituents. In fact, my very first piece of legislation as a Senator was the Honoring All Veterans Act.

But the reality is this comprehensive approach is necessary. I thank Senator SANDERS as chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee for recognizing that the needs of our veterans are interlocking, multifaceted, and manifold in the kinds of problems that are raised as they leave the military and enter the civilian world.

Sometimes it is their medical records that cannot be transferred seamlessly from the Department of Defense to Veterans Affairs and Veterans' Administration facilities. Sometimes it is the failure to make their military skills transferable in credentials and licensing. And sometimes it is medical conditions, health care needs for post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury, that make their wounds invisible, make them difficult to discern to the ordinary eye but are there deeply and enduringly unless they are treated properly. That is why health care for them is so important and why this bill expands opportunity for health care so dramatically.

The health care needs of our veterans must be met through the provisions of this bill that expand health care opportunities and services. When I first came to the Senate, I thought—and I think reasonably—that a veteran needing health care could simply go to a VA hospital to receive it. But that is really not the case. On January 17, 2003, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it would ''temporarily'' suspend enrolling Priority Group 8 veterans. That temporary restriction stands today. So under existing restrictions, a veteran making as little as $33,577 or a family of five making a household income of $50,025 can be denied health benefits in Connecticut. There are an estimated 720,000 Priority Group 8 veterans who are not enrolled in health care. Tens of thousands of veterans apply each year for enrollment and are denied due to that means test.

Simply put, the VA should have the capacity and resources to serve every veteran. That is why section 301 of this bill would allow veterans who lack that access, who do not have a service-connected disability, and who do not have affordable health insurance, to enroll in the VA's health care system.

There are other health care provisions: section 305, which expands the provision of chiropractic care; sections 331, 332, and 333, which expand complementary and alternative medicine. Anybody who has not yet seen ''Escape Fire'' should view it to understand the stark ways that veterans have challenges in access to alternative treatments and why drug addiction and abuse can become such a problem. And there is section 334, expanding wellness programs. All of these programs are vital, as well as the expanded access to treatment for post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury, which, in my view, are at the core of the need for this legislation.

Section 342 would require the VA to contract with outside providers to establish a program of supportive services to family members and caregivers of veterans suffering from mental illness. All of these invisible conditions have such dramatic consequences in the employability of veterans and their ability to give back and continue to contribute to this Nation, as so many of them wish to do.

The needs of our veterans are also pressing in disability claims. The need to end the backlog is, again, one of the areas addressed directly in this bill. The backlog of disability claims at the Department of Veterans Affairs has become a chronic problem. The VA is making progress. There is no question that the numbers are better today than they were. But there are still veterans such as Army veteran Jordan Massa in Connecticut, who served in Afghanistan, and Marine veteran David Alexander, who was deployed in Iraq, who had to wait too long and suffered as a result. We need to keep faith with those veterans.

I understand and I applaud Secretary Shinseki, who has committed to tackling this problem. But some 389,000 claims are still backlogged. In Connecticut, about 48 percent of the claims are backlogged, meaning that 48 percent of claims made by our veterans take more than 125 days to be resolved. Each of these veterans has an individual story, a record of service, a record of suffering. Be it in today's wars or conflicts past, a record of service and sacrifice is exemplified by every one of them. These individuals may now be looking for employment, perhaps, to support a family. We need to keep faith with them.

This legislation aims to decrease the backlog further through an accelerated appeals process and getting the VA the information it needs to decide these claims. It brings in local governments to help with the claims. And it helps veterans who have misfiled documents in the claims process to seek a better route to what they need and deserve.

The bill also would require regular reports to Congress on efforts to eliminate the backlog. Accountability is so critical—accountability on backlogs, on all of the issues that underlie the failure to process these claims as quickly as they should be. And the backlog must be eliminated.

Employment programs are also addressed in this bill. So are the traumatic effects of sexual assault. The bill is multifaceted and comprehensive, as it should be. To address the diverse and urgent needs, it must be big and broad because the needs and challenges of our veterans are big and broad.

The reality is that 1 million men and women will leave the military over the next 5 years. One million patriotic and brave men and women will be separating from our Armed Forces. Becoming veterans, they will need services and benefits that they have earned, and they will need them at the time they leave, not at some distant point in the future. We owe it to them now to keep faith.

I have submitted amendments that would address some of the other issues.

For example, the need to recognize that post-traumatic stress is not only a condition that afflicts our current military men and women and veterans but also past veterans, even though it was undiagnosed and untreated at the time. Changing their status so as to recognize post-traumatic stress for the veterans of past wars is a need that we need to address.

I will make sure those veterans of past wars, whether it is Vietnam or Korea or any of those conflicts in our history, receive a second look at their discharge. That is the purpose of the amendment. That is the purpose of legal action that has been brought by the Yale veterans clinic. I will continue to support it.

We can go further as well to enhance our veterans' health by including the Toxic Exposure Research and Military Family Support Act in this measure. I have an amendment that will do so. Many veterans were exposed to toxic chemicals such as Agent Orange and their needs are only beginning to be addressed.

In addition to the harmful effects to those individuals, there are also impacts on their children. For many years those who were exposed to Agent Orange were told there was no evidence that their symptoms resulted from that. Now that we have evidence Agent Orange is toxic, we need to include the longer term effects on their children and their families. The amendment I have offered would address those issues.

Even if none of those amendments I have proposed are adopted during this process, this measure stands on its own as a historic step forward. It is, indeed, a historic recognition of the obligation and opportunity we have at this point in our history to make sure we leave no veterans behind and keep faith with our veterans, address their needs in a

big and broad bill that reflects the urgent and diverse issues and challenges they face. I am proud to support it.

I thank my colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee who have approved many of the parts of this bill by unanimous vote or overwhelming bipartisan majorities. This cause should be truly bipartisan. Let's move forward and move America forward addressing the needs and challenges of its veterans as we have an obligation to do. We must keep faith with our veterans and leave no veterans behind.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

## CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

## COMPREHENSIVE VETERANS HEALTH AND BENEFITS AND MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY RESTORATION ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1982 which the clerk will now report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

Motion to Proceed to Calendar No. 301 (S. 1982) a bill to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let me thank Senators MURRAY, DURBIN, and BLUMENTHAL for their very thoughtful and important remarks regarding the needs of veterans and why it is absolutely imperative we pass this comprehensive veterans legislation. Let me also begin by thanking all of the members of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs for their very hard work in helping to craft what is not only an enormously important piece of legislation impacting the lives of millions of our veterans but is also, to a large degree, a bipartisan piece of legislation.

It is no secret that Congress today is extraordinarily partisan and, in fact, is largely dysfunctional. On major issue after major issue the American people are crying out to us and asking that we address the serious problems facing this country. Yet we are unable to do virtually anything. I hope—and I say this from the bottom of my heart, and as chairman of the Senate veterans committee—that at least on the issue of addressing their needs—the need to protect and defend those veterans who have protected and defended us, those men and women who have put their lives on the line to protect this country—we can rise above the partisan rancor that we see down here on the floor every single day.

That is what the American people want us to do. Not only has the veterans community been clear on the need to pass this bill, but that is what the American people want us to do. They understand the sacrifices made by veterans and their families, and they want us to rise above the partisan acrimony the American people see every single day.

Let me be very clear, and let there be no misunderstanding about this. I have tried, as chairman of the committee, to do everything I can to bring forth legislation which includes provisions from Republicans and provisions from Democrats. My view is, and has been, that if there is a good idea that improves the lives of veterans—I don't care if there is an ''R'' attached to a Senator's name, a ''D'' or an ''I,'' as in my case—let's bring forth that legislation.

The reality is, to the best of my knowledge, there are 26 separate provisions that Republican Members have authored or cosponsored—that is a lot—and some of them are very significant provisions. Further, perhaps most importantly, two of the most important parts of this comprehensive legislation are omnibus bills that were passed unanimously by the committee. So what we have done is brought ideas together in two of the most important provisions in this bill, with two separate omnibus bills passed unanimously by the committee. There are other provisions in the bill that were not passed unanimously but also passed with bipartisan support.

I also want to point out the two provisions that were not discussed at the committee level but have been passed almost unanimously by the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, and I believe have strong bipartisan support in the Senate. With almost unanimous votes, the House passed a provision that would solve a long-standing problem and enable the VA to enter into 27 major medical facility leases in 18 States and Puerto Rico. We have virtually that same language in our bill, and that was passed almost unanimously in the House. So I think that is a nonpartisan, bipartisan provision.

A second provision passed by the House with very broad support deals with ensuring that veterans can take full advantage of the post 9/11 GI bill and get in-State tuition in the State in which they currently live. That language I believe is identical in our bill.

So we have major provisions passed in the Republican House with almost unanimous support that are in this bill, and there are two omnibus provisions passed with unanimous support out of our committee, and we have other provisions passed with bipartisan support.

So while I am not here to say this is 100-percent bipartisan, because it is not, we have gone a very long way to do what has not been done very often here in the Senate, and that is to bring everybody's ideas together to pass something that is terribly important for our veterans.

The point I am trying to make here is that I happen to believe that virtually every Member of the Senate, regardless of their political point of view, does care about veterans. I say this especially about the members of the committee—the Veterans' Affairs Committee—who would not be on the committee if they didn't care about veterans. I believe that virtually every Member of the Senate wants to do the best they can for veterans. That is why I have worked so hard to do my best to make sure this bill is as bipartisan as it can be.

In my view, this is, in fact, a very good bill. But like any other piece of legislation, it can be made better. We have 50 States, we have Native American tribes, and we have all kinds of issues out there. There are 100 Senators here in this body who know their States, who know their issues. So let me be very clear in echoing what the majority leader said this morning, and that is he and I want to encourage every Member of the Senate—Democrat, Republican, and Independent—who has germane amendments dealing with veterans issues to please offer those amendments. Bring them to the floor.

My understanding is a number of amendments have already been offered by Democratic Senators and we have some amendments now that have been offered by Republican Senators. I understand Senator RUBIO and Senator COLLINS have offered amendments, as well as a number of Democrats. We look forward to more amendments coming to the floor so that we can have a serious discussion about those amendments.

I hope the one thing that will not happen is that, as we discuss this legislation, instead of having an honest debate about the needs of veterans, that this legislation becomes another forum for the same old partisan politics we have seen for years—the sort of partisan politics the American people are increasingly disgusted with. The American people understand that honest people have differences of opinion on the issues, but they do not want to see serious legislation being sabotaged because of political partisanship.

In my view, with regard to this veterans bill and the fact we have language in this bill which can improve the lives of millions of veterans and their families, I believe it would be extremely disrespectful to the men and women who have put their lives on the line to defend this country to use this piece of legislation dealing with veterans issues as nothing more than a political pawn for other issues that are totally extraneous to their needs.

I fully understand—no great secret here—that my Republican colleagues do not like the Affordable Care Act. They are entitled to their opinion. We have discussed this issue and this law over and over. I ask my Republican colleagues: Please, do not inject ObamaCare into the veterans debate. It has nothing to do with the needs of veterans.

I understand some of my Republican colleagues have strong feelings about sanctions in Iran. Clearly, this is an important issue. But it has nothing to do with the needs of veterans in this country. Please, do not inject the Iran sanctions issue into a debate on how we can improve the lives of veterans and their families.

I know there are strong feelings and disagreements about the wisdom or lack of wisdom of the Keystone Pipeline. I have my views on the issue. Other people have their views on the issue. But, frankly, the Keystone Pipeline has nothing to do with the needs of our veterans. And there are many other issues out there.

Let me at this point quote from a tweet that came out last night from the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America association, and this is what they say. This is the organization that represents the men and women who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is what they said last night:

> The Senate should not get distracted while debating and voting on the vets bill. Iran sanctions, ObamaCare, et cetera, aren't relevant to S. 1982.

That is the issue we are debating today, and I absolutely agree with the IAVA on this issue. They also say in another tweet:

> In 2013, veterans were not immune from gridlock in Washington. This year has to be different. We urge the Senate to pass this legislation.

As I mentioned yesterday, this legislation, in fact, has the support of virtually every veterans organization in the country, representing millions and millions of veterans, from the American Legion to the VFW, the DAV to the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Vietnam Veterans of America to the Disabled American Veterans and the Paralyzed Veterans of America. We have dozens of organizations that know how important this legislation is to their members.

So my plea to my colleagues is let's debate veterans' issues. If you have an idea to improve this bill, I welcome it. Let's have that debate. I do not believe this legislation is immune to improvement. We can improve it, but please do not inject extraneous issues in here for totally political reasons. I think that is unfair to the veterans of this country.

As the Presiding Officer well knows, on Veterans Day and Memorial Day, I—and I suspect every Member of the Senate—go out and speak to veterans. We express our deep respect for them and their families and the appreciation for all they have done for our country. Today I hope we can keep faith with those promises. Let us focus on veterans' issues. Let us get the best bill we can. Let's not kill this bill because of the same old same old partisan situation we face.

I will take a few minutes to discuss why we have brought forth this legislation, which has been described as the most comprehensive piece of veterans legislation to have come before Congress in decades.

While in recent years the President and Congress have made good progress—I think the President's budgets have been good; I think Congress, in a bipartisan way, has done a good job in addressing many of the problems facing the veterans community—the truth is, and I hope everybody knows, we still have a very long way to go. Now I will discuss some of the outstanding issues this bill addresses.

I think anybody who has nursed a child or a parent who is ill or injured knows how difficult and stressful this is; how sometimes you have to stay up all night, how sometimes you have to stay with your patient 24 hours a day. I would like people to be thinking about what it means day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, to be taking care of those veterans who are severely disabled in war.

Think about, for a moment, what the stress is and how much of your own life you have given up to your loved ones, and there are tens of thousands of spouses who are now doing nursing and caring for veterans from World War II, from Korea, from Vietnam, from Iraq, from Afghanistan. That is what they are doing right now, and they are doing it because they love their husbands or their wives or their sons or daughters.

The very good news is in 2010 Congress passed legislation to develop a caregivers program for post-9/11 disabled vets. This was a huge step forward. What it said is for those men and women who came back from Iraq and Afghanistan, perhaps without legs, perhaps blind, perhaps without arms, perhaps ill in one way or another through PTSD or TBI, we were going to make sure their wives, their mothers, their sisters, their brothers, their children had the support they need to provide the kind of inhome nursing care those veterans need. This legislation has been very successful for post-9/11 veterans. I will give one example and there are obviously many.

One family who benefited from the VA's caregiver program is Ed and Karen Matayka. They live in my home State of Vermont. In 2010, Ed and Karen were deployed together as medics to Afghanistan with the Vermont Army National Guard, a National Guard of which many of us in Vermont are very proud. Just 2 days before Independence Day, the vehicle Ed was riding in was hit by an IED. The driver, Vermont's Ryan Grady, was killed. We remember that loss very well. Ed and three others were severely injured. Ed lost one leg immediately, suffered a stroke and a severe spinal cord injury. Soon thereafter his other leg was amputated above the knee and he suffered yet another stroke.

After 3 years of rehabilitation, Ed was medically retired from the Army. Because of VA's caregiver program—a program we established in 2010 for post-9/11 veterans and their families—his wife Karen was able to separate from the Army as well as become her husband's full-time caregiver. Karen spends a significant amount of time every day caring for Ed. She helps Ed with personal care, fixing his meals, and all of his transportation, including to and from medical appointments. Karen has gone through the training program and receives a monthly stipend to help compensate for her loss of income.

I think that is the right thing to do. I am not sure there are too many Members in the Senate who don't think that is the right thing to do. Here is a guy who suffered terrible wounds. His wife is now giving up her career to care for him. Should we not help that family? I think we should. Thanks to this program Ed and Karen are able to continue their lives together in their home.

Another important point: What might the alternative be? Send Ed to a nursing home where he would be uncomfortable, not get the care of a loved one, and at great expense to the VA? So this saves us money and provides better care for our veterans. This is what we did in the post-9/11 caregiver bill. The problem is the bill only applies to post-9/11 veterans.

What I think should happen, what the veterans community thinks should happen, and what I believe the American people think should happen is we should expand that program to all veterans of all wars and their families. There are tens of thousands of family members today who are caring 24/7 for veterans wounded in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and other wars. They deserve the same benefits the post-9/11 veterans families are now receiving. That important provision is in this legislation, and I hope my colleagues support it.

There is another important provision in this legislation. This is a very important and sensitive issue. There are some 2,300 veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan who, because of a variety of injuries, are unable to start the families they have wanted to start. Some injuries are spinal cord, some may be genital injuries, some just affect the reproductive organs, and they are no longer able to have babies. Many of these young men and women want to have babies, to raise their children, and, as much as they can, to have a normal family.

Right now the VA does not offer reproductive treatments to veterans, meaning the most seriously injured among them cannot access the treatment or care needed to start a family.

Senator MURRAY, former chair of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, was on the floor yesterday speaking at great length about this important issue. I believe that if we send young people off to war and they become injured and if they want to start a family, we have to assist them in being able to do so. That provision is included in this legislation.

I will talk about another issue we deal with in this bill. Unfortunately, yesterday in discussion this provision was mischaracterized by some who spoke against it. This provision deals with expanding VA health care and making sure some, including some very vulnerable veterans who are today not eligible for VA health care, in fact become eligible.

Currently, VA uses an extremely complicated system to determine eligibility based on income for veterans without service-connected injuries, often what we call priority 8 veterans. The VA now determines income eligibility by looking at the income of an individual and his or her family county by county in each State. I don't know how many thousands of counties we have in the United States of America, but I will discuss what this means in the real world in terms of how the VA currently determines income eligibility.

My own State of Vermont is a small State—620,000 people. We are a rural State. There are just 14 counties. In Vermont, as throughout the country, each county has its own threshold for determining eligibility for priority group 8 veterans.

For a veteran living in Chittenden County, where I live, the threshold to enroll in the VA health care is less than $48,000, but for a veteran living in Windham County, in the southern part of the State, the threshold is less than $39,000. That is a difference of nearly $9,000.

In the State of Georgia, there are 159 counties and nearly as many income thresholds. Imagine that. For a veteran living in Walton County, GA, the threshold is less than $41,000. But if a veteran lives in Coffee County, the threshold is just over $28,000. It may make sense to some people. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me.

In the State of Texas, there are 254 counties. For a veteran living in Brazoria County near Houston, the threshold is less than $48,000. For a veteran living in Bee County, the threshold is less than $31,000. That is a difference of over $17,000. Frankly, this whole process does not make a lot of sense, and I know from personal experience it is totally confusing to veterans: Am I eligible for VA health care? It depends on which county you live in. It depends on which side of the road you live. This makes no sense at all.

This legislation simplifies the system. We establish a single income threshold for an entire State. So instead of having thousands of income thresholds, we have 50. It is true that the threshold we use would be the highest in each State, therefore, making more veterans eligible for VA health care. In my view, this is exactly what we should be doing.

There may be some in the Senate who believe a veteran in a given State who earns all of $28,000 a year should not be eligible for VA health care because he or she is ''too rich.'' I respectfully disagree. VA provides high-quality, cost-effective health care. There are many veterans in this country struggling economically who want and need VA health care.

I should also add that these newly eligible veterans will pay a copayment just like all other currently eligible priority 8 veterans. Frankly, I would prefer those veterans receive high-quality care at the VA, rather than going into an emergency room at 10 times the cost when they become ill.

Let me reiterate. Unlike what some of my colleagues said yesterday, this important provision does not open VA health care to every veteran in America—and there are 22 million of them—nor does it open the floodgates, bringing in millions and millions of veterans.

I cannot give an estimate, nor can anybody else, how many will take advantage of this provision, but it will be a manageable number, largely because we make very clear—and this is an important point some of my colleagues apparently did not understand. We make it very clear in this legislation that the VA has 5 full years to fully implement this provision in a way that will not negatively impact current patient needs. So anyone who says it is going to open the floodgates for every veteran is not accurate, and that because all of these veterans are coming in we are going to diminish the quality of care for current veterans is not accurate. Let me reiterate this point, which is also in the bill. We understand that the highest priority—and we have talked to disabled American veterans about this issue—for VA health care is to take care of those veterans with service-connected problems. That is the case today and that will remain the case after this bill is passed tomorrow. Those with disabilities and those with service-connected problems will remain the highest priority.

This is a long discussion, and we could go on and on for hours about this. I am also on the health committee and I have studied this issue a little bit. There were some very harsh criticisms made yesterday about VA health care. The truth is that the Veterans' Administration runs 151 medical centers. They run some 900 community-based outreach clinics. They have hundreds of vet centers.

The VA is the largest integrated health care system in the United States of America. It employs hundreds of thousands of workers, doctors, nurses, technicians, you name it. Obviously no one has ever suggested that VA health care is perfect or that there aren't problems within the system. I have talked to veterans in Vermont, and I have talked to veterans all over the country, and by and large there is very strong support for VA health care. These veterans understand that when they walk into a VA facility, the people who are there to treat them understand their problems, and many of the workers are veterans.

I think if you talk to the veterans community, they will tell you not that the VA does not have its share of problems, it certainly does, and not that we should not focus vigorously on improving the care at VA, but they will tell you by and large the care they are getting is good care.

The point I want to make is that before we eviscerate, as was the case yesterday, the Veterans Health Administration's health care system, let us remember today about what is going on in terms of health care in America. Let us understand that the VA is not the only health care system in this country which has problems.

Today, as a nation, we are the only major country on Earth that doesn't guarantee health care to all of its people as a right. Today there are tens of millions of people—even after the Affordable Care Act—who lack any health insurance.

Let's remember that 45,000 people—according to a Harvard study—die each year because they don't get to a doctor on time because they lack health insurance. Let us not forget that in the midst of high premiums, high copayments, and lack of insurance, the United States of America spends almost twice as much per person on health care as do the people of any other nation. Many of those other nations that spend a fraction of what we spend have better health care outcomes than we did in terms of life expectancy, infant mortality, and many other important outcomes.

I will also add that before we go about attacking, in a rather vicious way, the Veterans Health Administration's health care system, we should understand that according to a recent study that appeared in the Journal of Patient Study that between 210,000 and 400,040 people each year who go to the hospital for care suffer some type of preventable harm that contributes to their death. According to that study, that number would make medical errors the third leading cause of death in America behind heart disease and cancer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has used the hour of postcloture debate time.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 5 additional minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. My point in saying that is not to say that the VA health care system doesn't have its problems.

It is to say that we have problems in every health institution in America. That is what we have.

When you look at the VA—and I can go on and on—they are doing some cutting-edge work. If you look at health care technology and health care records, the VA has led the country in that direction.

There was a discussion yesterday—an absolutely correct discussion—about our concerns within the VA and outside of the VA and about overmedication of people who are dealing with pain problems. To the best of my knowledge, the VA is leading the country and doing cutting-edge work in complementary and alternative medicine with good results. They are saying that maybe we don't have to use all of this medication. Maybe we can use acupuncture, maybe we can use yoga, and maybe we can use meditation. They are doing that aggressively. By the way, this legislation expands those programs.

One of the crises in American health care today is our failure in terms of developing a strong primary health care system. Guess what. The VA has 900 primary health care facilities all over this country. The VA has women's health centers which deal with the specific needs of children.

I could go on and on about it. It is not fair to pick on the VA. They are vulnerable. Every problem they have is on the front pages of the newspapers.

I will never forget that a good friend of mine went into a hospital and died of an infection. It didn't make the front pages of the paper. That is happening all over America.

Yes, of course, we want to improve the VA health care system, but let us thank the hundreds of thousands of highly qualified and dedicated workers who are providing quality care to their patients.

Lastly, I want to say a word on something I feel very strongly about. I have always believed that dental care should be an integral part of health care as a nation and within the VA, and what this bill does for a first time, through a pilot project, is begin the process of opening dental care for nonservice-connected veterans.

There are a number of other provisions I will talk about later. Here is the bottom line: We owe more than we can ever pay back to people who sacrifice so much for this country. I think it is important that we pass this comprehensive legislation. I think it is terribly important that we have a serious debate about the serious issues facing the veterans community.

I look forward to my colleagues—Republican, Democrat, and Independent—bringing forth their ideas and amendments, but please do not disrespect those people who have sacrificed so much by killing this bill because of the same old politics we have struggled with for years. This is a veterans bill. Let's discuss veterans issues.

I yield the floor and thank my colleague for allowing me the extra 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, as Paul Harvey used to say on the radio: Now the rest of the story. We just heard a very glamorous description of bipartisanship and benefits that have been not provided equitably to veterans. What I would like to do is try and focus on reality and discuss what is actually in the bill, what is not in the bill, and what was the intent of Congress. What is the shape of the Veterans Administration?

I will start with one very important thing. My colleague pointed out that most of the veterans organizations support this bill. He is, in fact, correct. I will read from an editorial written by the CEO of Concerned Veterans of America. I won't read the whole thing and bore the President or those who listen, but he says:

> But given the vast scope of this bill, we should be skeptical. In recent years, the VA, which will take on a wide range of expanded responsibilities should this bill become law, has come under fire for dysfunctional management and poor service to veterans. If the VA is already failing to meet its obligations to veterans, is it wise to extend its mission even further? Of course not. And while we need to restore the shortsighted cuts to the military pensions, there are more narrow ways to address these cuts, such as Sen. Kelly Ayotte's (R–N.H.) military pensions bill, S. 1977.
>
> It's troubling that under this bill, VA services would be expanded far beyond veterans with combat injuries and service-connected disabilities, fundamentally changing the founding mission of VA. This will only flood the VA system with new claimants, many of whom would be better served by health coverage in the private insurance market.
>
> Veterans seeking VA care already face wait times of months and even years; further expanding eligibility to veterans who would be better served by other healthcare options will only stretch the VA to its breaking point. There is also currently no cost estimate of this massive expansion.
>
> Meanwhile, there is another compelling question of costs. Sanders has proposed shifting funding from the Pentagon's Overseas Contingency Operations to pay for these expanded veterans priorities. But taking funding from the men and women serving in Afghanistan and elsewhere is shortsighted and could otherwise endanger their lives. That approach will likely meet a chilly reception in the House of Representatives, and justifiably so.
>
> This means that Sanders' $30 billion bill would be paid for through the accumulation of additional debt. The CVA has been clear that Washington needs to ''cut debt, not vets.'' With $17 trillion in debt and massive annual deficits, our country faces a fiscal crisis of unparalleled scope. Now is not the time, in any federal department, to spend money we don't have.
>
> To be sure, there's much to like in the Sanders bill. And if those components were presented as separate, smaller bills, as part of a carefully considered long-term strategy to reform the VA, hold leadership accountable and improve services to veterans, we would have no problem extending enthusiastic support.
>
> As with so many bloated legislative projects in today's Washington, the overreaching and overpromising in this bill will only lead to disappointment and recriminations as the high costs and unanticipated consequences are revealed. That will be followed by demands for an entirely new round of ''comprehensive'' reform, and the cycle will begin anew.
>
> Congress should go back to the drawing board, assume a more modest approach and take up these proposals on an individual basis. That's the better path to achieving enduring and effective reform of, and accountability for, the services we provide to our veterans.

I point that out because he is a CEO of a veterans organization. Not all veterans organizations agree that more is necessarily better and that to blindly add to the system is not necessarily good.

My colleague mentioned that there was a 5-year implementation. I have the legislation right here. It is title 3, subtitle A. Expansion and improvements of benefits generally, requirements for enrollment in the patient enrollment system of the Department of Veterans Affairs of certain veterans eligible for enrollment by law but not currently permitted to enroll.

It goes through all the subsections and basically says the Secretary shall provide for the enrollment in the patient enrollment system of veterans specified in paragraph 2 by no later than December 31, 2014.

Well, in section 2, veterans with noncompensible service-connected disabilities rated as zero percent disabled who are not otherwise permitted to enroll in a system as of the date of enactment of the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefit Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014—under this section they do not have access to health insurance except through a health exchange.

My colleague sat on the floor and begged me not to talk about the Affordable Care Act. The Affordable Care Act is in his bill. It is referenced in his bill.

Now, get this: The Affordable Care Act has been portrayed as the solution to the health care problem in America. Forget for a minute the fact that premiums have increased for practically everybody in America—90 percent have seen increases. The $2,500 savings per family is a wish, a hope, and a dream.

My colleagues think so much of the Affordable Care Act that if the only choice for a veteran is the Affordable Care Act, then they can opt to go into the VA. If the Affordable Care Act and the exchange are so good, why would we want to shift them from something good into something that is questionable, based upon what the editorial said.

My colleague said the VA has the best health care system in the world. It does. The hospital system has been rated high practically every year it has been rated. I made the statement yesterday: Why would we take a system that is broken and stuff more people into it? Why wouldn't we focus the debate on how to reform the system?

This is one year's worth of inspector general reports on health care facilities, over 40 healthcare inspections reports that have been released by the inspector general. I can tell my colleagues what is in front of the VA. They can't even get their hands around their own inspector general's report. These are deaths of veterans. These are individuals who used somebody else's insulin pen. This is legionnaires disease. This is a system that drastically needs reform. This is not a Member of the Senate making an accusation, it is the inspector general of the Veterans' Administration and all of these reports from 12 months. Yet we are talking about a massive expansion of the Veterans' Administration, where the chairman says: Oh, they have 5 years to do it.

I am reading the legislation. There is no 5 years. There is a specified expansion of who is included in it, and it says the Secretary will do it by December 31, 2014. If the phase-in is there, then the chairman can come down and read me the language where it says 5 years. I am certainly not trying to mislead anybody, although I am trying to make sure we get the facts on the floor of what this legislation actually does.

The chairman talked about bipartisanship. He is correct. Quite a few of the bills in his package are my bills, and they passed out of committee with unanimous support. Incorporated in his bill are 143 provisions, 26 of which are Republican. I have never judged whether I liked the bill based upon how many of my proposals were in it or how many proposals from my side of the aisle were in it; I base it on what is in the bill. What are the policies? What is our intent? Do we accomplish that in the language of the legislation?

Let's look at it for just a minute. There are no reforms—zero. Zero reforms are in the bill. It is a massive expansion of individuals in the system. As a matter of fact, under this piece of legislation, the VA doesn't even support it. Let me read what the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Robert Jesse, said. He indicated that expanding enrollment of Priority 8 veterans ''presents many potential complications and uncertain effects on VA's enrollment system.'' This is the individual in charge of health at the VA who says: I don't think this is a good idea.

So I guess the only mistake the chairman made was—he suggested that I was opposed to it, and he was accurate, but he didn't ever say the VA is opposed to this massive expansion.

He talked about the caregiver bill. I know something about it because I wrote it. We implemented it as a demonstration project. Why? Because Senator Akaka and I believed the VA was not in a position to absorb this massive program and to administer and implement it in an effective way. As a matter of fact, Senator Akaka said at the time—he was then the chair of the veterans' committee—he said there were three reasons he was reluctant to—well, let me just say that when the caregivers program came up in debate on the Senate floor, Senator Akaka, then chair, noted that these benefits and services were not made available for all veterans for three reasons:

> [O]ne, the needs and circumstances of the newest veterans in terms of injuries are different—different—from those of veterans from other eras; two, the family situation of the younger veterans is different from that of older veterans; and three, by targeting this initiative on a specific group of veterans, the likelihood of successful undertaking is enhanced.

I say to my colleagues, would the author of the caregivers program not be the first one to come to the floor and lobby for an expansion? I think the answer is yes. But would the author of the caregivers legislation want to wait until the system can handle it?

Do my colleagues realize that in two States in America, a veteran can file for caregiver status in one State and be denied and file the same application in another and be granted caregiver status? It happened in Colorado and Florida. How, in a system that is created to equally treat veterans, is that possible? Now we want to extend it to veterans of all eras. I would suggest to my colleagues that this is almost ludicrous to even think about.

I see quite a few Members here, and I am not going to take up but a couple more minutes. I want to make sure my colleagues understand that my opposition is not to veterans. My opposition is to proceeding with legislation that could hurt veterans, not help them. In this particular case, more is not necessarily better. As the CEO of Concerned Veterans of America stated, the right congressional action would be to stop, take a breath, and focus what is broken. Fix the system. Then have a debate about which veterans, if any, should be included in the VA delivery of care.

The chairman highlighted yesterday that incorporated in both his bill and my bill is a House provision that provides leases for 27 new VA outpatient facilities. He said: That is proof we have in the system enough facilities to handle the population. No, Mr. Chairman, that is not proof. Those 27 leases are for trying to make sure we have facilities to handle our current population within the VA. Those veterans who are driving over 2 hours for a primary care visit, those individuals whose transportation is their No. 1 issue—27 doesn't even get us up to taking care of today's population.

As I said yesterday, we have I know $14 billion worth of construction that is currently underway in the VA; yet we appropriate $1 billion a year. It will take us 14 years to build out the inventory we have today. But the legislation calls for an incredible increase in the size of the veterans population by December of 2014. We won't have any of those 27 facilities that would be legislated in this bill done by December 2014.

So I am going to urge my colleagues, as we move forward, let's not do anything to damage veterans. Let's not do anything to overwhelm the Veterans' Administration. Let's commit to work with them to reform the system. Let's listen to what they want and not put them in a situation where they are telling us: We don't want what you are proposing. Let's listen and let's apply common sense to legislation versus to just be focused on the cheers we receive from a few who are paid to represent folks in Washington.

The chairman said a number of times that this is about veterans. I can tell my colleagues it is a little bit more. It is about the American people. It is about my kids, our kids, our grandchildren. It is about what they inherit from us. They are going to inherit from us probably the most important thing: the obligation to keep our promise to veterans of all eras.

I think the decision we have to make as we debate this legislation is whether we are going to commit to a promise that is bigger than what our kids can fulfill, that costs more than our kids can afford, and that doesn't necessarily enhance the health care delivered to our veterans. If anything, today it would probably be detrimental to those who need it the most.

I thank the Presiding Officer for his patience. I thank my colleagues for their indulgence as they have patiently waited. This is way too big an issue to rush forward with. I look forward over the next several days to a real debate about the specifics in this bill and, more importantly, about what we should do as a Congress to help veterans and to help the Veterans' Administration.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I did not come to speak on this bill, although I certainly appreciate the remarks of my colleague from North Carolina I also see the chairman is here. I say to the chairman of the committee, I am only prepared to speak on a separate subject probably for 5 to 7 minutes.

As I said, I appreciate the comments of my colleague, particularly when we are dealing with veterans, their benefits, and health care in particular. We need to be very careful in terms of what we are doing so we do it the right way because we owe them all our Nation's gratitude for the sacrifices they have made. As veteran myself, I have some appreciation of that. My daughter married into a military family. Nevertheless, we need to be very careful how we go forward in making sure the care they get through the VA system is the very best care possible. My colleague has outlined a number of issues that need to be debated, and I dearly hope the majority leader will allow us the opportunity to not only debate but vote on the alternative which, in my opinion, addresses the issue in the very best way.

MEDICAL DEVICE TAXES

Today I come to speak about the President's visit to Minnesota. I wish it were Indiana. He is going there for the purpose, as stated, of discussing a new initiative—I think it is a transportation initiative—that he hopes will create jobs and stimulate economic growth. Clearly, that has been an ongoing challenge for this administration.

How ironic. How ironic to go to Minnesota, a State like my home State of Indiana, which has been one of the most negatively impacted by the excise taxes imposed upon one of its most dynamic job creators—the medical device industry. How ironic it is to go to Minnesota and talk about creating jobs and economic growth while at the same time promoting a provision that was incorporated in the Affordable Care Act that imposes an egregious excise tax on not the profits but on the sales receipts of medical device companies. It is simply an ObamaCare pay-for.

As I said, Indiana and Minnesota are homes to many of the country's largest medical device manufacturers. In fact, my State of Indiana exported more than $9.7 billion in life science products in 2012, which includes medical devices. It is second in the country only to California in terms of exports of life science products. So it is very important to our State.

We have over 300 FDA-registered medical device manufacturers—some of them large, some of them small. They employ 20,000 Hoosiers directly, with an indirect support of nearly 30,000 more. So it is not a small thing for our State. It is one of the—and pardon the pun—cutting-edge industries, producing devices that improve the health of Americans and extend the life of Americans through some remarkable innovations. These companies have revolutionized the medical field with life-enhancing, as well as lifesaving, technology.

So what is the effect of this excise tax that has been imposed on these companies and this thriving industry?

Well, let me respond in a way that reflects what some Hoosiers have told me, as I travel across the State talking to these device employees and CEOs and manufacturers, learning what the impact of this tax is on their industry, which is so important to our country's economic growth.

One device manufacturer located in Warsaw, IN, develops and sells orthopedic implants for children but recently had to shelve two important projects simply because they had to get the money to pay the tax, so they could not put it into the research and development and innovation of their next products. I quote an employee of this company, who told my office: ''The medical device excise tax inhibits us from developing more products that can reduce a wheelchair-bound child's discomfort or that can allow a kid to walk for the first time.''

So there are real consequences here. Companies, many of which are innovative, struggling to design that new product that can be life enhancing and life saving, have simply had to defer their product to pay the tax. They may not have made a penny in net profits. Many of these are startup companies, hoping to develop and get FDA approval for, the next new life-enhancing innovation. Yet they are not taxed on their net profits—and many are losing money initially in order to go through the tortuous and time-consuming process of getting FDA approval, which denies them getting their products out to the market for a long period of time; so most of them early on are not making any profit. But on the devices they are selling, every dollar that comes in is taxed, even though they have no net profits and, therefore, they have to take money out of research and development, out of capital equipment, out of employee compensation, in order to send the check to the government.

Cook Medical, which is located in Bloomington, IN, another Hoosier device manufacturer, was forced to table plans for a major expansion because of the device tax. In testimony before the Senate Budget Committee last year, Cook's medical chairman, Steve Ferguson, said this:

> Cook has made the difficult decision that without repeal [of the medical device tax], we will move important new product lines outside of the U.S. Our previous plans to open up five new manufacturing facilities in American towns are now on hold as we use capital intended for these projects to pay the excise tax.

There are very real consequences here in terms of job creation and economic growth that are being inhibited. We are getting just the opposite. We are getting job-killing and deflated economic results as a result of this tax. And it is an egregious tax.

The Advanced Medical Technology Association recently conducted a survey of its members—they shared that with me earlier today—and found that the device tax forced manufacturers to let go of or avoid hiring 33,000 workers last year. Mr. President, that is 33,000 people who could have joined the workforce at wages which in my State are 56 percent higher than the average State wage. So these are good-paying jobs. They require good skills, but they are good-paying jobs. And it is an emerging series of products that can be exported around the world.

The survey also found that one-third of the respondents had to reduce their research and development as a result of the medical device tax.

In terms of investment dollars, three-quarters of the respondents said they had taken one or more of the following actions in response to the tax: They have either deferred or canceled capital investments; deferred or cancelled plans to open new facilities; reduced investment in startup companies; found it more difficult to raise capital, particularly among startup companies; and reduced or deferred increases in employee compensation.

There are negative results that come from taxing anything. But when you tax sales, when you tax on an excise basis, it has a compounding effect for startup companies, and even for established companies, in terms of what they are able to do in terms of hiring, in terms of plant expansion, in terms of research and development, in terms of innovation.

This is happening across the country. Minnesota and Indiana just happen to be two States that have been particularly hard hit. We ought to be encouraging these companies to continue their research and development. We should not be punishing them with an egregious tax which is simply a byproduct and the administration says: We have to find a pay-for for ObamaCare. Here is a prospering industry, so let's take some money from them—not on their profits—but let's just take money from them from their sales—an excise tax—so that we can apply it to ObamaCare.

Essentially, what they are doing is taking money from a program that works and puts people back to work and generates taxes the right way and transferring that money to a program that is in distress, has turned out to be a job killer, according to studies and a number of agencies that have looked at this, and is very much in a state of confusion and disarray right now among the American people.

So you take some money from something that works and you give it to something that does not work. What kind of rationale is that? And how can the President go to Minnesota and say: I am here to stimulate growth and create jobs, while his very own policy has done just the opposite?

The senior Senator from Minnesota, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, and I chair the Senate Medical Technology Caucus. We have been able to pull together a bipartisan effort to increase awareness of these unique issues but also to achieve a vote, which is hard to do around here. During the budget we had the so-called vote-arama. Republicans and Democrats got to offer any amendment we wanted. It is not binding law, but it sets the stage and illustrates the Senate's stance on particular topics.

On this one 79 out of 100 U.S. Senators—Republicans and Democrats; that is 45 Republicans and 34 Democrats—voted for repeal of the medical device tax. So this is not a Republican standing here challenging the President of another party or Members across the aisle saying: We are asking you to support this Republican issue. This is a bipartisan issue. Almost as many Democrats as Republicans support this. But yet the majority leader has refused to allow this to come to an actual vote, which would put it into passage—because the House has already supported and passed this—and be sent to the President for his signature.

So I guess what I am asking here today is that the majority leader at

least allow us the opportunity to go forward with a vote, where it would then, I suspect it would pass, be sent to the President. If he really wants to create jobs and stimulate the economy, we have living proof of something that will do it.

I do not know how the President today can go to a State and say: I am here to stimulate the economy and provide for new jobs and at the same time have in place a majority leader who will not allow us a vote on it. We all want to enact measures here that will get our country growing again and will get people back to work. In an area where we are providing life-enhancing and lifesaving medical technology, it is particularly important.

So my plea, as I finish here, is I urge the majority leader and I urge the President—if they are serious about encouraging economic growth, spurring job creation, and improving health care—to support the repeal of this unfair and destructive tax of medical devices.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I yield 45 minutes of my hour under cloture to Senator SANDERS, chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time is so yielded.

Mr. COONS. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SANDERS. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, earlier this afternoon I spoke about the many important provisions in this veterans bill that came out of the Veterans' Affairs Committee: the fact that we worked as hard as we could to make it bipartisan, the fact that there are many provisions in this bill that came from Republican Members, and the fact that some other provisions in this bill were passed unanimously by the House of Representatives, indicating very strong bipartisan support.

But what I also said is that while I believe the American people understand the full cost of war and understand the sacrifices made by veterans and their families, what they also believe is that when we have a piece of legislation—an important piece of legislation—on the floor dealing with the needs of millions and millions of veterans and their families—whether it is health care; whether it is dental care; whether it is sexual assault and how we address that issue; whether it is the fact that over 2,000 veterans have lost their ability to have kids and what we can do to make it possible for them to have children; whether it is the fact that we have tens of thousands of families in this country where loved ones are taking care of disabled vets, need some support, and we have a need to expand the caregivers act; whether it is the fact that we have some young people who are eligible to use the post-9/11 GI bill but are unable to do it because they cannot get in-State tuition; whether it is the issue of advanced appropriations and making sure we never again find ourselves in the position that we did a few months ago, where the government was shut down and where disabled veterans were 1 week or 10 days away from losing the checks they are dependent upon, I think there is widespread support in America for that bill, for the understanding that we do owe the men and women who put their lives on the line to defend us a debt of gratitude that can never be fully paid.

But we have to do our best. We have to make life as good as we can for those who were injured in war. We have to protect the hundreds of thousands who came back from Iraq and Afghanistan with PTSD or traumatic brain injury. But whatever one may think of the bill—whether you like the bill, don't like the bill, think it is too expensive or think we should have done more—the one thing most Americans understand is that it is totally absurd to be bringing forth extraneous issues into a debate on veterans needs in order to kill the bill.

I say to my colleagues exactly what the majority leader said this morning. If you have amendments dealing with veterans issues, we welcome them. We have a number of Democrats who have come forward with amendments. We have some Republicans who have come forward with amendments. We welcome amendments that are relevant and germane to the needs of veterans. What we do not welcome are extraneous amendments that are designed only—only—for partisan, political reasons, exactly the process that the American people are disgusted with today.

Interestingly enough, that is my view. I mentioned earlier today that the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America sent out a tweet yesterday, and the folks who served us in Iraq and Afghanistan said: The Senate should not get distracted while debating and voting on the veterans bill. Iran sanctions, ObamaCare, et cetera, aren't relevant to S. 1982—which is the veterans bill we are dealing with today.

The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America said: Focus on veterans' issues, which is a very simple request and the one that should be heeded.

But today, a little while ago, we heard from the largest veterans' association in America; that is, the American Legion, which represents 2.4 million members. The American Legion is the largest veterans' organization in this country. I suspect they have chapters. I know they are strong in Vermont. I suspect they are strong in Hawaii and strong all over this country.

American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger said today:

> Iran is a serious issue that Congress needs to address, but it cannot be tied to S. 1982, which is extremely important as our Nation prepares to welcome millions of U.S. military service men and women home from war. This comprehensive bill aims to help veterans find good jobs, get the health care they need, and make in-State tuition rates applicable to all who use their GI bill benefits. This legislation is about supporting veterans, pure and simple. The Senate can debate various aspects of it, and that is understandable, but it cannot lose focus on the matter at hand: helping military personnel make their transition to veteran life and ensuring that those who served their Nation in uniform receive the benefits they earned and deserve. We can deal with Iran—or any other issue unrelated specifically to veterans—with separate legislation.

I think Commander Dellinger hit the nail right on the head. What he is saying is, fine, we can debate Iran at some point; we can debate ObamaCare, which has been going on day after day after day. We can do anything we want to do, but this is a bill that deals with veterans' issues.

I thank the American Legion not only for their support—they along with virtually every other veterans organization in this country supports this legislation: the VFW, DAV, Vietnam Vets, Iraq-Afghanistan Veterans of America, and dozens of organizations—but I thank the American Legion in particular for their statement in making it clear that our job is to debate a veterans bill, not kill this bill because of an extraneous issue such as Iran sanctions.

I wish to say one other word before I proceed to my main remarks. My colleague from North Carolina quoted from a group called the Concerned Veterans of America. In support of our legislation, we have the largest veterans organization in America, the second largest, third largest, fourth largest, the fifth largest, the sixth largest, and all the way down the line—many millions of Americans. Apparently supporting his position is a group called the Concerned Veterans for America. I don't mean to be personal, but this is just a simple fact that people should understand. This organization, according to the Washington Post, is significantly supported by Charles and David Koch—the Koch brothers. We are going to be running into the Koch brothers on every piece of legislation where there is some group out there that they fund, and in this case it is the Concerned Veterans of America.

I talked earlier about the many important provisions in the bill dealing with reproductive issues, the belief the Federal Government and the VA should assist those men and women who have lost their ability to have kids. We have talked about caregivers and all that, and I want to just touch on a couple more issues at this moment.

I have believed for a very long time that dental care should be regarded as a part of health care. I think we make a mistake as a nation saying this is

health care and this is dental care. Our legislation, for the first time, begins the process of providing dental care to nonservice-connected members through a significant pilot project. I have the feeling once we do this we will see veterans from all over the country who are dealing with long-term dental problems availing themselves of this service. It is the right thing to do and something I think we should be doing.

Another provision in this bill deals with the COLA issue for military retirees. I think everybody here is familiar with the fact that in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 it reduced by 1 percent annually the cost-of-living adjustments for military retirees until age 62.

The good news is the House and Senate recently passed legislation completely rescinding those cuts and the President has signed that bill. That is the good news. The bad news is those cuts continue to exist for those who join the military after January 2014, and I know the veterans organizations are concerned about that. I am concerned about that. I think that is wrong, and our legislation corrects that. So if one is talking about cuts to military retiree COLAs, we end it, pure and simple. Those COLA cuts will no longer exist if this bill is passed.

As I mentioned earlier, this legislation addresses the issue of the benefits backlog. There is great concern among all Members of the Senate that veterans are forced to wait much too long to get their claims processed. What this legislation does is support VA's ongoing efforts to end the backlog and would make needed improvements to the claims system. Again, this is the result of some bipartisan efforts.

Secretary Eric Shinseki of the VA, as he moves the claims system from paper into an electronic system, has advanced the very ambitious goal of making sure that every claim filed by a veteran will be processed in 125 days at 98 percent accuracy. That is a very ambitious goal, and the language we have is going to hold the VA accountable and make sure we reach this very ambitious goal.

I gather there may be differences of opinion on this view, but another provision in our bill deals with the educational needs of servicemembers and making sure they get a fair shot at attaining their educational goals without incurring an additional financial burden, which is what the post-9/11 GI bill was all about. That bill has been enormously successful. There are certain problems remaining in it and we address these problems.

Given the nature of our Armed Forces, servicemembers have little to no say as to where they serve and where they reside during military service. Thus, when transitioning servicemembers consider what educational institution they want to attend, many of them choose a school in a State other than their home State or the State where they previously served. I have heard from too many veterans that many of these public educational institutions consider them out-of-State students. Given that the post-9/11 GI bill only covers in-State tuition and fees for public educational institutions, these veterans are left to cover the differences in cost between the in-State tuition rate and the out-of-State tuition rate. In some States that difference can be more than $20,000 a year.

That is certainly not what the purpose of the 9/11 GI bill was about. As a result, many of our Nation's veterans must use loans to cover this difference and, in the process, become indebted with large school loans that will take them years to pay off.

My office has heard from a number of veterans and veterans organizations about this problem. We heard from Skye Barclay, who lived in Florida prior to joining the U.S. Marine Corps in 2006. After serving her country, Skye decided to remain with her family in North Carolina so her husband could finish serving his military obligations. Less than 1 year later, they moved to Skye's hometown in Florida to transition back to civilian life and finish their college education.

Skye and her husband changed their residency, immediately started renting a home, and ensured her car registration was up-to-date. However, the school she chose to attend could not consider either of these veterans as in-State students. As a result, they were forced to pay an additional $2,000 out-of-pocket each semester. Due to the additional financial burden, Skye and her husband were unable to afford daycare for their daughter and instead have to juggle two demanding schedules, with one of them attending school in the morning and the other late afternoon.

The bottom line is that we passed a post-9/11 GI bill which is working incredibly well. Over 1 million veterans and their family members have used this program. It is very important for higher education in America, and I think we should support our veterans who move to another State and make sure they get in-State tuition.

Let me conclude my remarks at this point, though I will be back later to reiterate the major point I wish to make. We can play the same old politics. My Republican colleagues can defeat this bill because of some extraneous matters in it. I think that is incredibly disrespectful to the veterans community that has sacrificed so much. That is not just my view; that is what the American Legion believes and what the American Legion says: Discuss veterans issues in a veterans bill. The Iraq-Afghanistan Veterans of America say the same.

So we may have disagreements on this bill. People may choose to vote against it for whatever reason. People may offer amendments that we would love to see—some of them may be good, some not so good—but let us respect those folks who have given so much to this country. Let us not demean the veterans community by killing this bill because of something to do with Iran sanctions. That has nothing to do with veterans' needs.

I hope we continue to have a vigorous debate on this piece of legislation. I see my friend from Florida is on the floor. People may want to vote for it. That is good. They may want to vote against it. Fine. But let us not play the same old politics which so disgusts the American people.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I would like to inquire as to the pending business before the Senate. Is it the veterans bill, the motion to proceed?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. It is indeed the motion to proceed to S. 1982.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I appreciate this opportunity to address a number of matters of great concern. There might be, but I don't know of any State that has a greater presence of veterans within it than Florida, certainly per capita. We have a huge military presence in our State and a large number of veterans.

I have commented to people, by the way, that in my time in the Senate, which is now about 3 years and 2 months, a substantial percentage of the calls we get to our office are from veterans regarding veterans' issues. I have a veteran in my family—my brother—who has recently encountered some bureaucratic hurdles he is trying to overcome in terms of getting service from the VA. So these are relevant matters that are of great importance.

I am glad the Senate is on the debate. I am glad we have proceeded to have this debate. It is an important one, and I do hope I will have an opportunity to offer an amendment I have relevant to the bill that involves and gives the opportunity for the Secretary who oversees this Department to be able to hire and fire, particularly to hold accountable mid- and higher level officials within the Veterans' Administration who are not doing their jobs and are contributing to this backlog.

I can tell you that in Central Florida we have a veterans hospital that has been well over budget and has timeliness issues and it needs to be addressed. I think that is a veterans' issue that has extraordinary bipartisan consensus. So my hope is we will be able to address it and we will have an amendment process that allows these ideas to be brought forth. From what I heard from the Senator commenting just a few moments ago, he welcomes amendments. So I hope I will have an opportunity to offer that.

I know as part of this debate the issue of Iran sanctions has been raised. I don't think it is rare to have issues that perhaps are not directly on point to a bill offered in debate, particularly when getting into a debate on an issue that has been so difficult. That is part of the problem with the Iran sanctions issue.

I understand when someone files a bill, the managers have worked hard on it, and the last thing they want is for it to be slowed down because of debate on another topic that is not directly on topic. I understand that concern. I do. But on the other hand, I hope Members will understand that part of the frustration has been the inability to even get a debate on what truly is an extraordinarily important issue.

For those here watching and those at home watching and those who may see this later, let me take a moment to briefly discuss what is at stake. I briefly discussed this a few weeks ago, but I wanted to take this opportunity to do so again.

Here is the issue: Iran, a few years ago, began developing a nuclear processing capability. What that basically means is they take uranium, for example, and they reprocess it to a certain level. You need to have a certain level of reprocessing in order to, for example, provide domestic energy for nuclear energy plants. Many countries in the world have nuclear energy, but only a handful actually process it themselves. Most decide to buy it already processed from abroad.

We have agreements and arrangements with countries all over the planet that do that. Only a handful actually retain the capacity to reprocess it or to enrich uranium or reprocess plutonium. So when we see a country announce they are going to invest money, time, and energy in developing a reprocessing or an enrichment capability, that raises red flags, and here is why. Because while you only need a certain level of enrichment to be able to provide nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and a little bit higher level in order to use it for medical isotopes, the exact same scientists, the exact same machines, the exact same facilities are the exact same ones that can also reprocess or enrich to an even higher level to use in a weapon.

The story of Iran has been, over the last few years, to increase their enrichment and reprocessing capabilities. That in and of itself raises red flags. Adding to that uncertainty and concern about it has been the fact they have tried to hide most of this. Consistently, Iran has been found to have secret development projects ongoing that they only admit to once they are discovered. They take a tremendous amount of effort to hide it from the world. That begins to raise red flags, because if it is truly just a peaceful program, there would be no reason to hide it or to hide their capabilities. But Iran has consistently hidden them.

There is even more reason to be concerned. In addition to increasing their capacity to enrich and reprocess, Iran is also developing long-range missile capabilities. A long-range missile—basically a missile that can fly from Iran 1,000 miles, 1,500 miles, 2,000 miles, 3,000 miles—costs a lot of money to develop. It takes a lot of time to develop.

You don't spend time or money developing those capabilities for purely conventional purposes or for defensive purposes. Usually when you undergo those efforts to develop that kind of capability, it is because you want to have the opportunity to one day put a nuclear warhead on one of those rockets.

So that is the story of Iran: massive expansion in their enrichment and reprocessing capabilities; secret enrichment programs which they try to hide from the world; and the development of long-range missile capabilities. Add to it that we are not dealing with the government of Belgium, Japan, South Korea, or any other responsible government on the planet; we are dealing with a government that actively uses terrorism all over the world as an active element of its foreign policy. They are involved in supporting various terrorist elements around the country, not just in the Middle East. Open-source reporting revealed that just a couple years ago they were involved in a plot to assassinate a foreign ambassador in Washington, DC—not in the Middle East somewhere but here. They have an active cyber capability designed to attack, disrupt, and create acts of terror online. They have been implicated, for example, in the bombing of a Jewish center in Argentina. There are few, if any, countries in the world that more actively support terrorism than the Government of Iran.

So this is with whom we are dealing. As a result, the international community, through the United Nations, imposed sanctions. Not only did they impose sanctions, they imposed the requirement that they immediately suspend and stop all enrichment and reprocessing capabilities. We can imagine why the neighbors of Iran are concerned. It is not just Israel that is concerned. Ask the Saudis, ask the Turks, ask any number of the other countries in the region.

Recently, the President and this administration have begun to undertake conversations with Iran about this program. Their hope is that we can get Iran to a place where we can lock them in; where they, in exchange for the loosening of these sanctions, agree not to do certain things.

I don't know of anyone here who would not love to wake up to the news tomorrow that the Supreme Leader in Iran has decided to abandon the reprocessing and enrichment capability and to truly show that all he is interested in is domestic energy for peaceful purposes. The problem is that is not what is happening. I believe what is happening is the United States, through the State Department and this administration, de facto, is already—but if not, is on the verge of—agreeing to allow Iran to keep in place its enrichment and reprocessing capabilities, and I will explain why this is a problem.

If that capability is still there, if they retain all the facilities necessary for enrichment and reprocessing, even if they agree to limit it to a certain level for now, at any point in time in the future they can ratchet it back up and can go on to develop a weapon. In fact, unfortunately, the design for a weapon is the easiest part of all this. The hardest part is reaching the technological capability to enrich uranium to a certain point to weaponize it.

If we allow them to keep all the equipment, all the technology, all their scientists, all the infrastructure in place, then at any point in the future when they decide it is time for a weapon, they can break out and do that. And I would submit that the evidence is strong that this is exactly what their strategy is.

I don't think, I know for a fact that the mandate given to those negotiators on behalf of Iran and the Supreme Leader was the following: Do whatever you can to get these sanctions lifted off our shoulders, but do not agree to anything that is irreversible.

Put yourself in their position. If you want to retain the option to one day be able to enrich and then build a weapon, you are probably willing to take one step back by agreeing to suspend enrichment only to a certain level in exchange for the lifting of these sanctions, knowing that at some point—in 2 years, 3 years, or 4 years—when the world is distracted by something else, when something else is going on around the planet, you can then decide to come up with any excuse to build a weapon.

One of the reasons I know that is their strategy is because it is exactly what the North Koreans did. The playbook has already been written. They would engage in these ongoing negotiations, on again, off again, all designed to buy time.

Why does a government like Iran need or want a nuclear weapon? And they do. It is pretty straightforward.

No. 1, because of deep historical reasons, they desire to become the dominant power in the Middle East, to drive not just the United States but other nations out of the region and diminish everyone's influence at their expense.

The other is because they view a weapon as the ultimate insurance policy. They don't want to be the next Muammar Qadhafi; they want to be North Korea so they can now act with impunity, so they can do anything they want against us or anyone in the world because no one could possibly attack them because they have nuclear weapons.

I have heard stories about, well, we will know; we will be able to see this happening before it happens and do something about it. But look at Pakistan and India, which was a surprise to everybody, particularly India's capabilities. It is not outside the realm of the reasonable to believe that at some point one day we will wake up to the news that Iran has detonated a device and proven their capability. In fact, I have zero doubt in my mind that this is where they want to go.

What I find offensive in this whole conversation is the notion by some in the administration that anyone who

feels this way or anyone who has doubts or skepticism about these negotiations is warmongering.

I actually think the failure to impose sanctions now will inevitably place a future President—perhaps even this one—with a very difficult decision to make, and that will be whether to go in and take military action to stunt or stall their weapons program because, make no mistake, a lot of damage has already been done. A lot of damage has already been done to the sanctions that were already in place. There is already growing evidence that the amount of revenue coming into Iran, the amount of business dealings coming into Iran just simply on this talk about the interim deal has truly spiked.

We also see it in their comments. The leaders of Iran—from the President, to the Supreme Leader, to the chief negotiator—are not just bragging in Iran; they are bragging all over the world that they have agreed to nothing and the West has capitulated.

What we were told by the State Department is, well, that is only for domestic consumption; they are just saying that to be popular at home and to appease the radicals within Iran.

By the way, the term ''radical'' is an interesting term when applied to Iran. All the leaders in Iran are radical; it is just degrees of radicalism.

But to get back to the point I was making, we hear the comments they make in Iran—bragging how they have won, how they snookered the West, how they agreed to nothing, how everything they were doing before is going to move forward—and we are told: Just ignore that. They are just saying that for domestic political considerations.

That is not true. In fact, the Supreme Leader himself, the Ayatollah, has announced that these talks are going to lead to nowhere. He is not going to interfere, but they are going nowhere.

This is a transparent effort. All you have to do is open your eyes and see what they are doing. All they are doing is buying time. All they are doing is looking to relieve as many sanctions as possible without giving up anything they can do in the future or are doing now. For a deal such as this to work, you have to rely on all sorts of verification systems with a government that has made a specialty out of hiding their intentions and programs in the past.

The reason we see the push for the additional sanctions to be put in place is because at least 59 of us in the Senate—and I suspect many more who haven't lent their names to this effort yet—recognize that we cannot afford to be wrong about this because a nuclear Iran would be one of the worst developments in the world in a very long time.

In addition to being able to hold the region hostage, in addition to now being able to act with impunity—they don't have a weapon now, and they try to assassinate Ambassadors in Washington, DC. Imagine what they think they can get away with if they do have a weapon.

Beyond that, think about the risk it poses to our allies in that region, and think about this: Think about the reaction of other countries in the region to the news. The Saudis are not going to stand by and watch Iran develop a nuclear capability and not have one of their own. So I submit a nuclear Iran isn't just one more country joining the nuclear weapons club; it can be as many as two or three more countries eventually joining the nuclear weapons club in the most unstable region in the world, a place that has only had conflict, I don't know, for 5,000 years. This is what we are on the verge of here.

I appreciate the work diplomats working in the State Department do. There is a role for diplomacy in the world, and the good news is that we can negotiate agreements with most of the countries on this planet. But I think diplomacy also requires us to understand its limitations. It is very difficult to negotiate settlements and agreements with governments and individuals who don't ever feel bound by them, who see them as one-way streets, who see them as tactics and vehicles to buy time. That is what we are dealing with.

The other part we forget is that in some parts of the world and with some governments on this planet, the language of diplomacy is viewed as a language of weakness. It becomes an invitation to become aggressive or miscalculated.

I don't know of anyone in this body who is looking to get into another war or armed conflict. That is not what Americans are all about. If we look at the story of the conflicts we have been engaged in, almost all of them involved a reluctant nation having to get involved for geopolitical purposes, because we were trying to stem the growth of communism, because we were attacked in Pearl Harbor. That is not who we are. That is not who we have ever been. Americans aren't into that. What we want to do is live happy lives and raise our families in peace. We want to be able to sell to and buy from other countries. We want a peaceful world we can partner with for business and culture.

But I also think it is important to understand that when mistakes are made in foreign policy, it is a lot harder to reverse than when they are made in domestic policies. If we pass a bad tax bill, we can always come back and pass a new one. If we make a mistake—as this body did by passing ObamaCare—we can always come back and repeal it. If we make a mistake in domestic policy, we can always come back and reverse it somehow. It is not the same in foreign policy. Once there is a nuclearized, weaponized Iran, it will be quite difficult to undo, and so are all the things it will lead to.

Let me also say that additional sanctions are no guarantee that they will never get a weapon, but it changes the cost-benefit analysis. It tests their pain threshold economically. It forces them to make a decision about whether they want to continue to be isolated from the world economically and whether weaponizing is worth it.

If you put in place an interim agreement or a final one that allows them to retain the capability to enrich in the future, they will build a weapon. That is not a matter of opinion; in my mind, that is a matter of fact. Maybe this President won't be here by the time that happens, but someone is going to have to deal with that, and it is not just the President; our country is going to have to deal with that. I at a minimum want to be on record today as making that point because if, God forbid, that day should ever come, I want it to be clearly understood that I, along with my colleagues, warned against it.

By the way, I think this opposition to additional sanctions is part of a pattern of flawed foreign policy decisions on behalf of this administration, one that has largely been built on the false assumption that our problems in the world were caused by an America that was too engaged, too involved, too opinionated, was providing too much leadership and direction, when, in fact, the opposite is now true.

Many of the conflicts happening around the world today are a result of the chaos left by this administration's unclear foreign policy. Many of our allies openly question—and I can tell you from my travels that privately they strongly question—whether America's assurances remain viable and whether we can continue to be relied upon in the agreements we have made in the past to provide collective security for ourselves and our allies.

When you leave a vacuum, it is going to be filled. What it is being filled by right now are some of the most tyrannical governments on the planet. Look at what happened with Moscow over the last 5 years. Moscow viewed the whole reset strategy of the United States under this President not as an opportunity to engage us but as an opportunity to try to get an upper hand on us.

Look at what has happened in the Asia-Pacific region where the Chinese regional ambitions to drive the U.S. out have grown exponentially, as have their capabilities. Meanwhile, our partners in the region, while they welcome the rhetoric of a pivot, question whether we will have the capability to carry it out.

Certainly in the Middle East an incoherent foreign policy with regard to Syria left open an ungoverned space where foreign jihadists have poured into that country and have now basically converted entire parts of Syria as the premier operational space for global jihadists to train and operate.

Now Iran. The situation in Iran, to use a colloquial term, is freaking out all the other countries in that region who have no illusions about who Iran

truly is. They know exactly who these people are, and they are baffled at how the most powerful and informed government on the planet doesn't realize what they realized a long time ago—that you are not dealing with a responsible government here with Iran. You are dealing with a nation that openly supports terrorism as a tool of statecraft, that openly has shown that they want to develop a nuclear weapons capability so they can become untouchable and the dominant power in that region.

If we don't put in place a mechanism for additional sanctions to take place, I submit that the negotiation that is going on with the Iranians will become irrelevant. By that point, even if you wanted to impose more sanctions, it would be impossible to do because so many other countries will have reengaged with commercial transactions with Iran. You are not going to be able to put this genie back in the bottle, and the genie is already halfway out.

I hope we will take this more seriously, but at a minimum I ask this: Why can't we vote on it? If we are wrong, debate us on it. But why can't we vote on it? Since when has the Senate become a place run by one person on a matter of this importance and magnitude? Since when has the Senate become controlled by one person's opinion?

Are you telling me that the people of Florida who I represent do not deserve the right to be represented and heard as much as the people of Nevada or any other State? Are you saying that on an issue of this importance, one individual should have the power to basically say we will have no debate when 59 Members of this body—in a place where it is tough to get 51 votes on anything—have expressed the strong opinion that they favor this?

Why can't we have this debate? Isn't that what the Senate was designed to be, a place where the great issues of our time could be debated and flushed out before the eyes of the American public and the world?

What we are consistently told is we can't have this debate and we're not going to do it. Why? Why can't we debate this? This is important. Its implications will be felt by people long after we are no longer here. I hope more attention is paid to this.

Let me just say that I understand the frustration. A piece of legislation is filed on behalf of veterans, and the Iran issue comes up. But we are running out of time. This is the only mechanism that exists to have this debate.

I would argue that it actually is relevant because it is our men and women in uniform we are going to turn to—when this thing ends up the way I know it will—and ask them to take care of this problem.

If in the end these negotiations fail, and I tragically have to say they are destined to fail, and Iran retains their enrichment capability and eventually develops a nuclear weapon, it is the men and women in uniform of these United States—our sons, our daughters, our neighbors, our friends, our mothers, our brothers, our sisters, and our fathers—whom we will ask, as we always do, to go solve the problem for us. But if we put in place sanctions that clearly articulate and lay out the price they will have to pay to continue with these ambitions, we may be able to delay that, and even prevent it; otherwise, that day will come. This piper will be paid, and I hope the price will not be so high. I fear that is where we are headed. We are on the verge of making an extraordinary geopolitical blunder that will be very difficult to undo or reverse once it is already made.

All we are asking is to have a vote on this issue. This matters enough to the American people. This matters enough to the safety and future of our children and future generations. This matters enough to the world. It deserves a full debate, and it deserves a vote.

If you are against it, you can vote against it. If you are against it, you can debate against it. We want to hear their arguments and thoughts. Why can't we vote on it? It deserves a vote. It is that important.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as if in morning business.

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

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I rise to commend the words of my esteemed colleague, the junior Senator from Florida, who has just spoken powerfully about the threats facing our Nation. On Monday evening he spoke powerfully on the Senate floor about the brutal human rights abuses that have been endemic in communist Cuba over the past 50 years, and the sad reality that Cuba is playing a leading role in the repression of the opposition protests that are currently taking place in Venezuela.

I commend the sentiments of the Senator from Florida, and I offer a few additional thoughts of my own on this important topic.

Brave Venezuelan protesters persist in crowding the streets in Caracas, San Cristobal, Merida, and Valencia despite the detention, torture, and murder of their compatriots in recent days. They are not alone. They have been joined by darker figures, representatives of Hezbollah, Iran, and Cuba, all of whom have a vested interest in propping up the increasingly authoritarian socialist regime of Nicolas Maduro. The appearance of the Iranians, and their Hezbollah agents in Venezuela, is concerning, but it should not be surprising.

Iran has long maintained one of its largest embassies in Caracas, where it has been able to exploit the Venezuelan financial system to evade the international sanctions that—up until a few weeks ago—were placing a real burden on Iran's economy.

Now that the administration has eased the sanctions on Iran, Iran is in a significantly stronger position. Not only have they received the first $500 million in unfrozen assets, but they have also reaped considerable collateral benefit.

Iranian President Rouhani recently tweeted: ''You are witness to how foreign firms are visiting our country; 117 political delegations have come here.''

The Dutch ambassador to Iran tweeted in mid-January that he participated in ''speeddate sessions to meet business[es] interested in Iran.''

China has emerged as Iran's top trading partner with nonoil trade hitting $13 billion over the past 10 months, according to Iranian media.

According to documents seen by Reuters, Iran has signed a deal to sell Iraq arms and ammunition worth $195 million—a move that would break the U.N. embargo on weapons sales by Tehran.

What could a reenriched Iran offer Venezuela, given that the joint plan of action that has enabled this economic detente has done nothing to reverse their nuclear program. The answer is chilling. The longstanding commercial ties between Iran and Venezuela, not to mention their mutual hatred for the United States, raise the specter that should Iran acquire nuclear weapons technology, it might be inclined to share it with Venezuela, which would then act as a surrogate threat to the United States in our own hemisphere.

We need to act immediately to reimpose sanctions on Iran and stand unequivocally against Iran acquiring nuclear weapons capability. I am sorry to say there is one reason—and one reason only—that we have not done so, and that is because the senior Senator from Nevada has been single-handedly blocking the Senate from voting on a bipartisan bill on Iranian sanctions. Given the broad bipartisan support in both Chambers, both the senior Senator from Nevada and the rest of the Democratic leadership need to be held accountable for this obstruction and standing in the way of defending U.S. national security interests and standing in the way of defending our friend and ally, the Nation of Israel.

As alarming as the increasing collaboration is between Iran and Venezuela, there is no country that has a greater stake in preserving the status quo in Venezuela than communist Cuba. Over the 15 years of Hugo Chavez's rule, Venezuela and Cuba have engaged in a mutually parasitic relationship in which Venezuela has exported free oil to Cuba and imported the repressive apparatus of a police state that Raul and Fidel Castro have carefully nurtured other the last 50 years.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992, many former Soviet satellites have moved towards freedom and prosperity promised by closer ties

to the West—some even joining the historic NATO alliance. But Cuba, tragically, has remained mired in the communist past in no small part because Chavez provided the economic lifeline that sustained the Castro brothers' brutal oppression.

While some hoped that after Raul Castro replaced his brother in 2008, a new era of moderation might dawn, the opposite has occurred. Despite minor cosmetic reforms largely targeted toward beguiling the Western media rather than helping the Cuban people, the Castros have consolidated their control of the island with a significant uptick in human rights abuses.

Last year I had the opportunity to visit and interview two Cuban dissidents to help provide a forum for them to tell their stories. They described the oppression as ''Putinismo.'' That said it was following the strategy of Russia's President Putin, appearing on the outside to make cosmetic reforms while brutally repressing the people at home. That is what is happening in Cuba.

The Castro playbook includes targeting family members of the opposition, brutal attacks and even murder, as well as keeping inexorable control over communications in and out of Cuba.

An American citizen, Alan Gross, was thrown into prison in 2009 for the crime of handing out cell phones to Havana's Jewish population. Alan Gross should be released, and the United States should be calling for Alan Gross's release.

In a tip to the information age, heavy Internet censorship, among the most repressive on the planet, blankets the island to preempt the spontaneous organization facilitated by social media.

First Chavez, and now Maduro, have learned these lessons well under the tutelage of agents from the Cuban intelligence services, and their work has been on grim display during the protests that have taken place this month. The death toll is now at 13, and climbing, as police bullets have taken the lives of not only activists, but of students, innocent bystanders, and even a beauty queen.

Maduro's agents have also borrowed the tried-and-true Castro tradition of summarily detaining opposition leaders, including Leopoldo Lopez who helped organize the protests. But Mr. Lopez's real crime has been to propose an alternative to the socialist catastrophe into which Chavez and Maduro have plunged this once prosperous nation, and to suggest that real economic freedom is the only path out of the rampant inflation and chronic shortages that are making life in Venezuela intolerable.

Recent polling by Gallup reveals a dramatic shift in Venezuelans' attitude toward the economy, as the socialist policies continue to depress growth and to worsen the lives of hard-working Venezuelans. In 2012, just a couple of years ago, 22 percent of the population thought the economy was getting worse and 41 percent thought it was getting better. In 2013, those numbers reversed, with 62 percent believing it was getting worse while only 12 percent believed it was getting better. These numbers suggest there has been a sea change in how the majority of Venezuelans see their situation. These protests are different, and it is little wonder that so many have taken to the streets to demand something better.

America should stand with the protesters. America should stand on the side of freedom. America has a tradition for centuries of presenting a clarion voice for freedom because every heart yearns to be free across the globe, and the United States should unapologetically defend freedom.

Maduro appears to understand the threat of his people demanding freedom, but the unprecedented scale of his crackdown on the protesters has largely been masked from the rest of the world by a heavy veil of Internet and media censorship designed to simultaneously disable the opposition and to mask the scale of their oppression from the outside world. Some ingenious remedies have emerged, including Austin, TX's, own Zello—a direct messaging service that allows members to communicate freely either privately with individuals or over open channels that can support hundreds of thousands of users. Despite the best efforts of the Venezuelan censors to block access to Zello, the company has nimbly developed patches and work-arounds to maintain service to the some 600,000 Venezuelans who have downloaded the app since the protests began.

Zello is a shining example of how we can use our technological advantage to support those fighting for economic and political freedom across the globe, recalling our proud tradition of Radio Free Europe during the Cold War. Can my colleagues imagine apps such as Zello spreading to millions of Cubans, to millions of Iranians, to millions of Chinese, providing them the tools to directly speak out for freedom? We have other ways of supporting those advocating for a more free and prosperous Venezuela, such as supporting the sort of liberal economic reforms Mr. Lopez has proposed.

Given the remarkable natural resources Venezuela has enjoyed, it is ridiculous—it is tragic—that the economy has been so mismanaged that citizens face a chronic shortage of basic necessities. But this situation is not inevitable, and the United States is uniquely poised to help. For the United States, Canada, and now Mexico, democratic, market-oriented energy production has been the foundation of what we are beginning to call the American energy renaissance—and there is no reason that Venezuela could not reap these benefits if they reverse the socialist policies that have destroyed their economy.

In this event the United States could help Venezuela reach its full energy potential by offering a bilateral investment treaty that would cover the energy sector. Such an arrangement would protect American companies eager to invest in Venezuela and, at the same time, modernize facilities and increase production of crude—which, I might add, can be refined at the CITGO facilities in Corpus Christi, TX—resulting in gasoline and other refined petroleum products that can be sold on the open market for the benefit of the Venezuelan people, not given to Cuba to prop up the Castros. Which is the better deal for the Venezuelan people: having them receive the benefits of the bounty God has given that country in the open market, receive freedom, receive material blessings, or have instead their oil given to Castro to fuel the repressive policies that are inflicting misery on so many millions?

This is a dangerous and unsettling moment for Venezuela, but it is also a moment of great opportunity. Almost exactly 1 year ago, the Obama administration had a chance to push strongly for reform in Venezuela, when Chavez was on his deathbed. Instead, the Obama administration opted not to rock the boat, in the hopes that Chavez's hand-picked successor would prove more susceptible to diplomatic outreach, that he might not follow Chavez. These hopes are apparently evergreen, as just yesterday a State Department spokeswoman announced that they were open to closer engagement with the Maduro regime, saying: ''We have indicated, and have indicated for months, our openness to develop a more constructive relationship with Venezuela . . . .''

Negotiating with tyrants and bullies doesn't work. The notion that our State Department could at this moment extend yet another olive branch to Caracas is exactly backward. This is the moment to point out that Maduro's abuse of his fellow citizens is intolerable to the United States; that if he wants better relations with us, he should start by listening to the demands of his own people. He should immediately and unconditionally release Leopoldo Lopez, who is being held as a hostage at the mercy of an authoritarian state. He should lift the cloud of censorship that he is using to isolate Venezuelans from each other and from the rest of the world, and the United States should do all it can to help the people of Venezuela as they choose a different path—a path of freedom and prosperity that will return this one-time enemy to their traditional role of our partner and friend. That is where the Venezuelan people want to be, and it is only their brutal leadership that is preventing it.

This is a time for American leadership to speak in defense of freedom. This is a time for the President of the United States to unequivocally stand against oppression, against totalitarianism, and for the desire of the Venezuelan people to be free and prosperous. That would benefit them, it

would benefit us, and it would benefit the world.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I wish to say something about the Iran sanctions legislation that is contained in the alternative bill of which Senator BURR has been the chief architect. First I wish to speak briefly on what is happening in the Ukraine. Late last year, the country's increasingly autocratic President, Viktor Yanukovych, refused to sign a trade agreement with the European Union after coming under strong pressure from Russian leader Vladimir Putin. His refusal to sign the trade deal, coupled with the government's persistent attacks on democracy and civil liberties, as well as growing fears of Moscow's effort to turn Ukraine into a puppet state, sparked massive street protests in the capital city of Kiev. When the government responded with violence, the situation rapidly spiraled out of control until eventually President Yanukovych was expelled from office and forced to flee.

It has been almost a decade since Ukraine's Orange Revolution captured the attention and spirits of freedom lovers across the globe. Now the country is once again at a crossroads. The decisions that are made in the days and weeks that lie ahead will determine whether Ukraine is allowed to flourish as a pro-Western democracy or it is forced to languish in corruption and authoritarianism as a Russian satellite.

It is time for the President of the United States—the Commander in Chief, President Obama—to remind the world where America stands in the ongoing battle between democracy and dictatorship. It is time for him to rethink the so-called reset policy that has done nothing but embolden Vladimir Putin and discourage Russian human rights activists. It is time for the President to make absolutely clear that Russian meddling in the sovereign affairs of Ukraine is absolutely unacceptable.

As for Putin himself, it is time people everywhere see him for what he really is: a brutal thug who epitomizes corruption, repression, and dictatorship.

Turning to another important issue, which is what is happening in Iran, just a few months ago, after years of mounting sanctions and economic pressures, it appeared the West had finally gotten the Iranian dictatorship's attention and it was literally on the ropes. But then, for some reason, we chose to let them off the hook and to throw them a lifeline and to give up some of the very best leverage we had obtained over the course of years for minor concessions and hollow promises.

While the Obama administration is still trumpeting the November 2013 Iranian nuclear agreement as a diplomatic watershed, I remain deeply skeptical and concerned that we threw an economic lifeline to the world's leading state sponsor of international terrorism, even though the ayatollahs have shown no real willingness to abandon their decades-long quest for a nuclear weapon. Of course, were Iran to achieve a nuclear weapon, there would be a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, dramatically destabilizing that already very volatile region of the world.

So given that reality, along with Iran's well-documented record of duplicity, I have joined with 58 other of my Senate colleagues—Republicans and Democrats alike—in sponsoring new sanctions legislation. We have been ably led by the Senator from Illinois Mr. KIRK and other leaders. It is something called the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act that would take effect if and only if Tehran violated the Geneva agreement.

In other words, this is a backstop to the negotiations that Secretary Kerry has had and that the President has pointed to, but amazingly the Obama administration has taken the very bizarre position that the Democrats who are supporting this legislation—this backstop legislation that would do nothing to undermine the negotiations between the Secretary of State and other nations in the region—the President is now urging Democrats to stop supporting this important piece of backstop legislation, even though a commanding majority of the Senate has indicated their support for it.

In fact, the President has gone so far as to promise a veto of this legislation if it reaches his desk. Of course, it is not true, as the President argues, that this legislation would effectively sabotage the Geneva deal. In truth and in fact, what it would do is provide, as I said, a backstop but reinforce what the President and Secretary Kerry are so proud of in terms of what they have already negotiated. If Iran follows through, then this sanctions legislation would be of little force and effect.

I am not sure I understand the administration's concern. After all, if the administration thinks Iran will follow through on its Geneva commitments—something I am personally skeptical of—but if the President thinks they will follow through, then there is nothing to worry about. But if the administration believes that Iran will fail to honor those commitments, then it never should have made the deal in the first place and it should have welcomed this amendment, this piece of legislation, this backstop sanctions legislation that would buttress what they have negotiated.

I believe today what I have believed for many years—that our only hope for a peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis is to combine tough sanctions with the credible threat of military action. That is the only thing that will bring the ayatollahs to the table, and that is why we need to vote on new sanctions as soon as possible, preferably this week, to demonstrate that there will be serious consequences if Iran fails to uphold the Geneva deal or if it tries to delay indefinitely a final agreement.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRAHAM. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. GRAHAM. Madam President, I would like to be recognized for 10 minutes, if I could.

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

Mr. GRAHAM. Madam President, thank you. If the Presiding Officer would let me know when the 10 minutes expire, I would appreciate it.

I wish to rise in support of Senator BURR's alternative to Senator SANDERS' veterans bill. We are having a contest here about how best to help veterans. There is a lot of bipartisan agreement over the substance of the bill. The real difference is how to pay for it, but there is one key difference. In Senator BURR's alternative, we have the Iranian sanctions bill. I believe it is imperative for this body, the Senate, to speak on sanctions against Iran before it is too late. I hate the fact that we have lost our bipartisan approach to this topic.

We have been together for a very long time as Republicans and Democrats. We have had 16 rounds of sanctions since 1987, 9 U.N. Security Council resolutions since 2006 demanding the full and sustained suspension of all uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities and full cooperation with the IAEA.

The United Nations, the Congress, in an overwhelming bipartisan fashion, have been imposing sanctions in speaking to the threat we all face from the Iranian nuclear program. Unfortunately, the bipartisanship has come apart in terms of whether we should have another vote. The bipartisan bill that would reauthorize sanctions at the end of the 6-month negotiating period has 59 cosponsors, 17 Democrats.

We believe desperately—at least I do—that the sanctions that have been so effective in bringing the Iranians to the table are literally falling apart, and I will have some evidence to show that.

But here is what Senator REID, the majority leader, said on November 21, 2013:

I am a strong supporter of our Iran sanctions regime and believe that the current

sanctions have brought Iran to the negotiating table.

I believe we must do everything possible to stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons capability, which would threaten Israel and the national security of our great country.

The Obama administration is in the midst of negotiations with the Iranians that are designed to end their nuclear weapons program. We all strongly support these negotiations and hope they will succeed, and we want them to produce the strongest possible agreement.

However, we are also aware of the possibility the Iranians could keep negotiations from succeeding. I hope that won't happen, but the Senate must be prepared to move forward with a new bipartisan Iran sanctions bill when the Senate returns after the Thanksgiving recess. I am committed to do just that.

I will support a bill that would broaden the scope of our current petroleum sanctions, place limitations on trade with strategic sectors of the Iranian economy that support its nuclear ambitions, as well as pursue those that divert goods to Iran.

While I support the administration's diplomatic efforts, I believe we need to leave our legislative options open to act on a new bipartisan sanctions bill in December, shortly after we return.

The challenge of the majority leader was to find a bipartisan bill that could speak anew to sanctions. We are able to do that. Senator MENENDEZ has been absolutely terrific, along with Senator KIRK, in making sure that sanctions have worked. The Obama administration deserves a lot of credit for keeping the sanctions regime together and getting Iranians to the table.

But the interim agreement that has been entered into between the P5+1 and the Iranians quite frankly is well short of what we need. My goal, and I think the body's goal—at least I hope—would be to dismantle the plutonium-producing reactor that the Iranians are building; not just stop its construction, but dismantle it; take the highly enriched uranium that exists in Iran today and move it out of the country so it cannot be used for a dirty bomb or any other purposes.

This is what the U.N. resolutions have called for, removing the highly enriched uranium that exists in great number from Iran to the international community so it can be controlled; and, last but most importantly is to dismantle their enrichment capability. If the Iranians truly want a peaceful nuclear power program, I am all for that. I do not care if the Russians are jointly with us, that we build a nuclear powerplant in Iran to help them with commercial nuclear power. We just need to control the fuel cycle. There are 15 countries that have nuclear power programs that do not enrich uranium, Mexico and Canada being two, South Korea being another.

The point I am trying to make here is if you leave enrichment capability intact in Iran, the only thing preventing their abuse of that capability would be a bunch of U.N. inspectors. We tried this with North Korea. We provided foreign aid and economic aid and food assistance to control their nuclear ambitions. Well, they took the money and now they have nuclear weapons. The U.N. failed to stop the desire of the North Koreans to develop a nuclear weapon.

That type of approach is not going to work in Iran. Israel is not going to allow their fate to be determined by a bunch of U.N. inspectors. If that is the only thing between the Iranian ayatollahs and nuclear weapons is a bunch of U.N. inspectors, Israel will not stand for that, nor should we.

So when the Iranians demand the right to enrich, that tells you all you need to know about their ambitions. If they want a peaceful nuclear power program, they certainly can have it. We need to control the fuel cycle.

The interim deal has not dismantled any centrifuges. They have unplugged a few, but all of them exist, the 16,000 to 18,000 of them. Here is what the Iranian Government has been openly saying about the interim deal:

The iceberg of sanctions is melting while our centrifuges are also still working. This is our greatest achievement.

This is the head of the Iranian nuclear agency. The Foreign Minister said:

The White House tries to portray it is basically a dismantling of Iran's nuclear program. We are not dismantling any centrifuges, we're not dismantling any equipment, we're simply not producing, not enriching over 5 percent.

Pretty clear. This is the President of Iran, Mr. Rouhani, on CNN.

So there will be no destruction of centrifuges—of existing centrifuges?

No. No, not at all.

Another statement, another tweet:

Our relationship with the world is based on Iran's nation's interest. In Geneva agreement, world powers surrendered to Iran's national will.

You could say this is all bluster for domestic consumption. But just keep listening to what I have to tell you. The Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister said of the interconnections between networks of centrifuges that have been used to enrich uranium to 20 percent, so that they can enrich only to 5 percent: ''These interconnections can be removed in a day and connected again in a day.''

So you are not dismantling anything. You are unplugging it. They can plug it right back in. Here is what has happened, the President of Iran again:

We have struck the first blow to the illegal sanctions, in the fields of insurance, shipping, the banking system, foodstuffs and medicine and exports of petrochemical materials.

You are witness to how foreign firms are visiting our country; 117 political delegations have come here: France, Turkey, Georgia, Ireland, Tunisia, Kazakhstan, China, Italy, India, Austria, and Sweden.

The French Chamber of Commerce hosted a delegation to Iran after the interim deal. The International Monetary Fund says the Iranian economy could turn around due to the interim agreement. Prospects for 2014 and 2015 have improved with the agreement. They are getting a stronger economy. The interim deal has done nothing, in my view, to dismantle their nuclear program that is a threat to us and Israel.

India's oil imports from Iran more than doubled in January from a month earlier. China has emerged as Iran's top trading partner, with nonoil trade hitting $13 billion over the past 10 months. U.S. aerospace companies are talking about selling them parts. Thirteen major international companies have said in recent weeks they aim to reenter the Iranian marketplace over the next several months.

The value of their currency has appreciated about 25 percent. Inflation has been reduced substantially. In other words, the interim deal is beginning to revive the Iranian economy that was crippled by sanctions. The international community is lining up to do business in Iran. The sanctions against Iran are crumbling before our eyes, and the Iranians are openly bragging about this.

The only way to turn this around is to pass another piece of legislation that says, we will give the 6-month period of negotiations time to develop, but at the end of the 6 months, if we have not achieved a satisfactory result of dismantling their nuclear program, the sanctions will continue at a greater pace.

Without that threat, without that friction, we are going to get a very bad outcome here. The administration says that new sanctions will scuttle the deal and lead to war. I could not disagree more. The lack of threat of sanctions, the dismantling of sanctions, the crumbling of sanctions is going to lead to conflict. I do believe that if this body reinforced that we were serious about sanctions until the program gets to where the world thinks it should be, then we would be reinforcing our negotiating position.

So to my Democratic colleagues and Democratic leadership, I am urging you, please, to let this bipartisan bill go forward, if not in the Burr alternative, bring it up as a separate piece of legislation. Let's act now while we still can. I am hopeful we can avoid a conflict with the Iranians. But the only way to do that—I ask unanimous consent for 5 more minutes.

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

Mr. GRAHAM. The only way to do that is to make the Iranians understand that they are never going to have prosperity and peace until they comply with the will of the international community, which is give them a peaceful nuclear power program, not a weapons capability. Rather than us bending to their will, they need to bend to ours, simply because a disaster is in the making if Iran comes out of this negotiation with their nuclear capability intact.

If you allow the Iranians to enrich uranium, that is the final deal, where they still have an enrichment capability, theoretically controlled by the

U.N., every Sunni Arab state will want an enrichment program of their own, and you have destroyed nonproliferation in the Mideast.

I say again, if this final agreement allows enrichment at any level by the Iranians, Sunni Arab states are going to go down the same road. Then we are marching toward Armageddon, I fear. The last thing in the world we want to do is allow the Iranians to enrich, telling our allies they cannot. That will lead to proliferation of enrichment throughout the Mideast, and you are one step away from a weapon.

If you had to make a list of countries based on the behavior that you should not trust with enriching uranium, Iran would be at the top. For the last 30 years they have sown destruction throughout the world, a state sponsor of terrorism. They have killed our troops in Iraq; they are supplying weapons to the enemies of Israel; they have been up to just generally no good. Why in the world we would give them this capability I cannot envision.

So the sanctions are crumbling. We see it before our eyes. The threat of military force against the regime I think has been diminished after the debacle in Syria. Do you really think the Iranians believe after the Syrian debacle that we mean it when we say we would use military force as a last resort? I do not want a military engagement against the Iranians. I just want their nuclear ambitions to end and give them a nuclear powerplant that is controlled to produce power and not make a bomb.

The Israelis will not live under the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran. They will not allow this program to stay intact, unlike North Korea, where the South Koreans and the Japanese did not feel they needed a nuclear program to counter the North Koreans.

The Mideast is different. The Sunni Arabs will not be comfortable with an enrichment capability given to the Iranians. Israel will never accept this, because it is a threat to the Jewish state unlike any other. So I will urge the body, before it is too late, to take the earliest opportunity to pass the bipartisan legislation that would reimpose sanctions if the agreement does not reach a satisfactory conclusion in the next 6 months.

We have 59 cosponsors. If we had a vote, I am confident we could get an overwhelming vote. It would be the right thing to send to the Iranians. It would tell the Western World: Slow down. The idea of giving this 6 months to continue at the pace it is going, it would be impossible to reconstruct sanctions if we do not do it now. Six months from now, if the deal falls apart, President Obama says he would impose sanctions in 24 hours. By then, the regime will have been broken. Western Europe will have been basically out of the game; they have a different view of this than we do. So the idea you can wait for 6 months and the damage not be done, I think is unrealistic. You can see where the world is headed. Sanctions as a viable control device seems to be in everybody's rearview mirror unless the Congress acts, and acts decisively.

What I hope we can do, in a bipartisan fashion, is let our allies and the Iranians know that sanctions are going to be in place as long as the nuclear threat continues to exist. I hope the President will reinforce to the Iranians: Whatever problem I had in Syria, I do not have with you.

I hope the Congress could send a message to the Iranians that we do not want a conflict, but we see your nuclear ambitions as a threat to our way of life. While we may be confused about what to do in Syria, we are not confused about the Iranian nuclear program. We want a peaceful resolution. Sanctions have to be in place until we get the right answer. But if everything else fails, then we are ready to do what is necessary as a nation as a last resort to use military force. I say that understanding the consequences of military force. It would not be a pleasant task. But in a war between us and Iran, we win, they lose. They have a small navy, a small air force. I do not want war with anyone. But if my options are to use military force to stop the Iranians from getting a nuclear weapon, I am picking use of military force. Because if they get a nuclear weapon, then the whole Mideast goes down the wrong road. You would open Pandora's box to attack the Iranians. They could do some damage to us, but it would not last long. They lose, we win. If they get a nuclear capability, you have created a nuclear arms race in the Mideast and you will empty Pandora's box and put Israel in an impossible spot.

So, my colleagues, we have a chance here to turn history around before it is too late. But the way we are moving regarding this negotiation with Iran and the outcome, I have never been more worried about. I do not want to allow the last best chance to stop the Iranian nuclear program to be lost through inaction.

If we misread where Iran is actually going, it will be a mistake for the ages.

I am urging the majority leader, if not on this bill, as soon as possible, to allow the bipartisan Iranian sanction legislation to come to the floor for debate and a vote. I think it can change history before it is too late.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, I stand here as someone who is very interested in our Nation's veterans. We owe the men and women who stood in defense of our Nation the care and services they deserve for the sacrifices they have made for our country.

My dad served in the Air Force for over 20 years, and his service and sacrifice is in no small part why I am a Member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and previously the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. I requested to be a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committees in both Chambers because we made a commitment to take care of those who put their lives on the line for our safety and ideals, and I believe in carrying out the promise.

During my days as a Member of the House of Representatives, my mom would routinely ask me when I would see her: What have you done for our veterans lately? I was happy to talk about the programs and services we promoted, supported, and passed—and certainly in a very bipartisan way. There is a long list of accomplishments of which we can be very proud, from modernizing the GI bill so our veterans can get the education they need to succeed in life after the military, to helping our veterans pursue their dreams of owning a business, to improving the medical services our veterans need for the wounds they have suffered while serving our country.

Unfortunately, problems exist. In my Arkansas office—and I think this is true of most congressional offices—we have a number of dedicated staffers. In fact, we have three dedicated staffers who handle veterans-related issues. They help cut through the redtape of the Department of Veterans Affairs to get the care and attention our veterans have earned. Last year, more than 40 percent of the assistance we provided to Arkansans that involved Federal agencies focused on veterans' issues.

Increasing funding doesn't necessarily mean we will have better outcomes. Take for instance the claims backlog. This is a huge problem impacting hundreds of thousands of veterans nationwide. Even some of the simplest claims are stuck in the process. Since 2009, the number of claims pending for over 1 year has grown, despite a 40 percent increase in the VA's budget. The most recent statistics for the Little Rock VA Regional Office showed 7,663 total claims are pending. Nearly 54 percent have been in the process for more than 125 days. The regional office averages nearly 217 days to complete a claim.

Thanks to the hard work and commitment of Arkansans who work at the VA, we are making progress on the backlog at the Little Rock office, but there is still work to be done for our veterans. Take, for instance, the retired lieutenant colonel in Arkansas who is eligible for benefits he earned for his service in the military. He is not receiving the correct pay. The Defense Finance and Accounting Service approved his paperwork in August and sent it to the VA. It has been 6 months and still no decision has been made. This is an easy case, and it simply shouldn't take that long.

Retired CSM Richard Green lives in Sherwood and has already received his

retirement benefits, but he filed for benefits for his wife the month after they married in October 2012. It took 16 months to process that paperwork—much longer than he was used to during active military service when this sort of paperwork was fixed within one or two paychecks. Every part of the claims process is overwhelmed and bogged down.

Paul Cupp from Fort Smith, AR, has been working on his VA appeal since 2009. He was happy to get part of it approved in 2013, after 4 years of waiting. However, months later, he is still waiting for his rating to get updated and to see the actual benefits from that decision.

And the widows of our veterans are not exempt from this backlog. One Arkansan in her seventies has been working on her claim since 2005, and is still awaiting a decision on appeal. Nine years is certainly unacceptable.

Instead of fixing the existing challenges our veterans are facing through fully implementing what we have committed ourselves to, increasing accountability and improving efficiency, some of my colleagues think the best way to tackle this is by expanding programs and increasing the responsibility of the VA. The problem is we are putting more people in a system which is clearly overwhelmed and needs improvement.

This isn't the fault of the VA, which I believe is fully committed to meeting all the demands our veterans and Congress expect from them. However, the VA can only do so much. As the number of veterans and the complicated nature of their needs increases, we must not pile on additional responsibilities which overwhelm the agency. With the announcement by Senator Hagel of a potentially significant drawdown in the military, many more individuals will come into the VA system.

While the bill before us has worthwhile programs which I support and have championed, we should not expect a massive mandate imposed on VA to change the outcomes we experience. We need a measured approach to changes. They must be done over time and include oversight to make sure our veterans are receiving the attention they deserve in a timely manner.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. PRYOR. Madam President, it is great to see my colleague from Arkansas. We know Senator BOOZMAN tries hard to help our veterans. I thank him for his public service and for focusing on our men and women, whether they are in uniform now or who have served this country.

In the last few weeks I have talked quite a bit about veterans. We have had the veterans retirement cost-of-living fix and a few others which have brought me to the floor to talk about this very important group of people.

In my State of Arkansas we have nearly 255,000 veterans. They have put on the uniform and served their country. They have put their lives on hold for our country. They deserve to return home to a country which is going to honor the commitments we have made to them and a country which will keep the promises we have made, which is why I have been very supportive of these individuals, especially in the context of the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014, S. 1982.

Many Senators are working to make this bill better and get it into a posture where it can pass the Senate. This is a commonsense bill which covers a broad range of topics which are important to our veterans, and a lot of work is going on here behind the scenes. Sometimes when the American people visit the Senate or tune in to C–SPAN 2, they sometimes see an empty Chamber. They aren't always aware of what is going on in the back rooms, here and in the hallways, with folks trying to work through a number of important issues, which is happening with this bill.

I have an important provision in this bill which I have been working on for a while. I think it is going to have broad support on both sides of the aisle, as well as a number of military organizations around the country, called the Honor America's Guard and Reserve Retirees Act. It is kind of a long name, but it is a very simple premise.

Under current law, the military definition of a veteran applies only to servicemembers who have served on Federal active duty under title X orders. This means that many of our servicemembers—most specifically our National Guard members—who have not been deployed under proper orders are falling short of this established criteria.

To put this in perspective: I recently received a letter from an Arkansas veteran named Vincent. He served for more than 20 years in the National Guard. He has protected our families from natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. He served our country by protecting our borders in Operation Jump Start. He served our Nation in Operation Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and in Iraqi Freedom. Yet he still doesn't meet the military definition of a veteran of the armed services.

Vincent isn't the only one. There are 300,000 National Guard and Reserve servicemembers across the country who fall into this same category. My bill, the Honor America's Guard and Reserve Retirees Act, would fix this. It would amend the military definition of veteran to give Guard and Reserve retirees with 20 years of service the honor of being called a veteran. And it is an honor. It would allow these servicemembers to salute when the Star-Spangled Banner is played, to march in veterans' parades, and be recognized as veterans by other veterans.

I know Members of this Chamber will ask, as they should: This is a cost-neutral bill. There is no cost with this. It is simple, it is cost neutral, and it is an overdue recognition of these individual servicemembers who served bravely for our country.

It is time we pass this bill so Vincent and hundreds and thousands of others can receive the honor they deserve.

Madam President, I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this morning when I came to the Senate floor, I talked about how it is groundhog year, not ''Groundhog Day.'' What is going on here today is an example of what has been going on with the Republican-driven direction of this Congress for several years.

What are we doing here today? Nothing. Under the rules of the Senate, cloture was invoked 99 to 0. The purpose of that vote was to get on a bill. It is a shame we had to even file cloture on it, but we did, and that takes a couple of days. Everyone should understand that after cloture is invoked, there is 30 hours. It is a waste of time.

Why are they doing that? Why are they causing this? Because they don't want to legislate. They want to do anything they can to stop President Obama from accomplishing anything.

BERNIE SANDERS, chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, has dedicated his heart and soul to something he, his committee, and the veterans community believes in—improving the lives of veterans. We have millions of people who have come home, and are coming home, from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They deserve a lot.

The legislation that is on this floor is terrific. It is supported by 26 different veterans organizations, including the largest, the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Here is what the commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars said earlier today:

> American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger said Wednesday—

That is today—

> that sanctions against Iran have no place in a U.S. Senate debate over legislation that aims to expand health care, education opportunities, employment and other benefits for veterans.

I ask unanimous consent that his complete statement be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

COMMANDER: KEEP SENATE BILL FOCUSED ON VETS

American Legion leader says no other issues need to be attached to legislation to improve health care, education, employment and benefits for those who served our nation.

WASHINGTON (Feb. 26, 2014).—American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger said Wednesday that sanctions against Iran have no place in a U.S. Senate debate over legislation that aims to expand health care, education opportunities, employment and other benefits for veterans.

''Iran is a serious issue that Congress needs to address, but it cannot be tied to S. 1982, which is extremely important as our nation prepares to welcome millions of U.S. military servicemen and women home from war. This comprehensive bill aims to help veterans find good jobs, get the health care they need and make in-state tuition rates applicable to all who are using their GI Bill benefits. This legislation is about supporting veterans, pure and simple. The Senate can debate various aspects of it, and that's understandable, but it cannot lose focus on the matter at hand: helping military personnel make the transition to veteran life and ensuring that those who served their nation in uniform receive the benefits they earned and deserve. We can deal with Iran—or any other issue unrelated specifically to veterans—with separate legislation.''

A 99–0 vote in the Senate Tuesday cleared the way for a full debate on S. 1982, introduced by Sen. Bernie Sanders, I–Vt., chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The bill seeks to improve medical and dental care offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs, open 27 new VA clinics where access to care is now difficult, renew the Vow to Hire Heroes Act that has helped some 70,000 veterans find jobs and receive employment training, improve care for those who experienced military sexual trauma and protect cost-of-living adjustments for future military retirees.

Dellinger is the leader of the nation's largest veterans service organization, the 2.4-million-member American Legion.

Mr. REID. It goes into detail as to how wrongheaded this is, that the Republicans are trying to divert attention from an issue that is so very important to the American people, and why their continued obstruction has been so detrimental to our country.

KOCH ADVERTIZING

Mr. President, I can't say that every one of the Koch brothers' ads is a lie, but I will say this: The vast majority of them are. Now, enough editorial comment. I am going to read verbatim a column that appeared in today's The Hill magazine—newspaper, I should call it—here on the Hill. It is entitled ''Koch brothers' ads shameful.'' Let me read this:

Having a right is not the same thing as being in the right.

In some instances, we have the right to behave immorally. For example, the First Amendment gives some people, in some circumstances, the right to lie.

Let's set aside for a moment whether the billionaire Koch brothers have the right to run a flurry of dishonest ads about ObamaCare and ask instead whether spending millions of dollars to mislead and even lie to the American people is the right thing to do.

There is no legitimate debate about the integrity of the ads. In Louisiana, the Kochs' political front group placed an ad that, to all appearances, features a group of Louisianans opening letters from insurance companies informing them about the problems they face as a result of the Affordable Care Act.

Except that, as ABC News has documented, the individuals in their ad are not Louisianans. They are paid actors who are not reading actual letters sent by any real insurance company.

In other words, nothing about the ad is true.

The response from the brothers' organization: ''The viewing public is savvy enough to distinguish between someone giving a personal story and something that is emblematic.''

A little editorial comment before I continue with this op-ed piece: How about that for a response? That is code word for ''we have a lot of money, and we will run ads about anything we want to run ads about.''

I continue the column:

Were this an ad for Stainmaster carpet, a Koch product, Federal Trade Commission guidelines would require the ad to ''conspicuously disclose that the persons in such advertisements are not actual consumers.''

That is from the FTC.

Moreover, the FTC would require them to either demonstrate that these results of ObamaCare are typical or make clear in the ad that they are not.

Needless to say, the ad meets none of these requirements, thereby conforming to the legal definition of false advertising.

Not all Koch ads feature actors. Even those with real people, though, are not necessarily factual. Witness the attack on Rep. Gary Peters (D-Mich.)—

Who, by the way, is running for the Senate—

in a Koch-funded ad featuring a Michigan leukemia patient.

Everyone sympathizes with her struggle, as well they should. But neither her bravery nor her suffering makes the words she utters true. They aren't.

In the ad, the patient claims, with ObamaCare ''the out-of-pocket costs are so high, it is unaffordable.'' The Detroit News reports the ''ad makes no mention that [the patient] successfully enrolled in a new Blue Cross plan where she's been able to retain her University of Michigan oncologist and continues to receive the life-saving oral chemotherapy. . . . The ad also does not mention that [her] health care premiums were cut in half.''

The Washington Post's Glenn Kessler did the math. She saved $6,348 a year on premiums. And because ObamaCare caps out-of-pocket costs for plans at $6,350, she will be paying, at most, $2 more this year for her care.

It's hard to call that an unaffordable increase.

If it were just these two egregious examples, someone might suggest I'm picking on the Koch brothers. Now, I do not always agree with the fact checkers, who are sometimes wrong. But it is striking that PolitiFact reviewed 11 ads placed by the brothers' organization, and not a single one was rated ''true'' or even ''mostly true.'' Nine were rated ''false'' or worse.

So, I return to my original question. Whatever their constitutional rights, are the Koch brothers right to degrade the Democratic process with lies? Are they right to use tactics that are, by legal definitions, deceptive and dishonest? Are voters choosing a candidate due any less respect and honesty than consumers buying carpet?

We in the consulting profession—

This column is written by a nationally known pollster by the name of Mark Mellman—

We in the consulting profession need to ask ourselves hard questions about where the line is that we won't cross. When does the pursuit of victory at any cost exact too high a price? When does dishonesty distort democracy?

Politicians, political parties or media that fail to condemn these tactics, as well as broadcasters that air these ads, and the consultants who make them, are all complicit in the Kochs' immorality.

Mr. President, this is the truth. This is the truth. What is going on with these two brothers who made billions of dollars last year and attempted to buy our democracy is dishonest, deceptive, false, and unfair. Just because you have huge amounts of money, you should not be able to run these false, misleading ads by the hundreds of millions of dollars.

They hide behind all kinds of entities. It is not just their front organization, Americans For Prosperity. They give money to all kinds of organizations—lots of money. When you make billions of dollars a year, you can be, I guess, as immoral and dishonest as your money will allow. It is too bad they are trying to buy America, and it is time the American people spoke out against this terrible dishonesty and about these two brothers who are about as un-American as anyone I can imagine.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, does the Senator yield the floor?

Mr. REID. I sure do.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I rise briefly this afternoon to join my colleagues in expressing deep disappointment with yet another decision by the Obama administration to undermine the health care options of millions of Americans.

As we all know, the President promised, ''If you like your health care plan, you can keep it.'' But his law's drastic cuts to Medicare and Medicare Advantage are creating an impossible environment for Americans to keep their insurance plans or to keep their doctors. Even more troubling is that funds raided from Medicare will be spent on the President's flawed health care law.

In particular, Medicare Advantage serves more than 15 million American senior citizens, including some 56,000 Mississippians. It is a program that incentivizes market-based competition and patient choice. These are two elements that have made it both popular and successful. Nearly one-third of all Medicare patients voluntarily enroll in this type of health care plan, and 95 percent of Medicare Advantage members rate their quality of care as ''very high.''

Independent reports show that seniors will see their plans canceled. They will see higher premiums and fewer choices because of these severe cuts to Medicare and Medicare Advantage. I have heard from health care professionals in Mississippi who are concerned about the law's negative impact on patient care.

I came to the floor earlier this week to speak about the profound human

cost of the President's health care law. It is past time for the President and his allies in Congress to recognize the devastating consequences of ObamaCare. Delaying and changing the law, which the administration has done some two dozen times—with questionable legal authority, I might add—will not fix the damage. This is a law that just doesn't work.

The solution is to repeal and replace ObamaCare with market-driven reforms that empower Americans to decide which health care options are best for them. We can do better than this law, and we owe it to the American people to do so.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I come to the floor again to talk about—it is my understanding we are not going to be allowed to offer any amendments again on a significant bill that spends billions, tens of billions of dollars—to talk about a couple of amendments I have.

My staff recently talked with some veterans from Oklahoma, and I want to give you an anecdote that just happened. This is about VA care. This is a lady, a 100-percent disabled veteran, who has had knee replacements at a VA hospital. She did not have one knee replacement, she had two knee replacements. And then she had two knee replacements on the other knee.

If you look at the statistics of a knee replacement having to be replaced, it is a very rare occurrence. But the fact that you would have two knee replacements, and both of them would have to be replaced is unheard of.

The story does not end there. The story ends with the fact that during her second knee replacement, they broke her femur. So they had to put a rod into her femur. When they put the implant in, she ended up with one leg an inch longer than the other leg.

The fact is that this all occurred at a VA hospital. And it is unheard of that somebody who has a knee replacement on one side would have to have another one done because of complications, and then have the other knee done, and have to have that knee redone because of a complication. But then on top of it, as to the skill of the surgeon in terms of doing a second replacement and having a rod, and then putting the wrong rod in, it creates a leg length discrepancy that can only be corrected now by her spending a significant amount of money on an orthotic shoe on the shorter leg which, if you know anything about medicine, changes the alignment of the spine, which causes tremendous arthritis in the spine of that patient.

So here is a patient that if you look across the world in the private sector 99.9 percent of the time would not have had to have either of them replaced, would not have had to have a rod put in her femur, and would not have a leg-length discrepancy.

I agree that is an anecdote. But those are the kinds of things that we are not holding the VA to account for.

One of the amendments I was going to offer to this bill was a very straightforward amendment requiring every 6 months that the VA publish, in both their hospitals—outpatient—and nursing homes the quality of their care, the mortality rates, the complication rates, the infection rates, the wait times in their emergency rooms, the wait times for a screening examination, the wait times for an endoscopy, the complications associated with those, so veterans could actually see and compare it to the private sector—every other hospital knows all this stuff and publishes it—so they can see and compare the quality of care. Because we have an honor-bound commitment to offer care to those who have offered to sacrifice their life and their future for our freedom.

But we are not going to be able to offer the first step in terms of accountability to the VA health system because we get to offer no amendments.

What if you knew—and this does not apply and I do not mean to denigrate the whole VA system because there are some great VA hospitals, but in your area, where you have to go, if you knew the quality was 20 or 25 percent less than what you could get in your own hometown, would you still go to a VA hospital? Should veterans not know whether they are getting a standard of care that equates to what they could get in the private sector? They are not going to know because that is nowhere in terms of the accountability of the VA system I talked about yesterday.

One of the other amendments I was going to offer would be to strike section 301. The chairman of the committee yesterday referenced section 302. He was actually talking about section 308 of his bill, not section 302 of his bill. But when you expand VA health care to Priority Group 8—these are people who do not meet the income, have no service-connected disability, and have no limited resources—to put them into the VA health care system, when we are not adequately treating the veterans who are eligible for service today in the VA health care system, what you are really doing is taking away our commitment to care for those to whom we have already promised care. So it is somewhat cynical that we would expand from 6 million to a potential of 22 million people in a system that is behind the curve already.

The other thing that is important for that is the care for these veterans with nonservice-connected disabilities was excluded from the VA's priority group so the VA could focus—focus—its limited resources on our veterans with service-connected disabilities. In other words, they have a health complication because they served our country.

As former Secretary Anthony Principi said: Remember, when everyone is a priority, no one is. That is exactly what this bill will do. It will take the priority away from our veterans with service-connected disabilities to where they will fall further through the cracks.

The other thing in this section is—the only thing worse than them being in the Affordable Care Act, which is what this is really specifically designed to do, is to take them out of the exchanges and put them into the VA. So what we are saying under this bill is, if you are a high-income, nondisabled veteran, and the only health care coverage you have available to you is an ObamaCare exchange, then you now qualify for VA services.

What is that about? What that is about is moving to a single-payer, government-run, totally government-run health care system. And this is about moving 16 million veterans—or the potential of up to 16 million veterans—to that position. So the only thing worse than being covered by the VA, where veterans are waiting for weeks to see a doctor and literally dying because of medical deficiencies, is being in an Affordable Care Act exchange.

This amendment would strike the expansion from the legislation, which would ensure that the VA remains focused on the service-connected disabled and increasing the quality of care for more than 6 million veterans currently in the VA system.

I want to talk a minute about why we did that. We created the VA health care system for those who have a complication of their service—a complication of their service.

Do we have a commitment, one, to ensure that those who have a complication from their service get the care we have promised them?

I believe we do. Section 301 would markedly minimize that commitment to those who have a complication from their service. So how is it that we have come about, that we have this great big VA bill on the floor, without any oversight, aggressive oversight, on holding the VA accountable to do what it is supposed to be doing now—with a 59-percent increase in budget since October 1 of 2009, and expand it and blow it to an area where we are going to offer these same services, where we are not meeting quality outcomes, we are not meeting timeliness outcomes, we are not meeting care outcomes, and we are going to put that on the VA system?

I would say the better way to honor our veterans who have a complication associated with their service is to hold the VA accountable through transparency of their quality.

Here is the other thing that has not been studied, and we do not know the answer to this. I certainly do not know

it. I cannot find it anywhere. It is this. What does it cost to do an ''X'' procedure in a VA hospital, totally absorbed, versus doing it in a nonVA hospital? Let's assume quality is the same. Would the American taxpayer be better off if, in fact, we delivered that service at a cost that is much less?

But nobody has asked for those numbers. The VA cannot give those numbers. The VA does not know those numbers. So we are driving blind. We do not know what it costs to do a total knee in a VA hospital. We do know what it costs in Oklahoma City from every hospital. As a matter of fact, there is a wonderful hospital in Oklahoma City that advertises every price, all their complications, everything else out there. They have people from all across the country coming because they are so much cheaper and so much better than what people in the private market can get done where they live.

Let's see how VA cost and quality and outcomes compare to that. If you really want to drive quality for our veterans, we have to have accountability in terms of how we spend money, accountability in terms of the outcomes, accountability in terms of the quality, and accountability in terms of the service.

The other amendment that I have would allow service-connected veterans who are driving hundreds of miles—in my State—to get care with a pilot program which would allow them to go anywhere they wanted, to their home town, to the next town over if it is bigger and has higher quality, rather than drive 200 miles to get their care at a VA hospital. We would cover it under Medicare rates, since we do not know the cost ramifications of what we do at VA clinics and VA hospitals, in terms of the total absorbed cost, but we do know what the price would be if we had Medicare paying. My learned opinion is that, No. 1, veterans would have access to care closer to home, probably improved quality, and most probably a decreased cost for the Federal Government, i.e., the American taxpayers in terms of meeting this honor-bound commitment to our veterans.

If, in fact, you served this country, and one of the benefits of serving this country—and you have a service-connected disability associated with that—is a promise of quality health care, why do we say you can only get it in a VA clinic or a VA hospital? If you served our country, why can't you get it wherever you want? I mean, you served our country to preserve our freedom of choice, our freedom to do and select what is best for us and our interests. Why can't a veteran have that privilege that he or she fought for and put their rear ends on the line for? Why do we not avail them of the freedom that they sacrificed for?

Nobody will answer that question. Nobody will come down and answer that question. Those are knowable answers. They are moral questions. If you sacrifice, should you not have the benefits of the freedom for which you sacrificed?

The other problem with this bill is it has a false pay-for, money that we might have spent on a war in Afghanistan. Because we are not going to spend it, we are going to spend it here and call that a pay-for. That is not a pay-for. It does not pass muster. It does not pass the budget point of order on it. Everybody knows that.

So what we ought to be doing, instead of having this bill on the floor, we ought to have a bill on the floor that holds the VA accountable, that creates transparency in the VA so that everybody in the country, including the veterans can see outcomes, quality, and cost. Finally, we ought to give the veterans the freedom that they fought for; that if they are deserving of this benefit, they ought to be able to get the benefit anywhere they choose, because they are the ones who preserved the rights and the abilities and the capabilities for us to experience the freedoms to make choices for ourselves.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I come to the floor as the ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee as we consider S. 1982, the Sanders bill. I have been down to the floor several times, and I will not take up a lot of the Senate's valuable time right now. But I do want to cover some things that have transpired since the last time I was on the floor today, when I read from an editorial that was written by Concerned Veterans of America. The group was challenged by some of my colleagues here as to whether it was a front group, whether this was a political front group.

Let me assure my colleagues, it represents real veterans. But in an effort to try to debunk the belief that this is just about one political group, I want to read some from another editorial written by Stewart Hickey of AMVETS. Now, nobody can question whether AMVETS is a legitimate veterans service organization. They have been around for a while. I will be selective in my reading:

> While we agree the bill addresses many critical issues and recommends important solutions for our veterans, we do not support this bill for several reasons. First, it would be morally irresponsible and fiscally unsound, given the historically volatile situation in Afghanistan, to hang the funding for such robust legislation on any potential ''peace dividend.'' Throwing more money—upwards of $30 billion, and taken from war funds no less—at a failing department will only make matters worse.
>
> This kitchen sink-like bill also endeavors to be all things to all veterans, and is very enticing to all of us ''Veterans Service Organizations'' as the panacea for all of our legislative agendas. The problem is, in its current configuration, it has little to no chance of passage, it's just too ''pie in the sky'' and lacks the power base to hold VA accountable for providing excellent care and services to veterans currently accessing the system.

It goes on to say:

> We all want what is best for the veterans community, and many of the provisions in S. 1982 are positive. However, ''bigger'' does not mean ''better.'' And the Sanders bill further expands a VA system that is already overwhelmed and cannot meet the current needs of veterans. Before overcommitting the Department of Veterans Affairs and subjecting our veterans to more broken promises, Congress should rally on legislation that keeps the promises already made.

Yet another veterans service organization says: Reform the Veterans Administration.

Dr. COBURN from Oklahoma, the Senator from Oklahoma, was talking about horror stories within the veteran's facilities. So I say to my colleagues: You know, the mistake here is that we are not on the floor debating the reform of the VA and then debating any expansion.

But the fact is that we look at editorial after editorial of people who have some contact with the VA. They are saying: The last thing you should do is expand service. The last thing you should do is use gimmicks to pay for it. The last thing you should do is saddle our kids with not only the debt for it but the responsibility to uphold a promise that might be impossible.

Let me speak a little further on some of the things Dr. COBURN hit on. This is about hospital delays, veterans dying at VA facilities. I came down earlier—and I might add right now that this is the stack of the Inspector General of the VA for 1 year, 1 year's worth of investigations on VA facilities where they made specific recommendations of changes that had to be made.

This dealt with the death of veterans. It dealt with Legionnaire's Disease. It dealt with things as simple as more than one patient using a disposable insulin pen—something meant for one patient that was used for multiple patients, exposing them to potential illnesses.

If the question is, do we keep the promise of the quality of care to our veterans? And if that is not important enough, let me go to the veterans that are in the system trying for the first time to get a disability rating because of a service-connected disability.

The number of claims pending in America right now is 673,000 veterans. These are individuals who have filed a claim with the Veterans' Administration, who are waiting in line for the determination to be made about what percentage of those claims they will approve. The number of claims that are considered backlogged right now is 389,000 veteran's claims.

Once a veteran receives a disability rating, if in fact they feel that the VA has come to the wrong conclusion as to the percentage, they file an appeal. The

number of appeals pending is 272,000 appeals. So one can conclude from this that the number of claims pending is 673,000 plus 272,000. So there are over 1 million veterans right now waiting for a determination by the VA specifically or by the Court of Appeals to sort out their disability status.

The number of days to complete a claim is 265 days. Let me say that again: 265 days to complete a claim. Right now, claims pending are 673,000. The number of days for an appeal that is pending is 600 days—600. So let's just say of that 1 million claims that are either pending or that have been appealed, which is 1 million veterans, the number of days to complete the claim on average took 265 days, and the number of days for an appeal, on average, was over 600. We are now at 800 days. That is almost 3 years.

I hope my colleagues are understanding what I am saying. We have a severely dysfunctional Veterans' Administration today. We have a population of warriors who are coming out of the battlefield in Afghanistan. They are coming back from deployments. They leave the service; they file for disability; they wait, they wait, they wait, they wait. When they finally get their disability claim and they are going to the VA, now all of a sudden we are talking about dumping millions of additional veterans into the line with them.

My good friend and chairman Senator SANDERS said: We can handle this because we have 27 clinics, outpatient facilities in this bill that, under a lease agreement, we are going to build out—27 facilities. They are for the veterans we have today. We don't have enough facilities to handle the current population, and he said this could handle the millions who are going to come in.

Let me remind my colleagues once again that currently we have $14 billion worth of veterans construction underway. We appropriate about $1 billion a year. That is a 14-year backlog on the construction of these facilities, and none of the 27 leases that are in this bill will be ready in December 2014 when the enactment of this legislation takes place.

There is one other area of massive expansion other than to veterans with nonservice-connected disabilities, and that is to a program called our caregivers program. I am pretty passionate about this because I wrote the legislation. My good friend Senator Akaka, who is no longer here, who was chairman of the Senate veterans' committee, became a champion of it. Earlier, I read Senator Akaka's statements on the Senate floor the day it was passed. He stated as clearly as anybody ever has why we limited this to a demonstration project, why we rolled it out to a small group. Our intention was that when the VA was fixed, reformed, and was capable of implementing a plan that expanded the caregiver program, we would do that but not a day sooner.

Now, all of a sudden, we are not just talking about extending the caregiver program to every current-era veteran; Senator SANDERS' bill extends it to every era. Veterans from every era who served who are still alive would be eligible for caregivers.

On occasion, he has pointed to the wounded warrior program. I will read a letter the Wounded Warrior Project sent to the committee when this legislation was being considered.

They said:

> More than 2 years after initial implementation, VA still has not answered—let alone remedied—the problems and concerns that WWP and other advocates raised regarding the Department's implementing regulations. For example, those regulations leave ''appeals rights'' unaddressed (including appeals from adverse determinations of law); set unduly strict criteria for determining a need for caregiving for veterans with severe behavioral health conditions; and invite arbitrary, inconsistent decisionmaking. Simply extending the scope of current law at this point to caregivers of other veterans would inadvertently signal to VA acquiescence in its flawed implementation of that law. We recommend that the Committee insist on VA's resolving these long-outstanding concerns as a pre-condition to extending the promise of this law to caregivers of pre 9/11 veterans.

If there is one thing I have made perfectly clear yesterday and today, it is that there is nothing in this bill that reforms the VA. Look at any area of the legislation. There is no reform. Yet editorials from service organizations, letters from the Wounded Warrior Project—and they were, make no mistake, behind caregivers. Their letter to the chairman said: Don't do this until it is fixed.

Well, we are where we are. To suggest that all veterans, all veterans organizations, all organizations that deal with veterans are for this is just inconsistent with the paper trail that exists, letters and editorials.

There are two things that don't go away: one, the need to reform and, two, the promise we made to our country's warriors.

We have to ask ourselves: Are we better off fixing the VA before we enlarge the population or after we enlarge the population? I can answer that. It is tough to do now, and it is not going to happen without congressional leadership. But if we expand the population, dump it on a system that is physically not capable of handling it, administratively not capable of handling it, what do we say to those veterans who need the VA health care system and can't get in to see a primary care doctor? What do we say to a person who needs mental health treatment but can't see a psychiatrist, can't get in to be evaluated, and doesn't get the medication they need?

I plead with my colleagues, don't make this mistake. There is an alternative bill. It is taken from the Sanders bill. It is 80 percent, but it doesn't have the massive expansion. It doesn't reform, but it really moves forward on some important issues.

No matter what we do, at some point we are going to have to show the leadership how to reform the VA. Why? Because we are going to keep our promise to veterans. The promise to veterans was that we would provide them a quality of care that was unprecedented.

I am not sure there is a Member of this body who believes we can dump this population onto the Veterans' Administration and that we can look any veteran in the face and say: We kept our promise to you. Yes, you may have access, but it may be months from now. You may have the ability to go to the VA, but we don't have any room; there is no room in the inn.

These are all part of keeping your promises.

I will go back to what the AMVETS editorial said, and I will end with that because I see my colleagues here.

Bigger is not necessarily better. When I gave these statistics on backlogs of claims and appeals, these are veterans who aren't asking for bigger, they are asking for better. They are asking us to sort out this system and make it work in a way they deserve. All we will do is exacerbate the problem if, in fact, we pass S. 1982.

I urge my colleagues, support the alternative—if we are given the opportunity to offer one. If not, then don't do this to our country's veterans. Wait and let us reform the VA. That is our responsibility. That is our promise.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. BLUMENTHAL). The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, are we in morning business? What is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator should be aware we are on the motion to proceed to S. 1982.

Mr. WICKER. With the Senate's permission, I propose to speak, along with Senator MANCHIN, as in morning business on another matter.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

PUERTO RICO STATUS RESOLUTION ACT

Mr. WICKER. I rise today to speak about a recently introduced bill regarding the future of Puerto Rico's political status. Known as the Puerto Rico Status Resolution Act, this legislation would call for an up-or-down referendum on Puerto Rican statehood, excluding the option of Puerto Rico's current status of Commonwealth. The President and Congress would have to proceed with legislation if statehood receives a majority of votes.

I support Puerto Rico's right of self-determination. This is an issue I have closely followed and been involved in for the better part of two decades. Concern about the way we do statehood determination votes in Puerto Rico is an issue that has crossed party lines in the Congress.

I would say to my colleagues, Congress needs to make sure, at a minimum, that any process used to measure the intent of Puerto Rican voters is

objective; otherwise, the outcome will be neither fair nor a meaningful test of public opinion. That is why it is so important not to exclude the option of the current Commonwealth status.

The status resolution act does not rise to the threshold of fairness or a meaningful test of public opinion. There are two reasons:

First, legislation has already been enacted that calls for a plebiscite on Puerto Rico's political status. The 2014 omnibus already includes funding for a plebiscite that would include all available options for political status. Allowing Puerto Ricans the opportunity to choose a status besides statehood is in keeping with a recommendation from the White House Task Force Report released in 2011.

Second, the referendum proposed by the status resolution act would have the same shortcomings as the plebiscite held on November 6, 2012. The results of that referendum were widely criticized, as well as the tortured ballot designed by the pro-statehood party. Of the 1.9 million Puerto Ricans who participated in the referendum, only 834,191—or about 44 percent—favored statehood. Only 44 percent favored statehood. Close to half a million voters declined to respond to the second question on the ballot, evidencing their dissatisfaction with the choices offered. We need to offer better choices. The percentage of statehood supporters has not changed significantly over the past 20 years and certainly does not serve as an impetus for Congress to entertain yet another admissions process now.

Elsewhere on the November 6 ballot that I referred to, public support was clear for the pro-Commonwealth Popular Democratic Party and the election of pro-Commonwealth and anti-statehood candidate Alejandro Garcia Padilla as Puerto Rico's new Governor. In fact, the Commonwealth's legislature, as a result of that election, is now controlled by the pro-Commonwealth party, as is the mayorship of San Juan, the capital of the Commonwealth.

Statehood advocates may attempt to manipulate ballots and election results to support their preferred outcome, but they do so at the expense of the democratic process and the right of every Puerto Rican to have a say in the island's political future.

The referendum process should be conducted in a fair and transparent manner that reflects the true will of the people. In the past, I have introduced legislation that would recognize Puerto Rico's right to convene a constitutional convention—a process that could help build consensus rather than advance the exclusive agenda of one political party over the other.

For Commonwealth supporters, Puerto Rico's current status is instrumental to preserving the island's rich heritage and maintaining the authority needed to address specific needs. The status resolution act not only has the potential to trample on people's rights, but it also distracts from the island's pressing economic and security concerns.

In conclusion, Congress and the Obama administration should continue to strengthen the partnership between Puerto Rico and the United States in constructive ways instead of encouraging a shortsighted and flawed referendum. Puerto Rico faces economic, energy, and public safety challenges that have a direct impact on the quality of life of its residents. Joint efforts to restore economic growth, modernize energy resources, and reinforce strategies for combating drug trafficking could have a big impact. I am encouraged by proposed reforms, and I wish the best to Gov. Garcia Padilla in the early days of his term in office.

I hope the Senate will not attempt to impose a solution from Washington, DC, on Puerto Rican voters—a solution that would be contrary to the public opinion of inhabitants of the island.

I am glad my colleague from West Virginia, who serves on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee which exercises jurisdiction over matters relating to Puerto Rico, has joined me on the floor, and I would now yield for him—Senator MANCHIN—to comment on a recent study by the GAO on Puerto Rico's economy and the potential effects of statehood.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I wish to thank my colleague Senator WICKER for his longstanding concern about Puerto Rico's current status and how they can govern themselves and work independently. As you can tell, this is a bipartisan concern we have and we are working very closely together.

As Senator WICKER mentioned, the Government Accountability Office is currently working on a report that examines Puerto Rico's economy and the cost of admitting Puerto Rico as a State. I look forward to seeing the results of that report. But in light of the fact we are still awaiting the GAO report, in addition to a number of other reasons, I share Senator WICKER's concerns about the Puerto Rico Status Resolution Act.

On August 1 of last year, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which has jurisdiction over Puerto Rican issues, held a hearing on the political status of Puerto Rico, where we had the opportunity to hear from Governor Padilla, Commissioner PIERLUISI, and the President of the Puerto Rican Independence Party Ruben Berrios. I appreciated their willingness to openly discuss the ongoing status debate in Puerto Rico and their work with the committee members on how to move forward.

Similar to Senator WICKER, I support Puerto Rico's right to self-determination. However, I have voiced my concerns that the 2012 plebiscite did not meet our democratic standards of fairness and exclusivity, and more than 470,000 Puerto Ricans who left the ballot's second question blank would seem to share my concerns as well. We need a process with the support of all Puerto Ricans, regardless of their beliefs and political status.

Supporters of statehood argue about the constitutionality of different status options. Crafting a plebiscite, however, which excludes all options except statehood, as the Puerto Rico status resolution does, is not the solution. It is not the solution.

The 2014 omnibus includes funding for a plebiscite that would be proctored by the Department of Justice which can authoritatively decide on the constitutionality of all possible status options. Further, both those who are pro-Commonwealth and those who are prostatehood have expressed support for this process. This is not true of the 2012 plebiscite nor the Puerto Rico status resolution.

Political status is not the only issue facing Puerto Rico. The Commonwealth has faced more than half a decade of economic recession and high unemployment, as well as exceptionally high utility costs and continued obstacles to economic development.

As a former Governor I have great respect for Governor Padilla and the challenges he is up against, which are not unlike many of our own States in our country. In meeting with Governor Padilla, I have had the opportunity to hear directly about the enormous economic difficulties he has tackled in his short time as Governor.

In my understanding the 2014 budget—his 2014 budget for Puerto Rico—would significantly reduce the Commonwealth's projected deficit. General fund expenses were down by nearly $200 million during the second half of last year and expected revenue is up. The Governor has made these efforts with the goal of having a balanced budget by 2015, something we could all work toward and a goal I applaud. I understand and have seen that progress is being made.

The Senate should do everything we can to encourage economic development across our country, including in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. We need to work as partners in confronting its high energy costs, double-digit unemployment, and continuing recession. As we support self-determination, we should ensure our focus on political status does not prevent us from addressing the immediate economic needs of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

I thank my colleague for the time to join him in speaking on this important issue and I look forward to his support of a fair and open process and to working with him on this issue.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, if I might, let me congratulate my colleague from West Virginia on his remarks and in closing make three observations.

Despite the economic hardships of the region, the economy of Puerto Rico is the strongest of any of the Caribbean islands, and this has occurred under Commonwealth status—the special relationship that Puerto Ricans have with the United States as U.S. citizens but with their separate identity on the island.

Secondly, I would point out that some of the most vocal pro-Commonwealth voices in this Congress are Puerto Rican Americans who happened to have been elected to the Congress from the States, and they speak also and have spoken also with authority in favor of the Commonwealth concept but also in favor of a fair and accurate election.

Finally, I wish to just drive home a point Senator MANCHIN and I have made. On election day in 2012, 1.9 million Puerto Ricans showed up to vote in that election. The pro-Commonwealth candidate for Governor was elected, the pro-Commonwealth candidate for mayor of San Juan was elected, and a majority of the legislature of the island that day turned out to be pro-Commonwealth.

As flawed as the plebiscite was, the fact remains, of the 1.9 million American citizens in Puerto Rico who voted—who showed up to vote—only 44 percent of them cast a ballot in favor of statehood. That is a figure that cannot be controverted: 1.9 million people showed up to vote—American citizens in Puerto Rico—and only 44 percent of them checked the box for statehood.

So as we go forward and as we implement the provisions of the omnibus act, let us make sure that whatever we do we have the facts, as Senator MANCHIN has pointed out, and also we have a process to accurately reflect the will of the Puerto Rican people.

I thank the Chair, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I have talked to a number of my Republican colleagues, some of whom have expressed support for many of the provisions in this comprehensive veterans bill. Many of my Republican colleagues say they would like to support the bill, but they have concerns about how it is paid for and the issue of deficit—increasing the deficit. So let me say a word about this.

Unlike many expenditures, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the truth is this bill will not add one penny to the deficit. Let me repeat: This bill will not add one penny to the deficit. The Congressional Budget Office—the nonpartisan scorekeeper—has estimated that mandatory spending in this legislation will total $2.88 billion over the next decade. All of this mandatory spending is completely offset not by the overseas contingency operations—or OCO—but through more than $4.2 billion in actual savings from programs within the jurisdiction of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. As a result, CBO has determined that overall mandatory spending—mandatory spending in this bill—will be reduced by more than $1.3 billion.

In addition to the mandatory spending, this bill authorizes $18.3 billion in discretionary spending over the next 5 years to improve the lives of our Nation's veterans and their families.

As we know, there is no rule in the Senate that an authorization of funding has to be offset. In essence, the discretionary spending provisions in the legislation we are debating today are just recommendations on how much additional funding we believe is needed for our Nation's veterans. It will be up to future legislation originating in the Appropriations Committee to approve or disapprove these recommendations. In other words, the Veterans' Affairs Committee is an authorizing committee; the final decisions in terms of expenditures are made by the Appropriations Committee.

Many of my Republican colleagues have insisted even recommendations of new spending—spending which may never actually happen because it has to go through the Appropriations Committee—be offset. I have done my best to listen to their concerns and have come up with an offset which will not add to the deficit over the next decade.

Specifically, the discretionary spending authorized under this bill is paid for by using savings from winding down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—otherwise known as the OCO fund. CBO estimates spending for overseas contingency operations will total $1.025 trillion over the next decade, so a little more than $1 trillion. Spending as a result of this legislation will be a tiny fraction of that amount—less than 2 percent.

OCO funds are designed, very broadly, to be used to fund war-related activities. In my view, it is totally consistent with the goals of this funding source to provide support for the men and women who have defended us in those wars.

In recent years OCO funds have provided assistance to Syrian refugees, and have helped the people of Haiti recover from a massive earthquake. Further, since 2005, the Defense Department has used OCO funding for childcare centers, hospitals, schools, traumatic brain injury research, and orthopedic equipment.

In 2010, $50 million in OCO funds was used for the Guam Improvement Enterprise Fund. Last year, OCO funds were allocated to the following countries: Egypt, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Somalia, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. Last year, OCO funds were used to combat trafficking in persons related to labor migration in the Kyrgyz Republic, and to establish a Tunisian-American Enterprise Fund.

In 2011, $89.36 million was used by the National Guard to support the southwest border of the United States.

This year, $218 million in OCO funding is being used for the TRICARE health care program.

These are some of the ways in the past OCO funding has been used. I am not here to argue about the wisdom of any of those expenditures. Many of them may well be valid. What I will say is the needs of our veterans are also valid. If we can spend OCO funds for the Guam Improvement Enterprise Fund, I think we can use OCO funds to protect the interests of our veterans. Again, this expenditure is less than 2 percent of the savings from ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I have heard my friends on the other side of the aisle call this a budget gimmick. I disagree. Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate have voted several times to count war-related savings as a reduction in the deficit.

For example, virtually every Republican in the House of Representatives and Senate voted for the fiscal year 2012 budget resolution, introduced by Representative PAUL RYAN, which counted $1 trillion in deficit reduction from ''phasing down overseas contingency operations''—not what I am saying, but what the Heritage Foundation points out.

If the savings from winding down wars can be counted as deficit reduction, clearly we owe it to our Nation's veterans to use a very small percentage of this fund to make their lives a little bit better at home.

To me, placing modest caps on OCO—overseas contingency operations—funding to pay for the most comprehensive veterans legislation in a decade is a no-brainer. This money was always intended to assure the well-being and success of those brave men and women who have served our great country.

Finally, I think we should be very clear: The cost of war does not end once the last shots are fired and the last battles are fought. When members of the military lose arms, legs, eyesight, come back with PTSD or TBI from fighting in wars which Congress authorized, we have a moral obligation to make sure those veterans receive all of the benefits they have earned and deserve. When American soldiers die in combat, we have a moral obligation to make sure the spouses and children they leave behind are taken care of as best as we possibly can.

This speaks to the funding of this legislation, and I hope we will have strong support from all of our colleagues.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee for

his remarks, and for the relentlessness, enthusiasm, and passion which he has pursued putting together this extraordinarily strong bill for our veterans. I look forward to supporting it, and I commend him for his excellent work.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am here because every week the Senate is in session, now for 59 weeks, I give my climate speech, hoping some day sparks will hit tinder.

I could give a whole separate speech about the evil done by the Supreme Court Citizens United decision, and I could give a separate speech about the gridlock which bedevils the Senate. But this week's climate speech will touch all three—Citizens United, gridlock, and climate change—to show how the three are connected.

We fail here in this Senate to address climate change because of the peculiar gridlock in Congress. And Congress is peculiarly gridlocked because of the evils of Citizens United. Our failure to address climate change is a symptom of things gone wrong in our democracy.

I have spoken before on the Senate floor about the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision, one of the worst and most disgraceful decisions ever made by the Supreme Court, destined to follow cases such as Lochner v. New York onto the ash heap of judicial infamy. But we are stuck with it now. Until the Supreme Court gets its bearings back, their Citizens United stands.

In a nutshell, the Citizens United decision says this: Corporations are people; money is speech; so there can be no limit to corporate money influencing American elections under constitutional principles of freedom of speech.

If that doesn't seem right, it is because it is not. To unleash that corporate power in our elections, the conservative Justices had to go through some pretty remarkable contortions: They had to reverse previous decisions by the Court which said the opposite; they had to make up facts which are demonstrably flat-out wrong; they had to create a make-believe world of independence and transparency in election spending; and they had to maneuver their own judicial procedures to prevent a factual record which would belie those facts they were making up. It was a dirty business, with a lot of signs of intention, and it has produced evil results.

Let's start with the contortions the conservative Justices had to go through to uncork all that corporate money. They had to first make the leap that corporations are people and money is speech to ensure corporate money is protected by the First Amendment. They went a more circuitous route, but that is where they ended up. And it is quite a leap when you think of how suspicious the Founding Fathers were of corporations. There is no mention of corporations in the Constitution. So much for these conservative Justices' fidelity to originalism—a constitutional theory the conservatives put a lot of credence in when it suits them.

To treat corporations as people and money as speech, the conservative Justices also had to overrule previous Supreme Court decisions which had said the exact opposite, which they did, upending a century of law. So much for fidelity to precedent.

The conservative bloc then had to deal with the inconvenience that First Amendment doctrine actually allows the government to regulate elections, to protect against either political corruption or even the appearance of corruption.

So how do you take away the people's ability to restrain corporate money in elections when protecting against corruption is a legitimate reason for restraints on corporate money? What you do—and what they did—is decide, by making a finding of fact, that corporations' money would not corrupt elections or politics; indeed, that no amount of corporate money could even appear to corrupt elections or politics. So much for fidelity to the judicial rule which appellate courts, State or Federal, are not supposed to engage in fact-finding.

This fact-finding about corruption by the conservative Justices caused another little inconvenience: The assertion that corporate money can't corrupt politics is laughably false. This meant the conservatives couldn't allow a factual record in the case. A factual record, with testimony and evidence about such a ludicrous proposition, would have blown it out of the water. So they let the little, narrow Citizens United case get all the way through the judicial process, including briefing and argument before them, and then they went back and changed the question into a big one.

This clever maneuver at the very end of the case guaranteed there would be no factual record developed on the new and larger question. And that freed their hand.

I should emphasize that this was a third transgression. The first transgression was for conservatives to ignore their own constitutional theory of originalism in getting to the ''corporations are people and money is speech'' result. The second transgression was violating the traditional rule that appellate courts were not supposed to engage in factfinding at all, let alone ludicrous factfinding. The third transgression was this maneuver with the question presented.

As a general rule, when cases come to a supreme court, State or Federal, the court defines the ''questions presented'' by the case. This may not seem like a big deal, just something in the ordinary course, but it is actually an important limit on judicial power under our constitutional separation of powers. It is what prevents a supreme court from roving willy-nilly into any question it wants any time. Courts have to wait until a case comes that presents a particular question, and then they identify what the question is. So it was odd indeed when the Chief Justice went back, after the case was briefed and argued, and did his own new ''question presented.'' But it did the job.

Now the court—with no record saying otherwise—could pretend that corporate money just plain can't corrupt American elections, can't do it, no way, no how—the conservative immaculate conception of corporate money.

Pretending that corporate money couldn't possibly corrupt or even appear to corrupt American elections allowed them to sweep away any interest of the people in keeping corporate corruption out of our politics and elections. People don't need to worry their little heads about corruption, they said. Corporate money in elections is immaculate and can't corrupt.

Bingo. That got them where they wanted. We, the people, could no longer limit corporate spending in our elections. As we have seen, the big money began to flood in.

Citizens United actually gets worse in its plain errors about how independent corporate money was going to be from candidates and how transparent it was going to be whose money was truly behind all of those negative ads. Independent? Transparent? Look at the last elections. How did that work out? Subsequent history shows the falsity of that nonsense.

Those contortionist justices completely ignored a big, important fact: what big money can do, big money can threaten to do or promise to do, and there is going to be nothing independent or transparent about those private threats and promises. The Citizens United decision opened this avenue to corruption while pretending corruption was impossible.

So on to the next step: How do the evils of this Citizens United decision lead to the evils of gridlock? Look around. Look at who is scared of whom and look at who is angry with whom around here.

Democrats and Republicans actually get along pretty well—at least Democrats and most Republicans. We are policy adversaries on many subjects, but Democrats and Republicans have been policy adversaries for decades. Democrat versus Republican is old news. It doesn't explain the new weirdness around here.

Look at what you see. The real fear and the real anger around here is between the mainstream Republicans and the tea party extremists. Look around. Ask around. Where do emotions run high? Where are the shouting matches? Where are the insults hurled? Where are Senators heckled by their colleagues? The worst of it is not between Democrat and Republican, it is between tea party and Republican.

Who is being told how they can and cannot vote and what they can and cannot say? Who is being bullied and punished when they don't follow the party line—the tea party line? Not

Democrats, Republicans. No one likes being bullied.

Is it the irrefutable logic of tea party argument that scares regular Republicans? Is it the clear grasp by the tea party of modern economic, cultural, and scientific realities that scares regular Republicans? Is it the broad way the tea party represents our great and diverse democracy that scares regular Republicans? Is it the keen political acumen of the tea party, say, shutting down the U.S. Government and darned near blowing the debt limit, that scares regular Republicans?

Those questions answer themselves, don't they? No. The thing that scares regular Republicans is the big money—the big corporate money, the billionaire money—behind the tea party.

The Koch brothers, for instance, may be a living cartoon of avarice, out to pollute even more and make even more money, but when the Koch brothers' big money comes in and bombs you in a small primary election, it is pretty scary. When the paid-for rightwing attack machine turns on you in your Republican primary, that can be pretty scary.

So the gridlock comes when the Republican party will not work with Democrats—not because we don't make sense and not because most Republicans don't want to make sense but because they are scared of tea party attacks funded by Citizens United money.

That brings us to climate change. As I have described in a recent speech, tens—perhaps even hundreds—of millions of dark-money dollars are being spent. Is all that money being spent having any effect on Republicans? Just look.

In this body we have Republican colleagues who have publicly acknowledged in the past carbon-driven climate change and have called for legislative action. In this body we have a former Republican Presidential nominee who campaigned for President on addressing climate change.

In this body we have Republicans who have spoken favorably about charging a fee on carbon, including the Republican original cosponsor of a bipartisan carbon pollution fee bill. We have a Republican colleague who cosponsored climate change legislation when he was in the House and another who voted for the Waxman-Markey cap-and-trade bill when he was in the House.

In this body we have Senators who represent historic villages now washing into the sea and needing relocation because of climate change and sea level rise, and Senators who represent great American coastal cities that are now overwashed by the sea at high tides because of climate change.

We have Republican Senators whose home State forests—by the hundreds of square miles—are being killed by the marauding pine beetle, and Republican Senators whose home States' glaciers are disappearing before their very eyes in their own lifetimes. We have Republican Senators whose home States are having to raise offshore bridges and highways before the rising seas.

We have Republican voters who actually get that climate change is real. It is the tea party that has the deniers. Sixty-one percent of nontea party Republicans say there is solid evidence the Earth is warming, but only 25 percent of tea partiers agree—a 36-point swing between Republicans and tea partiers.

Republicans outside of Congress, immune from the effects of Citizens United, have actually supported a carbon pollution fee so long as it is revenue neutral and doesn't add to big government. You could actually lower other taxes with it. But Republicans in Congress will now scarcely say a word about climate change—not since Citizens United; not since that disgraceful decision uncorked all that big, dark money and allowed it to cast its shadow of intimidation over our democracy.

So that is how Citizens United connects to climate change.

While our American democracy suffers and stalls, the evidence of climate change relentlessly mounts. The damage will be done in our atmosphere and oceans. The damage has already started.

I have to warn my colleagues that the denier machinery—the beast I described earlier this month—will ultimately be shown for the evil apparatus of lies that it is. When that happens, there will be more damage to go around. There will be damage to a party that allowed itself to be taken over and silenced by that corrupt apparatus, ignoring the plain facts in front of their faces.

There will be damage to a supreme court that went through such peculiar contortions to let that dark money loose, ignoring plain facts in front of their faces. We Americans, who hold our lamp high to the rest of the world as a beacon of democracy, will have some explaining to do about how we—to the dismay of the rest of the world—let our great democracy be stifled by greedy polluters, ignoring the plain facts the world faces.

The historian David McCullough spoke at the Library of Congress 2 weeks ago about John Adams and America's founding generation. He reminded us that when those men signed the Declaration of Independence, they were signing their own death warrants. When they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to this cause, it was not mere words. David McCullough explained: ''It was a courageous time.'' And look at us, our great democracy mired in polluters, lies, and money.

But I still believe this can be a courageous time. As Americans have in the past, we can shed the shackles of corrupting influence and rise to our duty. It just takes courage to make this a courageous time.

I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

IRAN

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I rise today to address the significant and persistent national security threat stemming from Iran's unchecked nuclear program. I urge my colleagues to support the amendment to S. 1982 from the senior Senator from North Carolina which includes provisions to strengthen our sanctions against Iran should they fail to comply with their obligations under the joint plan of action.

Last November the Obama administration, without sufficient consultation with Congress, committed to an interim nuclear agreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Under this agreement we are granting to Iran over $7 billion in sanctions relief in exchange for their commitments to decelerate their nuclear program—commitments which will be difficult, if not impossible, to verify or enforce.

In effect, we are delivering billions of dollars in repatriated oil sales proceeds, additional foreign trade, and currency—all in exchange for hollow promises of compliance with laws and U.N. Security Council resolutions they should already be following.

The stated U.S. policy, which American Presidents have repeated for decades, is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. However, this agreement maintains Iran's nuclear weapons capability, and it allows Iran to continue to enrich uranium.

Moreover, Iran will not be required to destroy any centrifuges and will be permitted to replace centrifuges that become inoperable. The pact does little to reverse Iran's nuclear ambitions and sets a precedent for further sanctions relief in exchange for cosmetic concessions.

Rather than easing effective sanctions, we should be tightening existing sanctions until a better long-term deal can be reached. The United States must take a strong stance to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. If they do not agree to roll back their nuclear program, then they should face stronger sanctions.

That is why I strongly support provisions in the amendment from Senator BURR that would incorporate key provisions of the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act into the pending veterans legislation.

Mr. President, 58 of my Senate colleagues have already signed on to this important freestanding legislation. They and I agree that the Government of Iran continues to expand its nuclear and missile programs in direct violation of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions. Iran has a

demonstrated record of defiance and will continue to work toward stockpiling weapons grade nuclear material, sponsoring terrorism, and disregarding basic human rights.

Given these facts, it only makes sense that we take our own national security and commitment to our allies' security seriously by passing expanded sanction authorities, should Iran fail to uphold its end of the interim agreement.

Equally important, this legislation would give Congress the opportunity to review and—if necessary—disapprove of any final agreement with Iran.

I am hopeful Iran will come to the table with real, verifiable concessions in a final agreement on their nuclear program. However, hope is a poor national security strategy.

The Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act would set the proper framework for ensuring Iran dismantles its illicit nuclear infrastructure, complies with all Security Council resolutions, cooperates with the International Atomic Energy Agency, respects human rights, and ceases to promote global terrorism.

Furthermore, the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act implements President Obama's own policy. In his recent State of the Union Address, he stated that he will ''be the first to call for more sanctions'' should Iran fail to uphold the interim agreement.

By passing this legislation, we are ensuring that the United States has the ability to further penalize Iran for its continued noncompliance.

Nevertheless, President Obama has threatened to veto this legislation, further indicating his willingness to blindly concede to Iranian rhetoric.

Now is not the time for this Nation to exhibit weakness. Now is our chance to demonstrate to Iran and to the world that we are serious about nuclear nonproliferation and compliance with international laws and obligations.

For these reasons, I strongly support the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act as presented in this amendment, and I urge my colleagues to act swiftly to pass this important measure.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the remaining time postcloture be yielded back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, all time is yielded back.

The question is on the adoption of the motion to proceed.

The motion was agreed to.

## COMPREHENSIVE VETERANS HEALTH AND BENEFITS AND MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY RESTORATION ACT OF 2014

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1982) to improve the provision of medical services and benefits for veterans, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 2747

Mr. REID. On behalf of Senator SANDERS, I have an amendment at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the Sanders amendment.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Nevada [Mr. REID], for himself and Mr. SANDERS, proposes an amendment numbered 2747.

(The amendment is printed in the RECORD of Tuesday, February 25, 2014 under ''Text of Amendments.'')

Mr. REID. I ask for the yeas and nays on that amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 2766

Mr. REID. I have a second-degree amendment at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Nevada [Mr. REID] proposes amendment numbered 2766 to amendment numbered 2747.

The amendment is as follows:

At the end, add the following:

This Act shall become effective 1 day after enactment.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I have a motion, cloture in nature, at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on S. 1982, the Comprehensive Veterans Health Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act.

Harry Reid, Bernard Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Patty Murray, Michael F. Bennet, Mark Begich, Debbie Stabenow, Charles E. Schumer, Edward J. Markey, Richard Blumenthal, Ron Wyden, Maria Cantwell, Heidi Heitkamp, Christopher Murphy, Christopher A. Coons, Mazie K. Hirono, Tammy Baldwin.

MOTION TO COMMIT WITH AMENDMENT NO. 2767

Mr. REID. I have a motion to commit S. 1982. It has instructions, and that is also at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Nevada [Mr. REID] moves to commit the bill to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs with instructions to report back forthwith with the following amendment No. 2767.

The amendment is as follows:

At the end, add the following:

This Act shall become effective 3 days after enactment.

Mr. REID. I ask for the yeas and nays on that motion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 2768

Mr. REID. I have an amendment to instructions at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Nevada [Mr. REID] proposes an amendment numbered 2768 to the instructions of amendment numbered 2767.

The amendment is as follows:

In the amendment, strike ''3 days'' and insert ''4 days''.

Mr. REID. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 2769

Mr. REID. I have a second-degree amendment at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Nevada [Mr. REID] proposes an amendment numbered 2769 to amendment numbered 2768.

The amendment is as follows:

In the amendment, strike ''4 days'' and insert ''5 days''.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I have a cloture motion at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on amendment No. 2747 to S. 1982, the Comprehensive Veterans Health Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act.

Harry Reid, Bernard Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Patty Murray, Michael F. Bennet, Mark Begich, Debbie Stabenow, Charles E. Schumer, Edward J. Markey, Richard Blumenthal, Ron Wyden, Maria Cantwell, Heidi Heitkamp, Christopher Murphy, Christopher A. Coons, Mazie K. Hirono, Tammy Baldwin.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum for both cloture motions required under rule XXII be waived.

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

## CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. I now move to proceed to Calendar No. 309.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion to proceed.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A motion to proceed to Calendar No. 309, S. 1086, a bill to reauthorize and improve the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990, and for other purposes.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—S. 1982

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that on Thursday, February 27, during the Senate's consideration of S. 1982, but no later than 2 p.m., Senator SESSIONS, or his designee, be recognized to raise a budget point of order against the bill; that if such a point of order is raised, it be in order for Senator MURRAY, or her designee, to move to waive; that if a motion to waive is made, the vote on the motion to waive occur at 2 p.m. tomorrow; that if the motion to waive is successful, the Senate proceed to the vote on the motion to invoke cloture on amendment No. 2747; that if cloture is invoked on the amendment, all postcloture time be yielded back, amendment No. 2766 be withdrawn, and the Senate proceed to the vote on amendment No. 2747; that upon disposition of the amendment, the Senate proceed to vote on the motion to invoke cloture on S. 1982, as amended, if amended; that if cloture is invoked on the bill, all postcloture time be yielded back and the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill, as amended, if amended; if the motion to waive is not successful, then the cloture motions be withdrawn; finally, the filing deadline for first-degree amendments to S. 1982 be at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday and the filing deadline for second-degree amendments to amendment No. 2747 and S. 1982 be 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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

## MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we proceed to a period of morning business with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

## TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM KING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize an innovative educator from my home State of Kentucky—Mr. William King—who, earlier this month, was awarded the prestigious Milken Education Award.

If you were to ask William King about his occupation, he may not respond that he is a ''teacher'' or ''educator.'' Instead, he is more inclined to give himself the label of ''educational entrepreneur.'' That's because in his 12 years in education, Mr. KING has been relentless in his search to find new and better ways to educate our Nation's schoolchildren.

In his current capacity as freshman principal at Bowling Green High School—his alma mater—William is charged with shepherding his students through the all-important transition from middle to high school. King has spearheaded initiatives such as TeachMeet Kentucky and TeachMeet Nashville—which are informal meetings where teachers gather to share ideas and best practices—and No Office Day, where school administrators spend an entire day with students in the classroom. It is his Jump Start program, however, that has earned him one of, if not the most, prestigious awards in education—the Milken Education Award.

William created Jump Start to help better prepare students to excel in their first year of high school. Now, I face a lot of challenges here in the Senate, but few are more trying than those faced by a teenager who is about to enter high school. Mr. King not only recognized just how daunting this transition can be for students, but he also had the ability and the selfless inclination to do something about it.

With his innovative program, King works with students and parents and also coordinates between eighth- and ninth-grade teachers to ensure that his kids are prepared for the academic challenges they are about to face.

The Milken Education Award is a prestigious one; it is not given out just for good intentions. Wining an ''Oscar of Teaching,'' as it's known by teachers across the country, requires results—and William King unquestionably delivers results. Since implementing Jump Start, ninth-grade retentions have dropped by 68 percent. For this, he was recognized with the Milken Education Award, as well as $25,000 to spend as he chooses, at a surprise assembly at Bowling Green High School.

Lowell Milken, chairman and co-founder of the Milken Family Foundation, once said, ''A sound education provides the opportunity to realize one's potential.'' William King has shown that he is wholeheartedly dedicated to this proposition, and that he is deserving of praise from this body. I ask that my Senate colleges join me in recognizing this exemplary Kentucky citizen.

The Park City Daily News recently published an article highlighting William's work and his award. I ask unanimous consent that the full article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Park City Daily News, Feb. 12, 2014]

EDUCATOR RECEIVES $25,000 AWARD

(By Chuck Mason)

A Bowling Green High School administrator who graduated as a BGHS Purple in 1996 got the surprise of his life Wednesday morning.

Freshman Principal William King received a Milken Educator Award and $25,000 he can spend any way he wants. His Jump Start program working with freshman has reduced by 68 percent the number of BGHS freshmen who do not pass.

''I had no clue,'' said King after the ceremony. ''I had a list of all these names (of BGHS teachers) in my head (who could be receiving the award). ''It could have been anyone on our staff.''

King also has been instrumental in holding TeachMeet seminars, which are informal meetings for teachers to share best practices of how they use technology in their classrooms, at Western Kentucky University, in Nashville and other locations in the United States.

The Milken Educator Award, called the ''Oscars of Teaching'' by Teacher Magazine, was presented as the cheers of 1,200 students bounced off walls of the high school's arena. Many of the students cheering King have been under his leadership since they first entered the school halls four years ago. King was told the assembly was to honor the academic accomplishments of BGHS students, and it started that way before Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday took the microphone to make remarks and then introduced Jane Foley, senior vice president of the Milken Family Foundation. Foley made the surprise announcement that King is Kentucky's 2014 Milken Educator Award winner, after telling the students first how much the award was worth and that one educator in the arena was to receive it.

''We welcome you to our family of excellence,'' said Foley, who received her own Milken Educator Award in 1994.

Three south-central Kentucky educators previously received a Milken Educator Award, which was created in 1987.

King was surprised during the morning assembly. Principal Gary Fields said it was a challenge to keep the announcement secret from King. The winner said he wasn't even sure he was supposed to be in the arena that morning for the academic assembly. Fields read a lengthy list of BGHS students who excelled in academics, at one point, turning to Holliday and remarking, ''commissioner, I'm only halfway through the list.''

King, who monitors teacher and student success, founded the Jump Start program, in which teachers and parents ensure incoming freshmen are ready for high school. King spent a dozen years as an educator, including as an instructional assistant, social studies teacher, curriculum coordinator, literacy coach and freshman principal. He's a 1996 BGHS graduate and an Eagle Scout.

King ''always comes into our social studies class and talks with us,'' said Savannah Hanson, a junior at BGHS. She said the Milken Family Foundation made a good choice in honoring King.

Since 1987, the foundation has awarded more than $64 million to nearly 2,600 kindergarten through 12th-grade educators across the United States in awards. Total funding for the program, which includes resources for the winning educators, is more than $136 million. Fifty-two Kentucky teachers have received the award since 1993.

''A sound education provides the opportunities to realize one's potential, which is why the future belongs to the educated,'' Lowell Milken, chairman and co-founder, said in grant program information. ''Effective education equips each new generation with the knowledge and skills to make sound and independent judgments, as well as proceed to the next stage in learning and in life.''

The Milken awards were conceived to attract, retain and motivate talented people in the teaching profession.

Foley said the Milken Educator Award is not one that teachers or administrators can apply for. ''We don't accept nominations. You don't find us, we find you,'' Foley said.

''Not an accolade for lifetime achievement or the proverbial gold watch at the exit door, the Milken Educator Awards targets early- to mid-career education professionals for their already impressive achievements and, more significantly, for the promise of what they will accomplish in the future,'' the website noted.

Accompanying Holliday and Foley was Madeline Abramson, wife of Kentucky Lt. Governor Jerry Abramson.

After the award was announced, the students did a rousing chant with a Bowling Green Purples theme, clapping their hands in staccato fashion, then stamping their feet.

''There's no way I can top that,'' said Holliday, taking the microphone once again. Looking at King, the commissioner added, ''What an honor for Bowling Green High School and Kentucky.''

Milken award winners have exceptional educational talent as evidenced by effective instructional practices and student-learning results in the classroom and school; have exemplary educational accomplishments beyond the classroom that provide models of excellence for the profession; are individuals whose contributions to education are largely unheralded yet worthy of the spotlight; are early- to mid-career educators who offer strong long-range potential for professional and policy leadership; and have an engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community, the website noted.

The last south-central Kentucky educator to receive a Milken Educator Award was Karen Branham in 2001. At the time, Branham was a teacher at Glasgow High School. She is now assistant superintendent for student learning for the Elizabethtown Independent School District.

The MFF is headquartered in Santa Monica, Calif.

## VOTE EXPLANATION

• Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent from the votes during yesterday's session on Tuesday, February 25, 2014. Had I been present, I would have supported the nominations of James Donato and Beth Freeman to fill judicial emergency vacancies on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, and James Moody to fill a judicial vacancy on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas. I also would have voted in favor of the motion to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to S. 1982, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014.•

## TRIBUTE TO KATHLEEN RICE

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I wish to pay special tribute to Kathleen B. Rice, a key member of my staff on the Select Committee on Intelligence. Kathleen will leave us shortly to join Boveri Murphy Rice, LLP, a boutique trial and litigation firm in South Bend, IN, which represents clients nationwide, ranging from Fortune 500 companies to smaller businesses and individuals. Kathleen has had a distinguished career in her 19.5 years of service to the Senate, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, and the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida. I am honored to have the opportunity to publicly thank her and note my appreciation for her outstanding service to the Select Committee on Intelligence during the past 7.5 years.

Since becoming the vice chairman of the committee in 2011, I have routinely relied upon her impressive legal acumen and excellent advice on matters large and small. Kathleen is well known on the Hill and by the private sector as one of the leading congressional staff experts on cybersecurity legislative issues. During the 111th Congress, she distinguished herself as an authority in the field with her work on S. 3538, the National Cyber Infrastructure Protection bill, on behalf of Senators Kit Bond and ORRIN HATCH. Based upon that experience, I selected Kathleen to serve as the lead counsel for all of my cybersecurity legislative efforts. Since then, she has worked tirelessly to develop and negotiate legislative proposals consistent with my strong desire to get an effective cybersecurity information sharing bill enacted into law. During the last Congress, Kathleen was a crucial participant in the negotiations that led the ranking members of eight Senate committees to co-sponsor S. 2151 and S. 3342, the Strengthening and Enhancing Cybersecurity by Using Research, Education, Information, and Technology Act of 2012, more commonly known as ''SECURE IT.'' During this Congress, Senator FEINSTEIN and I have been working very hard to develop a bipartisan cybersecurity information sharing bill that we believe will be well-received by the private sector and our colleagues in the Senate and the House of Representatives. We are finally quite close to being able to mark up our cybersecurity information sharing bill and Kathleen played an integral role every step of the way.

Kathleen is a recognized legislative wizard. When negotiations have stalled, it is usually Kathleen who comes up with the textual solution that provides the basis for a practical and effective bipartisan compromise—a valuable skill that unfortunately has been in short supply on the Hill in recent memory. In addition to cyber, she has been a key staff contributor to the process of passing and enacting the committee's annual intelligence authorization bills. Her expertise on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) was invaluable during the negotiation and enactment of the Protect America Act of 2007, the FISA Amendments Act of 2008, Public Laws 111–141 and 112–14, extension of certain expiring FISA sunsets, and the FISA Amendments Act Reauthorization Act of 2012. She routinely monitors the legislative calendar to ensure that pending legislation does not negatively impact intelligence community activities and operations. She also works closely with the Members and staff of other committees on all issues related to national security.

Kathleen's mastery of criminal and national security law, coupled with her inexhaustible work ethic and sound judgment, have made her an indispensable member of the committee staff and an invaluable resource to other congressional committees. Her quick wit and good humor make her a pleasure to work with—less so, if you unwisely choose to work against the interests of her ''client''. Kathleen is a team player who makes everyone around her perform better. She has been an astute mentor and guide to the senior staff responsible for assisting the vice chairman and members of the committee with formulating and implementing the committee's legislative and oversight priorities. She also has done a terrific job interfacing and collaborating with my personal staff to ensure that my office is accurately transmitting my views on current national security issues and events.

My colleagues and I trust Kathleen's judgment implicitly. Her example of dedicated public service and exceptional day-to-day performance on the job has earned our respect and admiration, and it inspired a generation of staff who had the privilege to work alongside her. There is no doubt that Kathleen has a bright future in the private sector; however, should the right opportunity present itself, I would strongly encourage my Senate colleagues to entice her back into public service. We will miss Kathleen dearly, but her legacy will remain a part of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence for years to come.

## TRIBUTE TO RICHARD S. GIRVEN

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I wish to pay special tribute to Richard S. Girven, a key member of my staff on the Select Committee on Intelligence. Rich has a total of 33 years of distinguished service to the Senate and the U.S. Army. He will leave us shortly to join the Washington office of the Rand Corporation where he will serve as an associate director for the Intelligence Policy Center within the National Security Research Division. I am honored to have the opportunity to publicly thank Rich and note my appreciation for his outstanding service to the Select Committee on Intelligence during the past 5½ years.

Since becoming the vice chairman of the committee in 2011, I have often relied upon Rich's impressive analytical skills and teamwork on a wide range of intelligence issues. As the committee's director of analysis, he has routinely mentored our senior staff members in the execution of their substantive and regional portfolios. Rich is well known on the Hill and throughout the intelligence community as a leading expert on issues related to Asia and the Middle East, with special emphasis on South and Southeast Asia. He has also

done superlative oversight work on issues related to analytic quality, linguists in the intelligence community, human intelligence, technology, education and training, and intelligence authorities and reform. He has conducted and participated in many committee studies involving analysis, analytic tradecraft, and analyst technologies.

Rich even has a ''superpower''—he reads faster than anyone I have ever met. I have been told by reliable sources that he can read at least 1,600 words per minute. This sometimes worked to his personal disadvantage, because he was frequently tasked with reading very large bills, some in excess of 1,000 pages, to assess whether any provisions could negatively impact intelligence authorities and operations. Rich's inexhaustible work ethic and sound judgment have made him an indispensable member of the committee staff and an invaluable resource to other congressional committees. His quick wit and good humor make him a pleasure to work with. He is the consummate team player who improves the performance of everyone around him.

My colleagues and I trust Rich's judgment implicitly. His example of dedicated public service and exceptional day-to-day performance on the job has earned our respect, admiration, and it inspired a generation of staff who had the privilege to work alongside him. There is no doubt that Rich has a bright future at the Rand Corporation; however, should the right opportunity present itself, I would hope that he will consider another stint in public service. We will miss Rich deeply, but his legacy will remain a part of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence for years to come.

## ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

### REMEMBERING MAJOR GENERAL FLOYD L. EDSALL

• Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, I wish to recognize an exceptional Nevadan and veteran, Army MG Floyd Edsall. On January 29, 2014, Nevada's humble servant was called home after 92 years of devoted community advocacy.

Born December 21, 1921, Mr. Edsall answered a call for military service at an early age through his involvement at UNR in their ROTC program. In 1944, he fought in World War II and was awarded the Silver Star and three Bronze Stars for his valiant bravery.

Upon his return from service with the Army's 63rd Infantry Division, Major General Edsall taught at Elko and Sparks High Schools as well as his alma mater UNR, where he coached football and track and field. Throughout his teaching and coaching career, he remained active in the Nevada Guard.

Major General Edsall is recognized as the Nevada National Guard's first full-time adjunct general. From 1967 to 1979, he commanded the Nevada Air and Army Guard all while maintaining a steadfast dedication to expanding the Guard's enlistments during the Vietnam war. His focus and recruitment abilities exhibited with the Guard were widely regarded, and Major General Edsall retained his role of leadership over the span of three Nevada gubernatorial administrations.

Recognizing a lifetime of commitment to service, the Nevada Army Guard dedicated a 1,697-acre training facility in his honor in 1997, and on May 10 of the same year, the Maj. Gen. Floyd Edsall Training Center opened to further the foundations of service his namesake bears.

Major General Edsall's passing is a great loss and his loyal commitment to the Silver State will never be forgotten. I ask my colleagues to join me in remembering the life of a devoted Nevadan and honoring his accomplishments.•

### REMEMBERING WALTER ''DOC'' HURLEY

• Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, earlier this month, a Hartford icon, Walter ''Doc'' Hurley, passed away at the age of 91. For some, Doc was a teacher, for others a coach, and for many more he was a dedicated philanthropist and friend. No matter what role he played at any given time, Doc Hurley worked his entire life to positively impact the Hartford community, and he will be sorely missed.

Doc led an eclectic and inspiring life. After attending Weaver High School in the North End of Hartford, he served in World War II as a marine. Upon coming home from the war, he finished college, worked as a teacher in Virginia, and spent a brief stint as a professional football player in the All-American Football Conference before finally returning to Hartford in 1959.

It was when he became vice principal at Weaver High School in Hartford that he began in earnest his lifelong goal of inspiring students to pursue a college degree. The most visible piece of Hurley's lasting legacy in the community is the Doc Hurley Scholarship Foundation and the renowned Doc Hurley Scholarship Basketball Classic. Over the years, Doc's foundation was responsible for awarding more than $570,000 in scholarships to 550 high school seniors. Many of these students who went on to successful careers owe their start to Doc Hurley and his scholarship foundation. Doc was a once-in-a-generation mentor, coach, teacher, and positive inspiration for Hartford's youth.

Last October, I held an antiviolence basketball tournament for nearly 1,000 kids with the University of Connecticut men's basketball team in the field house that bears Doc Hurley's name at Weaver High School. I was proud to have had the chance to work with him on that basketball tournament and, more importantly I will work to continue his legacy of encouraging Hartford's students to achieve their highest potential.

I join everyone in Hartford and around Connecticut in celebrating the life of Walter ''Doc'' Hurley and mourning the loss of this great man.•

### BROWN UNIVERSITY

• Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, this March, Providence, RI, celebrates the 250th anniversary of the founding of Brown University, known as one of the world's great universities.

In 1764, the American Colonies were on a headlong course toward Revolution. Many of those who would lead the charge to independence also had a hand in establishing this great American college. Among the founding Fellows and Trustees of what was then called the College in the English Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations were future signers of the Declaration of Independence, delegates to the Continental Congress and Congress of the Confederation, and members of the prominent Brown family of Providence. One of them, John Brown, was later in the 1772 attack on the royal customs vessel HMS Gaspee in Narragansett Bay, an act of violence against the crown that drew the first British blood in the conflict that led to the American Revolution, more than a year before the Boston Tea Party.

Since then, prominent Brunonians have included Secretaries of State John Hay and Charles Evans Hughes, Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen, and our own Governor Lincoln Chafee and Congressman DAVID CICILLINE, to name just a few. For two and a half centuries, bright and eager young Americans have arrived in Providence's beautiful College Hill neighborhood, greeted by historic architecture and the famous Van Wickle Gates. They brought their ambition and their talent and, inevitably, they left their mark and continue to leave their mark—on our State and our Nation.

Today, Brown University is a hub of research, innovation, and learning, and an integral partner in our capital city's culture and economy. As a magnet for talent and resources, Brown has helped fuel Providence's Knowledge District, and the university itself is the fifth-largest private employer in Rhode Island. Brown's Alpert Medical School has helped bolster our State's leadership in the health care field, with more than 1,700 physicians—43 percent of all physicians in the State—affiliated with the school. And Brown's heralded BrainGate program famously helped Cathy Hutchinson use a robotic arm to pick up a cup of coffee and take a sip 15 years after a stroke left her paralyzed and unable to speak. These and countless other contributions continue to put Rhode Island on the forefront of the innovation economy, and I am grateful for Brown's role in driving our Ocean State forward.

Brown is a wonderful place. As I travel the country and encounter Brown

graduates, and attend Brown functions and meet undergraduates, I have been struck at how much they love this college. For a great many of our best and brightest high school seniors, Brown is their decided first choice among all the great universities of the world.

In its original charter, it was said that Brown, ''to which the youth may freely resort for education in the vernacular and learned languages, and in the liberal arts and sciences, would be for the general advantage and honor of the government.'' Two hundred fifty years later, it is clear that Brown has lived up to that expectation.

I am proud to congratulate the president of Brown University, Christina Hull Paxson, Brown's trustees and faculty, and its students and alumni on 250 remarkable years.●

## MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Pate, one of his secretaries.

## EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The messages received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

## MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 12:09 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 1123. An act to promote consumer choice and wireless competition by permitting consumers to unlock mobile wireless devices, and for other purposes.

H.R. 1211. An act to amend section 552 of title 5, United States Code (commonly known as the Freedom of Information Act), to provide for greater public access to information, and for other purposes.

H.R. 1232. An act to amend titles 40, 41, and 44, United States Code, to eliminate duplication and waste in information technology acquisition and management.

H.R. 1423. An act to provide taxpayers with an annual report disclosing the cost and performance of Government programs and areas of duplication among them, and for other purposes.

H.R. 2530. An act to improve transparency and efficiency with respect to audits and communications between taxpayers and the Internal Revenue Service.

H.R. 2531. An act to prohibit the Internal Revenue Service from asking taxpayers questions regarding religious, political, or social beliefs.

## MEASURES REFERRED

The following bills were read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 1123. An act to promote consumer choice and wireless competition by permitting consumers to unlock mobile wireless devices, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

H.R. 1211. An act to amend section 552 of title 5, United States Code (commonly known as the Freedom of Information Act), to provide for greater public access to information, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

H.R. 1232. An act to amend titles 40, 41, and 44, United States Code, to eliminate duplication and waste in information technology acquisition and management; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

## EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC–4742. A communication from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Department of Defense report on the joint strategy for readiness and training in a Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR)-denied environment (OSS No. 2014–0234); to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC–4743. A communication from the Chief of Staff, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness), Department of Defense, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled ''2014 Report to Congress on Sustainable Ranges''; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC–4744. A communication from the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers Project; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4745. A communication from the Acting Director of Congressional Affairs, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Retrospective Analysis under Executive Order 13579'' (NRC–2011–0246) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 24, 2014; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4746. A communication from the Chief of the Permits and Regulations Branch, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Migratory Bird Hunting; Revision of Language for Approval of Nontoxic Shot for Use in Waterfowl Hunting'' (RIN1018–AY59) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 11, 2014; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4747. A communication from the Acting Chief of the Branch of Listing, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Threatened Status for Eriogonum codium (Umtanum Desert Buckwheat) and Physaria douglasii subsp. tuplashensis (White Bluffs Bladderpod) and Designation of Critical Habitat'' (RIN1018–AX72; 1018–AZ54) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 11, 2014; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4748. A communication from the Chief of the Endangered Species Listing Branch, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Designation of Critical Habitat for Chromolaena frustrata (Cape Sable Thoroughwort)'' (RIN1018–AZ51) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 11, 2014; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4749. A communication from the Acting Chief of the Branch of Listing, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Arctostaphylos franciscana (Franciscan Manzanita)'' (RIN1018–AY63) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 11, 2014; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4750. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Approval and Promulgation of Air Quality Implementation Plans; New Mexico; Transportation Conformity and General Conformity Requirements for Bernalillo County'' (FRL No. 9906–65–Region 6) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 18, 2014; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4751. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Approval and Promulgation of Air Quality Implementation Plans; Oklahoma; Regional Haze and Interstate Transport Affecting Visibility; State Implementation Plan Revisions; Revised BART Determination for American Electric Power/Public Service Company of Oklahoma Northeastern Power Station Units 3 and 4'' (FRL No. 9906–93–Region 6) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 20, 2014; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4752. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Approval and Promulgation of Air Quality Implementation Plans; Oklahoma; Regional Haze and Interstate Transport Affecting Visibility State Implementation Plan Revisions; Withdrawal of Federal Implementation Plan for American Electric Power/Public Service Company of Oklahoma'' (FRL No. 9906–81–OAR) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 20, 2014; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4753. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Approval and Promulgation of Air Quality Implementation Plans; Virginia; Prevention of Significant Deterioration and Nonattainment New Source Review; Fine Particulate Matter (PM 2.5)'' (FRL No. 9906–67–Region 3) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 20, 2014; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–4754. A communication from the Regulations Coordinator, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Ninety-Day Waiting Period Limitation and Technical Amendments to Certain Health Coverage Requirements Under the Affordable Care Act'' (RIN0938–AR77) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 24, 2014; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4755. A communication from the Chief of the Publications and Regulations Branch,

Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Ninety-Day Waiting Period Limitation and Technical Amendments to Certain Health Coverage Requirements Under the Affordable Care Act'' ((RIN1545–BL50) (TD 9656)) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 24, 2014; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4756. A communication from the Chief of the Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Applicable Federal Rates—March 2014'' (Rev. Rul. 2014–8) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 24, 2014; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4757. A communication from the Chief of the Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amount of the Life Insurance Reserves Taken into Account Under Section 807 of the IRC for Variable Contracts'' (Rev. Rul. 2014–7) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 24, 2014; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4758. A communication from the Chief of the Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Safe Harbor for Disregarded Entities Under Section 108'' (Rev. Proc. 2014–20) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 24, 2014; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4759. A communication from the Chief of the Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Update of Weighted Average Interest Rates, Yield Curves, and Segment Rates'' (Notice 2014–13) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 24, 2014; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4760. A communication from the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Employment and Training Administration, Department of Labor, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Federal-State Unemployment Insurance (UI) Program; Data Exchange Standardization as Required by Section 2104 of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012'' (RIN1205–AB64) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 21, 2014; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4761. A communication from the Director, Office of Regulations and Reports Clearance, Social Security Administration, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Extension of Expiration Dates for Several Body System Listings'' (RIN0960–AH61) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 20, 2014; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4762. A communication from the Director, Office of Regulations and Reports Clearance, Social Security Administration, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Change of Address for Requests: Testimony by Employees and the Production of Records and Information in Legal Proceedings, Claims Against the Government Under the Federal Tort Claims Act of 1948, and Claims under the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees' Claim Act of 1964'' (RIN0960–AH65) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 18, 2014; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–4763. A communication from the Secretary of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the export to the People's Republic of China of items not detrimental to the U.S. space launch industry; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

EC–4764. A communication from the Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs, Department of State, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to section 36(c) of the Arms Export Control Act (DDTC 14–003); to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

EC–4765. A communication from the Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs, Department of State, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to section 36(c) of the Arms Export Control Act (DDTC 13–171); to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

EC–4766. A communication from the Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs, Department of State, transmitting, the report of a rule entitled ''Visas: Waiver by Joint Action of Visa and Passport Requirements for Members of Armed Forces and Coast Guards of Foreign Countries'' (RIN1400–AD51) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 6, 2014; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

EC–4767. A communication from the Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs, Department of State, transmitting, the report of a rule entitled ''Visas: Documentation of Nonimmigrants Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, As Amended; TN Visas from NAFTA Countries'' (RIN1400–AD29) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 5, 2014; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

EC–4768. A communication from the Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs, Department of State, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the interdiction of aircraft engaged in illicit drug trafficking; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

EC–4769. A communication from the Vice President, Office of External Affairs, Overseas Private Investment Corporation, transmitting, the report of final rules revising and updating the Agency's Freedom of Information Act, Privacy Act, and Touhy regulations; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

EC–4770. A communication from the Director of Regulations and Policy Management Staff, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Current Good Manufacturing Practices, Quality Control Procedures, Quality Factors, Notification Requirements, and Records and Reports, for Infant Formula; Correction'' ((RIN0910–AF27) (Docket No. FDA–1995–N–0063)) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 26, 2014; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–4771. A communication from the Director of Regulations and Policy Management Staff, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Medical Devices; Reports of Corrections and Removals; Technical Amendment'' (Docket No. FDA–2014–N–0011) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 21, 2014; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–4772. A communication from the Director of Regulations and Policy Management Staff, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Administrative Detention; Corrections'' (Docket No. FDA–1997–N–0222) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 21, 2014; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–4773. A communication from the Director of Regulations and Policy Management Staff, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Medical Device Reporting: Electronic Submission Requirements'' ((RIN0910–AF86) (Docket No. FDA–2008–N–0393)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 21, 2014; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–4774. A communication from the Director of Regulations and Policy Management Staff, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Current Good Manufacturing Practices, Quality Control Procedures, Quality Factors, Notification Requirements, and Records and Reports, for Infant Formula; Final Rule'' ((RIN0910–AF27) (Docket No. FDA–1995–N–0036)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 18, 2014; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–4775. A communication from the Program Manager, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''World Trade Center Health Program: Amendments to List of WTC–Related Health Conditions; Cancer; Revision'' (RIN0920–AA50) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 18, 2014; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–4776. A communication from the Secretary of Education, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program'' (RIN1840–AD13) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 24, 2014; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–4777. A communication from the Associate General Counsel for General Law, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to a vacancy in the position of Under Secretary, Science and Technology Directorate, Department of Homeland Security, received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 21, 2014; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC–4778. A communication from the Director, Office of Personnel Management, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled ''Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) for Fiscal Year 2012''; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

## PETITIONS AND MEMORIALS

The following petitions and memorials were laid before the Senate and were referred or ordered to lie on the table as indicated:

POM–196. A resolution adopted by the House of Representatives of the Legislature of the State of Iowa requesting the United States Congress to immediately enact a new federal food, farm, and jobs bill; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 102

Whereas, the United States Congress regularly establishes agricultural and food policy in an omnibus farm bill in a bipartisan spirit of cooperation, exemplified by the federal Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110–246 which originally was to expire in 2012, but was extended by the 112th

Congress in the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012, Pub. L. No. 112–240; and

Whereas, a new food, farm, and jobs bill is critical to maintaining a strong agricultural economy and an abundant food supply that benefits all Americans, including by providing programs relating to farm commodity support, horticulture, livestock, conservation, nutrition assistance, trade, and international food aid, agricultural research, farm credit, rural development, bioenergy, forestry, and innovative strategies to revitalize this nation's rural economy by creating jobs in small towns and rural communities; and

Whereas, in Iowa, agricultural producers have faced a multitude of disasters, including drought, flood, and blizzard conditions which have been alleviated by disaster assistance under farm bill programs; and

Whereas, during 2013, the United States Senate and House of Representatives have been engaged in prolonged negotiations to enact a new food, farm, and jobs bill that is now in conference committee which is considering differences between the Senate version, titled the Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013 (S. 954), and the House version, titled the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management (FARRM) Act of 2013 (H.R. 2642); and

Whereas, without the passage of a new food, farm, and jobs bill the United States will be subject to previously enacted permanent law, including commodity price support statutes effective in 1949; and

Whereas, the prolonged delay in passing a new food, farm, and jobs bill has created uncertainty for agricultural producers and will negatively impact the nation's overseas trade; and

Whereas, without the immediate passage of a new food, farm, and jobs bill consumers will increasingly suffer economic consequences: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the House of Representatives*, That with the reconvening of the United States Congress after its holiday recess, the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate should enact a new food, farm, and jobs bill with all possible speed but no later than January 31, 2014; and be it further

*Resolved*, That a copy of this resolution shall be transmitted to the President of the United States Senate and the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives; and be it further

*Resolved*, That a copy of this resolution shall be transmitted to the Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the United States Senate, and the Honorable Frank Lucas, Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture of the United States House of Representatives; and be it further

*Resolved*, That a copy of this resolution shall be transmitted to each member of the Iowa congressional delegation; and be it further

*Resolved*, That a copy of this resolution shall be transmitted to the Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture.

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POM–197. A joint resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the State of Ohio urging the Congress of the United States to propose a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution and applying to the Congress, pursuant to Article V of the United States Constitution, to call a convention for proposing a balanced budget amendment; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 5

*Be it resolved by the General Assembly of the State of Ohio:*

The General Assembly of the State of Ohio urges the Congress of the United States to propose a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution and hereby applies to the Congress, under the provisions of Article V of the United States Constitution, for the calling of a convention of the states limited to proposing an amendment to the United States Constitution requiring that in the absence of a national emergency the total of all federal appropriations made by the Congress for any fiscal year may not exceed the total of all estimated federal revenues for that fiscal year, together with any related and appropriate Fiscal restraints; and

It is the intention of the General Assembly that matters shall not be considered at the convention that do not pertain to an amendment requiring that, in the absence of a national emergency, the total of all federal appropriations made by the Congress for any fiscal year may not exceed the total of all estimated federal revenues for that fiscal year, together with any related and appropriate fiscal restraints; and be it further

*Resolved*, The Secretary of State is hereby directed to transmit copies of this application to the President and Secretary of the Senate and to the Speaker and Clerk of the House of Representatives of the Congress, and copies to the members of the Senate and House of Representatives from the State of Ohio; also to transmit copies of this application to the presiding officers of each of the legislative houses of the several states, requesting their cooperation; and be it further

*Resolved*, This application is to be considered as covering the balanced budget amendment language of the presently outstanding balanced budget applications from other states, including previously adopted applications from Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. This application shall be aggregated with those other applications for the purpose of attaining the two-thirds of states necessary to require the calling of a convention for proposing a balanced budget amendment, but shall not be aggregated with any applications on any other subject; and be it further

*Resolved*, If the convention called by the Congress is not limited to considering a balanced budget amendment, then any delegates, representatives, or participants from the State of Ohio asked to participate in the convention are authorized to debate and vote only on a proposed amendment or amendments to the United States, Constitution requiring that in the absence of a national emergency the total of all federal appropriations made by the Congress for any fiscal year may not exceed the total of all estimated federal revenues for that fiscal year, together with any related and appropriate fiscal restraints; and be it further

*Resolved*, This application constitutes a continuing application in accordance with Article V of the United States Constitution until the legislatures of at least two-thirds of the several states have made applications on the same subject or the Congress has proposed an amendment to the United States Constitution equivalent to the amendment proposed in this resolution. This application supersedes all previous applications by the General Assembly of the State of Ohio on the same subject.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. WHITEHOUSE:

S. 2042. A bill to amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to reauthorize the National Estuary Program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mrs. FISCHER (for herself, Mr. INHOFE, and Mr. JOHANNS):

S. 2043. A bill to prohibit the Internal Revenue Service from asking taxpayers questions regarding religious, political, or social beliefs; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mrs. FISCHER (for herself, Mr. INHOFE, and Mr. JOHANNS):

S. 2044. A bill to improve transparency and efficiency with respect to audits and communications between taxpayers and the Internal Revenue Service; to the Committee on Finance.

By Ms. BALDWIN (for herself and Mr. MARKEY):

S. 2045. A bill to amend title 17, United States Code, to secure the rights of visual artists to copyright, to provide for resale royalties, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. BROWN:

S. 2046. A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide Medicare beneficiaries coordinated care and greater choice with regard to accessing hearing health services and benefits; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mrs. BOXER (for herself, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. HARKIN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. MARKEY, and Mr. BROWN):

S. 2047. A bill to prohibit the marketing of electronic cigarettes to children, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Ms. HIRONO (for herself, Mr. LEE, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. SCHUMER, and Mrs. MURRAY):

S. 2048. A bill to include New Zealand in the list of foreign states whose nationals are eligible for admission into the United States as E–1 and E–2 nonimmigrants if United States nationals are treated similarly by the Government of New Zealand; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mrs. MCCASKILL (for herself and Mr. ROCKEFELLER):

S. 2049. A bill to curb unfair and deceptive practices during assertion of patents, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

## SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

The following concurrent resolutions and Senate resolutions were read, and referred (or acted upon), as indicated:

By Mr. KAINE (for himself, Mr. PORTMAN, and Ms. BALDWIN):

S. Res. 362. A resolution supporting the goals and ideals of ''Career and Technical Education Month''; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mrs. GILLIBRAND (for herself, Mrs. HAGAN, Mr. LEVIN, Mr. CASEY, Mr. ISAKSON, Mr. COCHRAN, Mr. BEGICH, Ms. MURKOWSKI, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. CARDIN, Ms. LANDRIEU, Mr. WYDEN, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. PRYOR, Mr. SCHUMER, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. MENENDEZ, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. KAINE, Ms. CANTWELL, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. WARNER, Mr. NELSON, Mr. COBURN, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. MERKLEY, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. COONS, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, Mr. PORTMAN, Mr. CARPER, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. SANDERS, Mr.

KIRK, Mr. WICKER, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. SCOTT, Ms. WARREN, Mrs. MCCASKILL, Mr. LEAHY, and Mr. UDALL of Colorado):

S. Res. 363. A resolution celebrating Black History Month; considered and agreed to.

## ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 315

At the request of Ms. KLOBUCHAR, the names of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) and the Senator from Montana (Mr. TESTER) were added as cosponsors of S. 315, a bill to reauthorize and extend the Paul D. Wellstone Muscular Dystrophy Community Assistance, Research, and Education Amendments of 2008.

S. 345

At the request of Mrs. SHAHEEN, the name of the Senator from Maine (Ms. COLLINS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 345, a bill to reform the Federal sugar program, and for other purposes.

S. 357

At the request of Mr. CARDIN, the name of the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) was added as a cosponsor of S. 357, a bill to encourage, enhance, and integrate Blue Alert plans throughout the United States in order to disseminate information when a law enforcement officer is seriously injured or killed in the line of duty.

S. 411

At the request of Mr. ROCKEFELLER, the name of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 411, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend and modify the railroad track maintenance credit.

S. 623

At the request of Mr. CARDIN, the name of the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 623, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to ensure the continued access of Medicare beneficiaries to diagnostic imaging services.

S. 810

At the request of Mr. DONNELLY, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 810, a bill to require a pilot program on an online computerized assessment to enhance detection of behaviors indicating a risk of suicide and other mental health conditions in members of the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

S. 862

At the request of Ms. AYOTTE, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 862, a bill to amend section 5000A of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide an additional religious exemption from the individual health coverage mandate.

S. 919

At the request of Ms. CANTWELL, the name of the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 919, a bill to amend the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act to provide further self-governance by Indian tribes, and for other purposes.

S. 1280

At the request of Ms. STABENOW, the name of the Senator from Washington (Ms. CANTWELL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1280, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide for the deductibility of charitable contributions to agricultural research organizations, and for other purposes.

S. 1323

At the request of Mrs. FEINSTEIN, the name of the Senator from Alaska (Mr. BEGICH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1323, a bill to address the continued threat posed by dangerous synthetic drugs by amending the Controlled Substances Act relating to controlled substance analogues.

S. 1332

At the request of Ms. COLLINS, the name of the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. FRANKEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1332, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to ensure more timely access to home health services for Medicare beneficiaries under the Medicare program.

S. 1406

At the request of Ms. AYOTTE, the name of the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1406, a bill to amend the Horse Protection Act to designate additional unlawful acts under the Act, strengthen penalties for violations of the Act, improve Department of Agriculture enforcement of the Act, and for other purposes.

S. 1410

At the request of Mr. DURBIN, the name of the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. UDALL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1410, a bill to focus limited Federal resources on the most serious offenders.

S. 1431

At the request of Mr. WYDEN, the name of the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1431, a bill to permanently extend the Internet Tax Freedom Act.

S. 1495

At the request of Mr. CASEY, the names of the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) and the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY) were added as cosponsors of S. 1495, a bill to direct the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration to issue an order with respect to secondary cockpit barriers, and for other purposes.

S. 1587

At the request of Mr. MARKEY, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1587, a bill to posthumously award the Congressional Gold Medal to each of Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods in recognition of their contributions to the Nation.

S. 1654

At the request of Mr. REED, the name of the Senator from Vermont (Mr. LEAHY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1654, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to deny tax deductions for corporate regulatory violations.

S. 1756

At the request of Mr. BLUNT, the name of the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1756, a bill to amend section 403 of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act to improve and clarify certain disclosure requirements for restaurants, similar retail food establishments, and vending machines.

S. 1862

At the request of Mr. BLUNT, the name of the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1862, a bill to grant the Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the Monuments Men, in recognition of their heroic role in the preservation, protection, and restitution of monuments, works of art, and artifacts of cultural importance during and following World War II.

S. 1956

At the request of Mr. SCHATZ, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1956, a bill to direct the Secretary of Defense to review the discharge characterization of former members of the Armed Forces who were discharged by reason of the sexual orientation of the member, and for other purposes.

S. 1982

At the request of Mr. KAINE, his name was added as a cosponsor of S. 1982, a bill to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes.

At the request of Mr. SANDERS, the name of the Senator from Wisconsin (Ms. BALDWIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1982, supra.

S. 2000

At the request of Mr. MCCAIN, his name was added as a cosponsor of S. 2000, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to repeal the Medicare sustainable growth rate and improve Medicare payments for physicians and other professionals, and for other purposes.

S. 2012

At the request of Mr. WHITEHOUSE, the name of the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2012, a bill to amend the Controlled Substances Act to more effectively regulate anabolic steroids.

S. 2024

At the request of Mr. CRUZ, the names of the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN) were added as cosponsors of S. 2024, a bill to amend chapter 1 of title 1, United States Code, with regard to the definition of ''marriage'' and ''spouse'' for Federal purposes and to ensure respect for State regulation of marriage.

S. 2036

At the request of Mr. HARKIN, the names of the Senator from Hawaii (Ms.

HIRONO) and the Senator from Wisconsin (Ms. BALDWIN) were added as cosponsors of S. 2036, a bill to protect all school children against harmful and life-threatening seclusion and restraint practices.

S. CON. RES. 32

At the request of Mr. DURBIN, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY) was added as a cosponsor of S. Con. Res. 32, a concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress regarding the need for investigation and prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, whether committed by officials of the Government of Syria, or members of other groups involved in civil war in Syria, and calling on the President to direct the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations to use the voice and vote of the United States to immediately promote the establishment of a Syrian war crimes tribunal, and for other purposes.

S. RES. 203

At the request of Mrs. FEINSTEIN, the name of the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. SCHATZ) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 203, a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate regarding efforts by the United States to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a negotiated two-state solution.

AMENDMENT NO. 2752

At the request of Mr. JOHANNS, his name was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 2752 intended to be proposed to S. 1982, a bill to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes.

## STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Ms. HIRONO (for herself, Mr. LEE, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. SCHUMER, and Mrs. MURRAY):

S. 2048. A bill to include New Zealand in the list of foreign states whose nationals are eligible for admission into the United States as E–1 and E–2 nonimmigrants if United States nationals are treated similarly by the Government of New Zealand; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, today, I introduced bipartisan legislation that would promote trade and investment in America from a critical partner of ours in the Asia-Pacific region, New Zealand. I want to thank Senators LEE, MCCAIN, RUBIO, SCHUMER and MURRAY for cosponsoring this bill and for their support for this commonsense proposal.

The Encouraging Trade and Investment from New Zealand Act would extend eligibility for E–1 and E–2 visas to New Zealand citizens. E–1 visas are available to certain foreign nationals coming to the United States to engage in substantial trade, including trade in services or technology principally between the United States and their home country. E–2 visas are for certain foreign investors coming here to develop and direct the operations of an enterprise in which they invested a substantial amount of capital.

These non-immigrant visas are distinct from EB–5 investor immigrant visas, H1–B work visas and B–1 business visitor visas. Because of the unique structure of E–1 and E–2 visas, they are scrutinized closely by the State Department so that they directly support economic activity and jobs in the United States.

Allowing New Zealanders to apply for these visas would directly promote job creation. In 2010, New Zealand-owned U.S. firms in the United States supported 10,900 American jobs. By the end of 2011, the total value of direct investment from New Zealand to the United States reached $6 billion. While these positive trends continue, the New Zealand government and New Zealand businesses have indicated that the lack of E–1 and E–2 visas is a dominant factor impeding further investment in our country.

The Encouraging Trade and Investment from New Zealand Act would fix that. Because of the changes in our treaty practices, the E–1 and E–2 visas can only be extended to New Zealand through legislation. Historically, we extended trade and investment visas to any country possessing a treaty of friendship, commerce, and navigation with the United States or through other agreements.

Today more than 50 countries have access to E–1, trade, visas, and more than 80 countries have access to E–2, investors, visas. In recent years, the U.S. government has generally stopped pursuing treaties of friendship, commerce, and navigation.

Indeed, in 2012, Congress enacted legislation extending E–1 and E–2 visas to Israel. It is now the right time to do the same for New Zealand.

Attracting trade and investment capital from New Zealand would bolster the reach of the United States' economy in the fast growing Asia-Pacific region. President Obama has made engagement with the Asia-Pacific region a top economic and security priority, the so called ''pivot to Asia,'' and New Zealand is a valued strategic partner.

Extending trade and investment visas would bolster the bilateral relationship, increase foreign investment, and strengthen America's ties to the Asia-Pacific region. Every state will gain from greater trade and investment from New Zealand. In 2012 over 350,000 foreign traders and investors holding E–1 or E–2 visas came to our country and managed a business in all 50 states.

Substantial benefits will accrue to Hawaii—the United States' gateway to Asia and the Pacific. Hawaii has recently seen a substantial increase in tourism from New Zealand, fostered by increased direct flights between New Zealand and Hawaii. In fact, Hawaiian Airlines is the only U.S. airline offering direct service to New Zealand.

New Zealand recently announced that it would be opening a consulate in Honolulu, Hawaii. This consulate will help further bilateral ties and benefit from its proximity to the heart Hawaii's financial district and headquarters of U.S. Pacific Command.

U.S. citizens are already eligible for a similar visa in New Zealand. I encourage my colleagues to join me in supporting this important initiative to allow them to do the same here to create jobs in our country.

## SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

### SENATE RESOLUTION 362—SUPPORTING THE GOALS AND IDEALS OF ''CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION MONTH''

Mr. KAINE (for himself, Mr. PORTMAN, and Ms. BALDWIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. RES. 362

Whereas a competitive global economy requires workers to be trained in skilled professions;

Whereas in a National Association of Manufacturers report, 80 percent of respondents indicate a moderate to severe shortage of qualified skilled production employees, including frontline workers, such as machinists, operators, craft workers, distributors, and technicians;

Whereas career and technical education (referred to in this preamble as ''CTE'') has proven to be an effective solution to ensure that competitive, skilled workers are ready, willing, and capable of holding jobs in high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand career fields, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics disciplines, nursing, allied health, construction, information technology, energy sustainability, and many other fields that are vital in keeping the United States competitive in the global economy;

Whereas approximately 14,000,000 students are enrolled in CTE programs, which exist in each State and in nearly 1,300 public high schools and 1,700 2-year colleges across the United States;

Whereas 10 of the 20 fastest growing occupations in the United States require an associate's degree, or a degree with fewer requirements;

Whereas 13 of the 20 occupations with the largest number of new jobs projected require on-the-job training and an associate's degree or certificate, and nearly all such occupations require real-world skills that individuals can master through CTE;

Whereas CTE matches employability skills with workforce demand and provides relevant academic and technical coursework, leading to industry-recognized credentials for secondary and postsecondary education and adult learners;

Whereas CTE students are significantly more likely than non-CTE students to report developing problem-solving, project-completion, research, mathematics, college application, work-related, communication, time management, and critical thinking skills during high school; and

Whereas students at schools with highly-integrated, rigorous academic and CTE programs have significantly higher achievement in reading, mathematics, and science than students at schools with less integrated programs: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved,* That the Senate—

(1) designates the month of February as ''Career and Technical Education Month'' to celebrate career and technical education across the United States;

(2) supports the goals and ideals of Career and Technical Education Month;

(3) recognizes the importance of career and technical education in preparing a well-educated and skilled workforce in the United States; and

(4) encourages educators, counselors, and administrators to promote career and technical education as an option for students.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, today I am submitting a resolution with Senator PORTMAN designating February as Career and Technical Education month.

The key to America's continued success lies in improving our Nation's educational system. In a National Association of Manufacturers report, 80 percent of respondents indicate a moderate to severe shortage of qualified skilled production employees, including frontline workers, like machinists, operators, craft workers, distributors, and technicians. If we are to win the race for talent, we need a long-term plan that produces the best workforce in the world.

Career and technical education is a proven solution for creating jobs, retraining workers with the skills they need to fill open positions in the job market, and ensuring students of all ages and all walks of life are career and college ready. Career and technical education will also help close the skills gap to meet the needs of high-growth, skill intensive industries. Approximately 30 percent of jobs by 2018 will require some college or a two-year associate degree, a need which can be met by improved access to career and technical education programs.

Senator PORTMAN and I have also created the Senate Career and Technical Education Caucus, a bipartisan effort committed to strengthening access and improving career and technical education. Through these efforts, we will support students and grow our nation's workforce by ensuring our youth have access to high-quality, rigorous career and technical education that will prepare them for college and for their future careers.

## SENATE RESOLUTION 363—CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mrs. GILLIBRAND (for herself, Mrs. HAGAN, Mr. LEVIN, Mr. CASEY, Mr. ISAKSON, Mr. COCHRAN, Mr. BEGICH, Ms. MURKOWSKI, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. CARDIN, Ms. LANDRIEU, Mr. WYDEN, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. PRYOR, Mr. SCHUMER, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. MENENDEZ, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. KAINE, Ms. CANTWELL, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. WARNER, Mr. NELSON, Mr. COBURN, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. MERKLEY, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. COONS, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, Mr. PORTMAN, Mr. CARPER, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. KIRK, Mr. WICKER, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. SCOTT, Ms. WARREN, Mrs. MCCASKILL, Mr. LEAHY, and Mr. UDALL of Colorado) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 363

Whereas in 1776, people imagined the United States as a new country dedicated to the proposition stated in the Declaration of Independence that ''all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness . . .'';

Whereas the first Africans were brought involuntarily to the shores of America as early as the 17th century;

Whereas African Americans suffered enslavement and subsequently faced the injustices of lynch mobs, segregation, and denial of the basic and fundamental rights of citizenship;

Whereas inequalities and injustices in our society still exist today;

Whereas in the face of injustices, people of the United States of good will and of all races have distinguished themselves with a commitment to the noble ideals on which the United States was founded and have courageously fought for the rights and freedom of African Americans;

Whereas African Americans, such as James Beckwourth, Bill Pickett, Lieutenant Colonel Allen Allensworth, and Clara Brown, along with many others, worked against racism to achieve success and have made significant contributions to the economic, educational, political, artistic, literary, scientific, and technological advancements of the United States, including the westward expansion;

Whereas the contributions of African Americans from all walks of life throughout the history of the United States reflect the greatness of the United States;

Whereas Muhammad Ali, Constance Baker Motley, James Baldwin, James Beckwourth, Clara Brown, Ralph Bunche, Shirley Chisholm, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, Alex Haley, Dorothy Height, Lena Horne, Charles Hamilton Houston, Mahalia Jackson, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Tuskegee Airmen, Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, Bill Pickett, Jackie Robinson, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Homer Plessy, the Greensboro Four, Simeon Booker, and Booker T. Washington each lived a life of incandescent greatness;

Whereas many African Americans lived, toiled, and died in obscurity, never achieving the recognition they deserved, and yet paved the way for future generations to succeed;

Whereas pioneers, such as Maya Angelou, Arthur Ashe, Jr., Carol Moseley Braun, Ronald Brown, Ursula Burns, Kenneth Chenault, David Dinkins, Alexis Herman, Mae Jemison, Earvin ''Magic'' Johnson, Sheila Johnson, James Earl Jones, David Paterson, Marian Wright Edelman, Alice Walker, Oprah Winfrey, General Colin Powell, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, and Clarence Thomas have all benefitted from their forefathers and have served as great role models and leaders for future generations;

Whereas on November 4, 2008, the people of the United States elected an African-American man, Barack Obama, as President of the United States;

Whereas African Americans continue to serve the United States at the highest levels of government and military;

Whereas on February 22, 2012, President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama, along with former First Lady Laura Bush, celebrated the groundbreaking of the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall, in Washington, DC;

Whereas the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass inspired the creation of Negro History Week, the precursor to Black History Month;

Whereas Negro History Week represented the culmination of the efforts of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the ''Father of Black History'', to enhance knowledge of Black history through the Journal of Negro History, published by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, which was founded by Dr. Woodson and Jesse E. Moorland;

Whereas Black History Month, celebrated during the month of February, dates back to 1926 when Dr. Woodson set aside a special period in February to recognize the heritage and achievement of Black people of the United States;

Whereas Dr. Woodson stated: ''We have a wonderful history behind us. . . . If you are unable to demonstrate to the world that you have this record, the world will say to you, 'You are not worthy to enjoy the blessings of democracy or anything else.' '';

Whereas since the founding of the United States, the country imperfectly progressed towards noble goals; and

Whereas the history of the United States is the story of people regularly affirming high ideals, striving to reach such ideals but often failing, and then struggling to come to terms with the disappointment of such failure, before committing to trying again: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved,* That the Senate—

(1) acknowledges that all people of the United States are the recipients of the wealth of history provided by Black culture;

(2) recognizes the importance of Black History Month as an opportunity to reflect on the complex history of the United States, while remaining hopeful and confident about the path ahead;

(3) acknowledges the significance of Black History Month as an important opportunity to recognize the tremendous contributions of African Americans to the history of the United States;

(4) encourages the celebration of Black History Month to provide a continuing opportunity for all people in the United States to learn from the past and understand the experiences that have shaped the United States; and

(5) agrees that, while the United States began as a divided nation, the United States must—

(A) honor the contribution of all pioneers in the United States who have helped to ensure the legacy of the great United States; and

(B) move forward with purpose, united tirelessly as ''one Nation . . . indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.''.

## AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 2754. Mr. KAINE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2755. Mr. BOOZMAN (for himself and Mr. BEGICH) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2756. Mr. HELLER submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2757. Mr. HELLER (for himself, Ms. HEITKAMP, and Mr. MANCHIN) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him

to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2758. Mr. COBURN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, and Mr. BURR) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2759. Mr. COBURN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, and Mr. BURR) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2760. Mr. COBURN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, and Mr. BURR) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2761. Mr. COBURN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2762. Mr. COBURN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. BURR, Mr. LEE, and Mr. FLAKE) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2763. Ms. COLLINS submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2764. Ms. BALDWIN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2765. Ms. STABENOW submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2766. Mr. REID proposed an amendment to amendment SA 2747 proposed by Mr. SANDERS to the bill S. 1982, supra.

SA 2767. Mr. REID proposed an amendment to the bill S. 1982, supra.

SA 2768. Mr. REID proposed an amendment to amendment SA 2767 proposed by Mr. REID to the bill S. 1982, supra.

SA 2769. Mr. REID proposed an amendment to amendment SA 2768 proposed by Mr. REID to the amendment SA 2767 proposed by Mr. REID to the bill S. 1982, supra.

SA 2770. Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2771. Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2772. Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2773. Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2774. Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2775. Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself, Mr. UDALL of Colorado, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, and Ms. BALDWIN) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2776. Mr. UDALL, of New Mexico (for himself and Mr. HELLER) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2777. Mr. UDALL, of New Mexico submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2778. Mr. BOOKER submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2779. Ms. COLLINS submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

## TEXT OF AMENDMENTS

**SA 2754.** Mr. KAINE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 33, after line 18, add the following:

**SEC. 207. COURSES UNDER EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE AUTHORITIES ADMINISTERED BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3679 is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

''(c) A course offered by an educational institution in a State that is a required element of the curriculum to be satisfied to obtain employment in an occupation or profession requiring the approval or licensure of a board or agency of that State may be treated as approved for purposes of this chapter by an individual seeking to obtain employment in that occupation or profession only if—

''(1) the successful completion of the curriculum fully qualifies a student to—

''(A) take any examination required for entry into the occupation or profession, including satisfying any State or professionally mandated programmatic and specialized accreditation requirements; and

''(B) be certified or licensed or meet any other academically related pre-conditions that are required for entry into the occupation or profession; and

''(2) in the case of State licensing or professionally mandated requirements for entry into the occupation or profession that require specialized accreditation, the curriculum meets the requirement for specialized accreditation through its accreditation or pre-accreditation by an accrediting agency or association recognized by the Secretary of Education or designated by that State as a reliable authority as to the quality or training offered by the institution in that program.''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on August 1, 2014, and shall apply with respect to courses pursued on or after that date.

**SEC. 208. REVIVAL OF PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION AND LICENSURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall reestablish the Professional Certification and Licensure Advisory Committee of the Department of Veterans Affairs provided for under section 3689(e) of title 38, United States Code. The Committee shall be reestablished in accordance with the provisions of such section 3689(e), as amended by subsection (b), and shall carry out its duties in conformance with, and subject to the requirements of such section, as so amended.

(b) MODIFICATION OF AUTHORITIES AND REQUIREMENTS.—Section 3689(e) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (2)—

(A) by inserting ''(A)'' after ''(2)''; and

(B) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

''(B) In addition to the duties under subparagraph (A), the Committee shall—

''(i) develop, in coordination with other appropriate agencies, guidance to be used by the Department or other entities to perform periodic audits of licensure and certification programs to ensure the highest quality education is available to veterans and members of the Armed Forces; and

''(ii) develop, in coordination with the Department of Defense, appropriate certification agencies, and other appropriate nonprofit organizations, a plan to improve outreach to veterans and members of the Armed Forces on the importance of licensing and certification, as well as educational benefits available to them.'';

(2) in paragraph (3)(B), by striking ''and the Secretary of Defense'' and inserting ''the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Education'';

(3) in paragraph (4), by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting the following new subparagraph:

''(B) The Committee shall meet with such frequency as the Committee determines appropriate.''; and

(4) in paragraph (5), by striking ''December 31, 2006'' and inserting ''December 31, 2019''.

(c) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the reestablishment of the Professional Certification and Licensure Advisory Committee of the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to this section, the Committee shall submit to Congress a report setting forth an assessment of the feasibility and advisability of permitting members of the Armed Forces to use educational assistance to which they are entitled under chapters 30 and 33 of title 38, United States Code, to obtain or pursue civilian employment certifications or licenses without the use of such assistance for that purpose being charged against the entitlement of such members to such educational assistance.

**SA 2755.** Mr. BOOZMAN (for himself and Mr. BEGICH) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

Beginning on page 233, strike line 20 and all that follows through page 236, line 25, and insert the following:

**SEC. 504. ADVANCE APPROPRIATIONS FOR CERTAIN ACCOUNTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 117 is amended—

(1) by striking ''medical care accounts of the Department'' each place it appears and inserting ''covered accounts of the Department'';

(2) in subsection (c)—

(A) by striking ''medical care accounts of the Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs account'' and inserting ''accounts of the Department of Veterans Affairs account'';

(B) in paragraph (1), by inserting ''Veterans Health Administration,'' after ''(1)'';

(C) in paragraph (2), by inserting ''Veterans Health Administration,'' after ''(2)'';

(D) in paragraph (3), by inserting ''Veterans Health Administration,'' after ''(3)'';

(E) by redesignating paragraphs (1) through (3) as paragraphs (7) through (9), respectively;

(F) by inserting before paragraph (7), as redesignated by subparagraph (E), the following new paragraphs:

''(1) Veterans Benefits Administration, Compensation and Pensions.

''(2) Veterans Benefits Administration, Readjustment Benefits.

''(3) Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Insurance and Indemnities.

''(4) Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Housing Benefit Program Fund.

''(5) Veterans Benefits Administration, Vocational Rehabilitation Loans Program Account.

''(6) Veterans Benefits Administration, Native American Veteran Housing Loan Program Account.'';and

(G) by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

''(10) Veterans Health Administration, Medical and Prosthetic Research.

''(11) National Cemetery Administration.

''(12) Departmental Administration, General Administration.

''(13) Departmental Administration, General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration.

''(14) Departmental Administration, Information Technology Systems.

''(15) Departmental Administration, Office of Inspector General.

''(16) Departmental Administration, Construction, Major Projects.

''(17) Departmental Administration, Construction, Minor Projects.

''(18) Departmental Administration, Grants for Construction of State Extended Care Facilities.

''(19) Departmental Administration, Grants for Construction of Veterans Cemeteries.'';

(H) in the subsection heading, by striking ''MEDICAL CARE ACCOUNTS'' and inserting ''COVERED ACCOUNTS''; and

(3) in the section heading, by striking ''**CERTAIN MEDICAL CARE ACCOUNTS**'' and inserting ''**CERTAIN ACCOUNTS**''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to fiscal year 2016 and each subsequent fiscal year.

(c) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 1105 of title 31, United States Code, is amended by striking the first paragraph (37) and inserting the following:

''(37) information on estimates of appropriations for the fiscal year following the fiscal year for which the budget is submitted for the following accounts of the Department of Veterans Affairs:

''(A) Veterans Benefits Administration, Compensation and Pensions.

''(B) Veterans Benefits Administration, Readjustment Benefits.

''(C) Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Insurance and Indemnities.

''(D) Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Housing Benefit Program Fund.

''(E) Veterans Benefits Administration, Vocational Rehabilitation Loans Program Account.

''(F) Veterans Benefits Administration, Native American Veteran Housing Loan Program Account.

''(G) Veterans Health Administration, Medical Services.

''(H) Veterans Health Administration, Medical Support and Compliance.

''(I) Veterans Health Administration, Medical Facilities.

''(J) Veterans Health Administration, Medical and Prosthetic Research.

''(K) National Cemetery Administration.

''(L) Departmental Administration, General Administration.

''(M) Departmental Administration, General Operating Expenses, Veterans Benefits Administration.

''(N) Departmental Administration, Information Technology Systems.

''(O) Departmental Administration, Office of the Inspector General.

''(P) Departmental Administration, Construction, Major Projects.

''(Q) Departmental Administration, Construction, Minor Projects.

''(R) Departmental Administration, Grants for Construction of State Extended Care Facilities.

''(S) Departmental Administration, Grants for Construction of Veterans Cemeteries.''.

(d) TECHNICAL CORRECTION.—Such section is further amended by redesignating the second paragraph (37), as added by section 11(a)(2) of the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (Public Law 111–352; 124 Stat. 3881), as paragraph (39).

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**SA 2756.** Mr. HELLER submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 291, after line 21, add the following:

**Subtitle E—Other Matters**

**SEC. 641. IMPROVEMENTS TO AUTHORITY FOR PERFORMANCE OF MEDICAL DISABILITIES EXAMINATIONS BY CONTRACT PHYSICIAN.**

(a) EXTENSION OF TEMPORARY AUTHORITY.—Subsection (c) of section 704 of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 (Public Law 108–183; 38 U.S.C. 5101 note) is amended by striking ''December 31, 2014'' and inserting ''December 31, 2016''.

(b) LICENSURE OF CONTRACT PHYSICIANS.—

(1) TEMPORARY AUTHORITY.—Such section 704 is further amended—

(A) by redesignating subsection (d) as subsection (e); and

(B) by inserting after subsection (c) the following new subsection (d):

''(d) LICENSURE OF CONTRACT PHYSICIANS.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any law regarding the licensure of physicians, a physician described in paragraph (2) may conduct an examination pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (b) at any location in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States, so long as the examination is within the scope of the authorized duties under such contract.

''(2) PHYSICIAN DESCRIBED.—A physician described in this paragraph is a physician who—

''(A) has a current license to practice the health care profession of the physician; and

''(B) is performing authorized duties for the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (b).''.

(2) PILOT PROGRAM.—Section 504 of the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1996 (Public Law 104–275; 38 U.S.C. 5101 note) is amended—

(A) by redesignating subsections (c) and (d) as subsections (d) and (e), respectively; and

(B) by inserting after subsection (b) the following new subsection (c):

''(c) LICENSURE OF CONTRACT PHYSICIANS.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any law regarding the licensure of physicians, a physician described in paragraph (2) may conduct an examination pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (a) at any location in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States, so long as the examination is within the scope of the authorized duties under such contract.

''(2) PHYSICIAN DESCRIBED.—A physician described in this paragraph is a physician who—

''(A) has a current license to practice the health care profession of the physician; and

''(B) is performing authorized duties for the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (a).''.

(c) EXPANSION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—Subsection (b) of such section 504 is amended to read as follows:

''(b) LOCATIONS.—

''(1) NUMBER.—The Secretary may carry out the pilot program under this section through not more than 15 regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

''(2) SELECTION.—The Secretary shall select the regional offices under paragraph (1) by analyzing appropriate data to determine the regional offices that require support. Such appropriate data shall include—

''(A) the number of backlogged claims;

''(B) the total pending case workload;

''(C) the length of time cases have been pending;

''(D) the accuracy of completed cases;

''(E) the overall timeliness of completed cases;

''(F) the availability and workload of the examination units and physicians of the medical centers in the regional office; and

''(G) any other data the Secretary determines appropriate.

''(3) ANNUAL ANALYSIS.—The Secretary shall carry out the data analysis of the regional offices under paragraph (2) during each year in which the program under this section is carried out to determine the regional offices selected under paragraph (1) for such year.''.

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**SA 2757.** Mr. HELLER (for himself, Ms. HEITKAMP, and Mr. MANCHIN) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

At the end of title IX, add the following:

**SEC. 918. EXCLUSION FROM INCOME.**

Section 3(b)(4) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437a(b)(4)) is amended—

(1) by striking ''and any amounts'' and inserting '', any amounts'';

(2) by striking ''or any deferred'' and inserting '', any deferred''; and

(3) by inserting after ''prospective monthly amounts'' the following: '', and any reimbursement related to aid and attendance as detailed under section 1521 of title 38, United States Code''.

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**SA 2758.** Mr. COBURN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, and Mr. BURR) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 76, between lines 8 and 9, insert the following:

**SEC. 330. PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION ON PROVISION OF HEALTH CARE BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and every 180 days thereafter, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish on an Internet database of the Department of Veterans Affairs available to the public information on the provision of health care by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) ELEMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Each publication required by paragraph (1) shall include, with respect to each medical facility of the Department during the 180-day period preceding such publication, the following:

(i) An assessment of the outcomes of each surgical procedure with respect to each patient, including—

(I) the quality of such procedure;

(II) any complications that occurred during such procedure; and

(III) the safety of such patient in connection with such procedure.

(ii) The average length of stay for inpatient care.

(iii) A description of any hospital-acquired condition acquired by any patient.

(iv) The rate of readmission of patients within 30 days of release.

(v) The rate of mortality of patients within 30 days of release.

(vi) The rate at which opiods are prescribed to each patient.

(vii) An assessment of the outcomes of mental health treatment with respect to each patient, including—

(I) the suicide rate; and

(II) the safety of such patient in connection with such mental health treatment.

(viii) An assessment of the outcomes of nursing home treatment, if any, with respect to each patient, including the safety of such patient in connection with such nursing home treatment.

(ix) The average wait time for emergency room treatment.

(x) A description of any scheduling backlog with respect to patient appointments.

(B) ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS.—The Secretary may include in each publication required by paragraph (1) any additional information on the safety of facilities of the Department, health outcomes at such facilities, and quality of care at such facilities as the Secretary considers appropriate.

(3) SEARCHABILITY.—The Secretary shall ensure that the Internet database required by paragraph (1) is searchable by State, city, and facility.

(4) PERSONAL INFORMATION.—The Secretary shall ensure that personal information connected to information published under paragraph (1) is protected from disclosure as required by applicable law.

(b) COMPTROLLER GENERAL REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to Congress a report setting forth recommendations for additional elements to be included with the information published under subsection (a) to improve the evaluation and assessment of the safety and health of individuals receiving care under the laws administered by the Secretary and the quality of care received by such individuals.

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**SA 2759.** Mr. COBURN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, and Mr. BURR) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 34, strike line 6 and all that follows through page 38, line 22.

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**SA 2760.** Mr. COBURN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, and Mr. BURR) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 76, between lines 8 and 9, insert the following:

**SEC. 330. PROGRAM TO ALLOW INDIVIDUALS ELIGIBLE FOR HEALTH CARE FROM DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO RECEIVE SUCH CARE FROM NON-DEPARTMENT ENTITIES.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 17 is amended by inserting after section 1703 the following new section:

**"§ 1703A. Program to allow individuals eligible for health care from Department to receive such care from non-Department entities**

''(a) IN GENERAL.—(1) Commencing not later than one year after the date of the enactment of the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014, the Secretary shall carry out a program to provide health care and services to eligible individuals described in subsection (b) through non-Department providers and suppliers.

''(2) For purposes of this section:

''(A) The term 'provider' means a provider of services, as that term is defined in subsection (u) of section 1861 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395x), participating in the Medicare program under title XVIII of such Act.

''(B) The term 'supplier' means a supplier, as that term is defined in subsection (d) of such section, participating in the Medicare program under title XVIII of such Act.

''(b) ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.—An eligible individual described in this subsection is an individual who—

''(1) is a veteran, surviving spouse of a veteran, spouse of a veteran, or a child of a veteran; and

''(2) is eligible for health care and services under the laws administered by the Secretary.

''(c) RESTRICTION ON CERTAIN PROVIDERS AND SUPPLIERS.—The Secretary may restrict a provider or supplier from providing care and services under the program if the Secretary determines that veterans have received substandard care from that provider or supplier.

''(d) PAYMENTS TO PROVIDERS AND SUPPLIERS.—(1) Subject to paragraph (2), payment rates to providers and suppliers for the provision of care and services under the program shall not exceed the payment rates under the fee-for-service program under the Medicare program under title XVIII of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1355 et seq.) for a comparable item or service.

''(2) The Secretary shall ensure that the aggregate amount paid to non-Department providers and suppliers for the provision of care and services under the program does not exceed the cost of providing such care and services through the Department.''.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 17 is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 1703 the following new item:

''1703A. Program to allow individuals eligible for health care from Department to receive such care from non-Department entities.''.

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**SA 2761.** Mr. COBURN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 76, between lines 8 and 9, insert the following:

**SEC. 330. PILOT PROGRAM TO ALLOW INDIVIDUALS ELIGIBLE FOR HEALTH CARE FROM DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO RECEIVE SUCH CARE FROM NON-DEPARTMENT ENTITIES.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall commence a pilot program to assess the feasibility and advisability of providing health care and services to eligible individuals described in subsection (b) through non-Department providers and at non-Department facilities.

(b) ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.—Eligible individuals described in this subsection are veterans, surviving spouses of veterans, spouses of veterans, and children of veterans (as those terms are defined in section 101 of title 38, United States Code) who are eligible for health care and services under the laws administered by the Secretary.

(c) PROVIDERS AND FACILITIES.—In carrying out the pilot program under this section, the Secretary shall select such non-Department providers and such non-Department facilities as the Secretary considers appropriate to provide health care and services as described in subsection (a).

(d) LOCATIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to paragraph (3), the Secretary shall carry out the pilot program at not more than 40 locations selected by the Secretary for purposes of the pilot program, which shall include at least one location within each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN).

(2) PRIORITY.—In selecting locations under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall give priority consideration to those locations in which individuals seeking primary care appointments at the nearest medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs have the longest average wait time.

(3) ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—The Secretary may expand the pilot program to include more than 40 locations as the Secretary considers appropriate on the earlier of—

(A) the date that the Secretary determines that the pilot program—

(i) is cost effective, feasible, and advisable; and

(ii) has equal or better outcomes and satisfaction among veterans as compared to health care and services received through providers and facilities of the Department; or

(B) three years after the date of the commencement of the pilot program.

(e) PAYMENTS TO PROVIDERS AND FACILITIES.—

(1) PAYMENT RATES.—Subject to paragraph (2), in carrying out the pilot program under this section, the Secretary shall specify the rates by which non-Department providers and non-Department facilities are paid for the provision of care and services under the pilot program.

(2) LIMITATION.—The Secretary shall ensure that the aggregate amount paid to non-Department providers and non-Department facilities for the provision of care and services under the pilot program does not exceed the cost of providing such care and services through providers and facilities of the Department.

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**SA 2762.** Mr. COBURN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. BURR, Mr. LEE, and Mr. FLAKE) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 367, after line 14, insert the following:

**SEC. 817. LIMITATION ON IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW PROGRAMS AND EXPANSION OF EXISTING PROGRAMS.**

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may not implement any new program or expand any existing program pursuant to any provision of this Act until the Comptroller General of the United States certifies to Congress that the Secretary is meeting all strategic targets for every program measure established in the report of the Department

of Veterans Affairs entitled ''2013 Performance and Accountability Report''.

**SA 2763.** Ms. COLLINS submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 291, after line 21, add the following:

**Subtitle E—Other Claims Processing Matters**

**SEC. 641. INSPECTOR GENERAL INVESTIGATION INTO WHETHER EMPLOYEES OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS DESTROYED FILES TO MISREPRESENT BACKLOG OF CLAIMS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall commence an investigation to assess whether employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs have destroyed files in order to misrepresent the backlog of claims filed with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary.

(b) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Inspector General shall submit to Congress a report on the findings of the Inspector General with respect to the investigation carried out pursuant to subsection (a).

**SA 2764.** Ms. BALDWIN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 131, after line 19, add the following:

**SEC. 365. AGREEMENTS WITH ORGANIZATIONS TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO VETERANS WHO ARE SURVIVORS OF MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA.**

(a) MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may enter into a memorandum of understanding with an organization described in subsection (b) to provide services to veterans who are survivors of military sexual trauma.

(b) COVERED ORGANIZATIONS.—Organizations described in this subsection are civilian organizations, including the following:

(1) Nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations.

(2) Religious or community-based organizations.

(3) Federally qualified health centers.

(4) The Indian Health Service.

(c) PURPOSE.—The purpose of a memoranda of understanding entered into under subsection (a) shall be to facilitate working and collegial relationships between the senior leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs and an organization described in subsection (b) in order to assist the Department in better addressing military sexual trauma in one or more veteran communities.

(d) ANNUAL REPORTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not less frequently than once each year, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on any memoranda of understanding entered into under subsection (a).

(2) IN GENERAL.—Each report submitted under paragraph (1) shall include the following:

(A) How many memoranda have been entered into and are currently in force.

(B) The strategies in such memoranda.

(C) The outcomes of the relationships sought through such memoranda.

(D) Such recommendations as the Secretary may have for legislative or administrative action to facilitate a relationship described in subsection (c) or otherwise better address military sexual trauma in a veteran community.

**SEC. 366. REPORT ON FEASIBILITY AND ADVISABILITY OF SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIPS TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO VETERANS WHO ARE SURVIVORS OF MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA.**

(a) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report on the feasibility and advisability of supporting partnerships between local medical facilities (as defined in section 8101 of title 38, United States Code) with organizations described in subsection (b) to provide services (including mental health services and trauma-informed services) to veterans who are survivors of military sexual trauma.

(b) COVERED ORGANIZATIONS.—Organizations described in this subsection are civilian organizations, including the following:

(1) Nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations.

(2) Religious or community-based organizations.

(3) Federally qualified health centers.

(4) The Indian Health Service.

(c) CONTENTS.—The report required by subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) An assessment of the effect of the Patient-Center Community Care program of the Department of Veterans Affairs on the provision of specialty care for survivors of military sexual trauma.

(2) An assessment of the feasibility and advisability of supporting partnerships as described in subsection (a) in not fewer than three Veterans Integrated Service Networks.

(3) Recommendations as to the kinds or types of organizations to which medical facilities should partner as described in subsection (a), including recommendations on the following:

(A) Nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations, the primary purpose of which is to provide services to survivors of military sexual trauma, sexual assault, domestic violence, family violence, or stalking.

(B) Religious or community-based organizations that specialize in working with survivors described in subparagraph (A).

**SA 2765.** Ms. STABENOW submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 109, strike lines 18 through 22 and insert the following:

(2) The number of individuals participating in the pilot program at each site, disaggregated by—

(A) age;

(B) sex;

(C) disability rating;

(D) any illness or condition co-occurring with the mental health disorder for which the individual is receiving treatment under the pilot program and with which the individual has been previously diagnosed by the Department; and

(E) whether or not the individual is homeless.

(3) A detailed assessment of the effectiveness of the pilot program, including a survey of each veteran participating in the pilot program, to determine the impact of the program on—

(A) the success of such veteran in obtaining and maintaining gainful employment;

(B) the success of such veteran in pursuing and completing educational opportunities;

(C) the interpersonal relationships of such veteran, including relationships with family members; and

(D) the success of such veteran in achieving stable housing.

**SA 2766.** Mr. REID proposed an amendment to amendment SA 2747 proposed by Mr. SANDERS to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; as follows:

At the end, add the following:

This Act shall become effective 1 day after enactment.

**SA 2767.** Mr. REID proposed an amendment to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; as follows:

At the end, add the following:

This Act shall become effective 3 days after enactment.

**SA 2768.** Mr. REID proposed an amendment to amendment SA 2767 proposed by Mr. REID to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; as follows:

In the amendment, strike ''3 days'' and insert ''4 days''.

**SA 2769.** Mr. REID proposed an amendment to amendment SA 2768 proposed by Mr. REID to the amendment SA 2767 proposed by Mr. REID to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; as follows:

In the amendment, strike ''4 days'' and insert ''5 days''.

**SA 2770.** Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

Beginning on page 155, strike line 8 and all that follows through page 157, line 17.

**SA 2771.** Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

Beginning on page 132, strike line 13 and all that follows through the matter preceding line 1 on page 134.

**SA 2772.** Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 39, strike lines 18 through 25.

**SA 2773.** Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the

provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 122, after line 20, insert the following:

**SEC. 356. TERMINATION OF CERTAIN PROGRAMS RELATING TO DENTAL CARE.**

(a) PILOT PROGRAM ON EXPANSION OF FURNISHING OF DENTAL CARE TO VETERANS.—Notwithstanding subsection (b) of section 352, the pilot program required by such section shall terminate not later than three years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(b) PROGRAM OF EDUCATION TO PROMOTE DENTAL HEALTH FOR VETERANS.—The program required by section 353 shall terminate not later than three years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(c) PILOT PROGRAM ON DENTAL INSURANCE.—Notwithstanding section 354(b), the dental insurance pilot program established by section 17.169 of title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, shall terminate not later than three years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

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**SA 2774.** Mr. LEE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

Beginning on page 53, strike line 13 and all that follows through page 61, line 5.

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**SA 2775.** Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself, Mr. UDALL of Colorado, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, and Ms. BALDWIN) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

At the end, add the following:

**SEC. 918. DEFINITION OF SPOUSE FOR PURPOSES OF VETERAN BENEFITS TO REFLECT NEW STATE DEFINITIONS OF SPOUSE.**

(a) SPOUSE DEFINED.—Section 101 is amended—

(1) in paragraph (3), by striking ''of the opposite sex''; and

(2) by striking paragraph (31) and inserting the following new paragraph (31):

''(31)(A) An individual shall be considered a 'spouse' if—

''(i) the marriage of the individual is valid in the State in which the marriage was entered into; or

''(ii) in the case of a marriage entered into outside any State—

''(I) if the marriage of the individual is valid in the place in which the marriage was entered into; and

''(II)(aa) the marriage could have been entered into in a State; or

''(bb) the marriage was valid in the place in which all parties to the marriage resided at the time the marriage was entered into.

''(B) In this paragraph, the term 'State' has the meaning given that term in paragraph (20), except that the term also includes the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.''.

(b) MARRIAGE DETERMINATION.—Section 103(c) is amended by striking ''according to'' and all that follows through the period at the end and inserting ''in accordance with section 101(31) of this title.''.

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**SA 2776.** Mr. UDALL of New Mexico (for himself and Mr. HELLER) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 155, between lines 2 and 3, insert the following:

**Subtitle I—Health Care for Rural Veterans**

**SEC. 391. PROVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE TO CERTAIN VETERANS IN RURAL AND HIGHLY RURAL AREAS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide mental health care to eligible veterans described in subsection (c) for which a determination has been made under subsection (d).

(b) USE OF OTHER PROVIDERS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may provide mental health care under this section by contracting with or providing payments to mental health care providers that are not otherwise affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs and shall, to the extent feasible, use health care resources pursuant to existing arrangements, contracts, or agreements entered into under section 8153 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) PAYMENTS.—The Secretary may not provide payments described in paragraph (1) that exceed the amount that the Secretary would otherwise expend in providing similar mental health care through the Department or under such existing arrangements, contracts, or agreements.

(c) ELIGIBLE VETERANS.—An eligible veteran described in this subsection is a veteran that—

(1) has a mental health issue resulting from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or any other health condition that was incurred or aggravated in line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service; and

(2) lives in a rural area or highly rural area.

(d) DETERMINATION.—The Secretary shall provide the care required by subsection (a) to an eligible veteran if the Secretary determines any of the following:

(1)(A) A mental health care provider affiliated with the Department is not available to provide mental health care services to the eligible veteran at the medical facility of the Department that is nearest to the residence of the eligible veteran; and

(B)(i) in-person and telehealth mental health care services from the Department are not available to the eligible veteran;

(ii) the eligible veteran requests that a mental health care provider affiliated with the Department provide mental health care services to the eligible veteran in private and the provider is unable or unwilling to do so; or

(iii) travel by the eligible veteran to a regional medical center of the Department is impractical or severely detrimental to the health of the eligible veteran.

(2) That—

(A)(i) a mental health care provider affiliated with the Department has recommended that a complementary and alternative therapy approved by the Food and Drug Administration be administered to the eligible veteran;

(ii) the eligible veteran is a member of an Indian tribe or a Native Hawaiian and requests a healing method that is a cultural tradition of the eligible veteran; or

(iii) a mental health care provider has recommended a treatment for the eligible veteran that, based on the medical knowledge of the health care provider, is safe and would assist the eligible veteran in coping with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or another mental health issue; and

(B)(i) the eligible veteran has not received the therapy, healing method, or treatment described in subparagraph (A) because of the inaccessibility or unavailability of such treatment from a medical facility of the Department; and

(ii) the eligible veteran, as a result of the mental health condition of the eligible veteran—

(I) cannot work or maintain employment;

(II) is at increased risk of doing physical harm to the eligible veteran or others; or

(III) cannot adequately manage activities of daily life.

(e) INDIAN TRIBE DEFINED.—In this section, the term ''Indian tribe'' has the meaning given that term in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b).

**SEC. 392. GRANTS TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION TO COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS FOR VETERANS IN RURAL AND HIGHLY RURAL AREAS.**

(a) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may award grants to eligible entities to provide transportation to veterans in rural and highly rural areas who would otherwise be eligible for reimbursement for or payment of travel expenses by the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to section 111 or section 111A of title 38, United States Code.

(2) MAXIMUM AMOUNT.—The Secretary may not award a grant under this section in an amount that exceeds $100,000.

(3) NO MATCHING REQUIRED.—The Secretary may not require that an eligible entity provide a contribution of funds as a condition of receiving the grant.

(b) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—The Secretary may award grants under this section to any of the following entities:

(1) State veterans agencies.

(2) Veterans service organizations.

(3) Tribal organizations.

(c) USE OF GRANTS.—Eligible entities in receipt of a grant under this section may use the grant amount as follows:

(1) To provide transportation to veterans in rural and highly rural areas to and from medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including transportation by air or sea if necessary.

(2) To otherwise assist veterans in rural and highly rural areas with transportation in connection with the provision of medical care to those veterans, including transportation by air or sea if necessary.

(d) APPLICATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Each eligible entity seeking a grant under this section shall submit an application to the Secretary at such time, in such manner, and accompanied by such information as the Secretary may require.

(2) CONTENTS.—Each application submitted pursuant to paragraph (1) shall contain a proposal for the manner in which the eligible entity seeks to provide the transportation described in subsection (a).

(e) PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall give priority in the awarding of grants under this section to applications submitted under subsection (d) that contain proposals that comply with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794) and regulations issued by the Secretary of Transportation under such section 504.

(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) TRIBAL ORGANIZATION.—The term ''tribal organization'' has the meaning given that term in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b).

(2) VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION.—The term ''veterans service organization'' means

an organization recognized by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the representation of veterans under section 5902 of title 38, United States Code.

**SEC. 393. PILOT PROGRAM ON HOUSING ALLOWANCES FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ACCEPTING ASSIGNMENT AT RURAL AND HIGHLY RURAL COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS.**

(a) PILOT PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out a pilot program to assess the feasability and advisability of providing a housing allowance to health care providers of the Department of Veterans Affairs who accept assignment at rural or highly rural community-based outpatient clinics as a means of encouraging such health care providers to accept assignment to such Clinics.

(b) ELIGIBILITY.—An individual is eligible for participation in the pilot program if the individual—

(1) is a health care provider;

(2) is, or agrees to become, an employee of the Veterans Health Administration on a full-time basis in a health care position designated by the Secretary for purposes of the pilot program; and

(3) accepts an assignment in such position for a term of not less than 36 months at a rural or highly rural community-based outpatient clinic selected by the Secretary for purposes of the pilot program.

(c) CONDITIONS ON PAYMENT OF HOUSING ALLOWANCE.—Except as provided in subsection (d)(3), an individual may be provided a housing allowance under the pilot program only while—

(1) in good standing as a health care provider within the Veterans Health Administration; and

(2) assigned as a health care provider at a rural or highly rural community-based outpatient clinic.

(d) AMOUNT OF HOUSING ALLOWANCE.—

(1) MONTHLY AMOUNT DURING INITIAL TERM.—During the first 36 months of participation in the pilot program, the housing allowance provided a health care provider participating in the pilot program shall be provided on a monthly basis at a rate that is equivalent to the monthly rate of basic allowance for housing (BAH) payable under section 403 of title 37, United States Code, to members of the uniformed services whose grade, dependency status, and geographic location most closely equals, as determined by the Secretary, the grade of such provider under section 7404 of title 38, United States Code, and the dependency status and geographic location of such provider.

(2) MONTHLY AMOUNT FOR CERTAIN PROVIDERS FOR ADDITIONAL TERM.—If upon completion of the first 36 months in the pilot program a health care provider accepts continuing participation in the pilot program at a rural or highly rural community-based outpatient clinic for a term of not less than 12 additional months, the housing allowance provided the health care provider under the pilot program shall be provided on a monthly basis for such additional months at a rate determined in accordance with paragraph (1).

(3) BONUS AMOUNT.—

(A) COMPLETION OF INITIAL TERM.—Any health care provider who successfully completes 36 months of participation in the pilot program shall be paid upon completion of participation in the pilot program an amount equal to three months of the monthly rate of housing allowance provided the health care provider under paragraph (1) during the last month before the provider's completion of participation in the pilot program.

(B) COMPLETION OF ADDITIONAL ONE-YEAR TERM.—Any health care provider who successfully completes 48 months of participation in the pilot program shall be paid upon completion of participation in the pilot program an amount equal to 12 months of the monthly rate of housing allowance provided the health care provider under paragraph (2) during the last month before the provider's completion of participation in the pilot program.

(C) COMPLETION OF ADDITIONAL TWO-YEAR TERM.—Any health care provider who successfully completes 60 months of participation in the pilot program shall be paid upon completion of participation in the pilot program an amount equal to 13 months of the monthly rate of housing allowance provided the health care provider under paragraph (2) during the last month before the provider's completion of participation in the pilot program.

(D) NO REQUIREMENT TO REMAIN ON ASSIGNMENT.—An amount payable under this paragraph shall be paid whether or not the health care provider concerned remains in an assignment at a rural or highly rural community-based outpatient clinic.

(e) NATURE OF ALLOWANCE.—

(1) SUPPLEMENTAL AMOUNT.—Any housing allowance provided under the pilot program shall be in addition to any pay (including basic pay, special pay, and retirement or other bonus pay) payable to personnel of the Veterans Health Administration personnel under chapter 74 of title 38, United States Code, or any other provision of law.

(2) EXEMPTION FROM TAXATION.—For purposes of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, any housing allowance provided under the pilot program shall not be included in gross income.

(f) ANNUAL REPORTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act and not less frequently than once each year thereafter while the pilot program is in effect, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the pilot program.

(2) ELEMENTS.—Each report submitted under paragraph (1) shall include the following:

(A) A current description of the pilot program, including the current number of participants in the pilot program and the amounts of housing allowance being provided such participants.

(B) A current assessment of the value of the housing allowance under the pilot program in encouraging health care providers in accepting assignment to rural and highly rural community-based outpatient clinics.

(g) FUNDING.—Amounts for housing allowances under the pilot program shall be derived from amounts available for the Veterans Health Administration for Medical Services.

(h) SUNSET.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—No individual may commence participation in the pilot program on or after the date that is five years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(2) CONTINUATION OF ON-GOING PROVISION OF ALLOWANCE.—Nothing in paragraph (1) shall be construed to prohibit the Secretary from providing housing allowances under the pilot program to individuals who commence participation in the pilot program before the date that is five years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(i) RURAL OR HIGHLY RURAL COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINIC DEFINED.—In this section, the term ''rural or highly rural community-based outpatient clinic'' means a community-based outpatient clinic of the Veterans Health Administration that predominantly serves veterans who live in rural and highly rural areas.

**SEC. 394. PROGRAM ON TRAINING HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS FOR ASSIGNMENT AT COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS THAT PREDOMINANTLY SERVE VETERANS WHO LIVE IN RURAL AND HIGHLY RURAL AREAS.**

(a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a program to train health care professionals for assignment at community-based outpatient clinics that predominantly serve veterans who live in rural and highly rural areas.

(2) PARTNERSHIP WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the program, the Secretary may enter into partnerships with educational institutions.

(B) CONSULTATION.—If the Secretary enters into a partnership with an educational institution to carry out the program, the Secretary shall consult with the head of such educational institution with respect to the training and curriculum provided under the program at such educational institution.

(b) TRAINING.—The training provided to health care professionals under the program shall include the following courses:

(1) Courses on general professional development of health care professionals.

(2) Courses on providing health care to rural populations and specifically to rural veterans.

(c) CURRICULUM.—The program shall include training with respect to health issues that commonly afflict veterans as specified by the Secretary.

(d) HIRING PREFERENCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Each health care professional that completes the program and completes a three-year assignment at a community-based outpatient clinic that predominantly serves veterans who live in rural and highly rural areas shall receive a preference in selection for employment in the Veterans Health Administration at the end of such three-year assignment.

(2) DEGREE OF PREFERENCE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The preference received under paragraph (1) shall be less than the preference given a veteran.

(B) VETERANS.—A veteran that receives a preference under paragraph (1) shall receive a greater preference than an individual that receives a preference under such paragraph who is not a veteran.

**SEC. 395. ENCOURAGING AND FACILITATING TRANSITION OF MILITARY MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS INTO EMPLOYMENT WITH VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.**

(a) ENCOURAGING EMPLOYMENT WITH VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense shall jointly establish a program to encourage an individual who serves in the Armed Forces with a military occupational specialty relating to the provision of health care to seek employment with the Veterans Health Administration when the individual has been discharged or released from service in the Armed Forces or is contemplating separating from such service.

(b) MATCHING OF MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTIES.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense shall jointly identify military occupational specialties relating to the provision of health care and match such occupational specialties with occupations and positions of employment within the Veterans Health Administration for which experience in such military occupational specialty qualifies one for employment in such occupation or position of employment.

(c) FACILITATION OF TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT WITH VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs and

the Secretary of Defense shall prescribe such regulations and take such actions as may be necessary to facilitate the transition of individuals with military occupational specialties identified under subsection (b) into the corresponding occupations and positions of employment with the Veterans Health Administration under such subsection.

**SEC. 396. ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS IN RURAL AND HIGHLY RURAL AREAS.**

(a) ASSESSMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a periodic assessment of community-based outpatient clinics in rural and highly rural areas to determine whether expansion and improvement of community-based outpatient clinics in those areas is feasible or advisable.

(2) ELEMENTS.—Each periodic assessment required by subsection (a) shall include the following with respect to each community-based outpatient clinic assessed:

(A) An assessment of whether the facility—

(i) meets applicable building code requirements;

(ii) meets applicable health care requirements related to privacy;

(iii) has the capacity to handle the number of patients that seek care at the facility;

(iv) has sufficient parking for patients that seek care at the facility;

(v) has adequate access to broadband technology to allow the use or expansion of telehealth services at the facility; and

(vi) has the capacity to properly store and dispose of medical and other hazardous waste.

(B) A survey of health care providers who practice at the facility with respect to—

(i) strengths of the facility;

(ii) weaknesses of the facility; and

(iii) areas in which the facility may be improved.

(b) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, and not less frequently than once each year thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives a report on the findings of the Secretary with respect to the most recently completed assessment conducted under subsection (a), including such recommendations as the Secretary may have for the expansion or improvement of community-based outpatient clinics in rural and highly rural areas.

**SEC. 397. REPORT ON ESTABLISHMENT OF POLYTRAUMA REHABILITATION CENTERS OR POLYTRAUMA NETWORK SITES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS IN RURAL AREAS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report on the feasibility and advisability of establishing a Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center or Polytrauma Network Site in each area in which the nearest Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center or Polytrauma Network Site is more than 300 miles away.

(b) REQUIREMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The report required by this section shall include the following:

(A) An assessment of the adequacy of existing Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers and Polytrauma Network Sites in providing care to veterans that live more than 300 miles from such facilities.

(B) An assessment of the adequacy of existing Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers and Polytrauma Network Sites in providing rehabilitation services pursuant to section 1710C of title 38, United States Code.

(C) An assessment of the feasibility and advisability of establishing a Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center or Polytrauma Network Site in each State in which there is a medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(D) An assessment of whether establishing new Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers and Polytrauma Network Sites would be beneficial—

(i) to the veteran population in general;

(ii) to veterans who live—

(I) more than 300 miles from the nearest Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center or Polytrauma Network Site; or

(II) in a State in which there is not a Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center or Polytrauma Network Site; and

(iii) to veterans who served in the active military, naval, or air service on or after September 11, 2001.

(2) BUDGET FOR ADDITIONAL FACILITIES.—If the Secretary determines that establishing additional Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers and Polytrauma Network Sites is feasible and advisable, the Secretary shall include with the report required by subsection (a) a budget and plan for the establishment of those additional facilities.

**SEC. 398. REPORT ON EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE IN TREATING VETERANS WITH CERTAIN MENTAL ILLNESSES.**

Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the effectiveness of complementary and alternative medicine used by the Department of Veterans Affairs in treating veterans with mental health conditions resulting from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or any other health condition that was incurred or aggravated in line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service.

**SEC. 399. DEFINITIONS.**

In this subtitle:

(1) ACTIVE MILITARY, NAVAL, OR AIR SERVICE.—The term ''active military, naval, or air service'' has the meaning given that term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) HIGHLY RURAL AREA.—The term ''highly rural area'' means an area located in a county that has less than seven individuals residing in that county per square mile.

(3) RURAL AREA.—The term ''rural area'' means any area that is not an urbanized area or a highly rural area.

(4) URBANIZED AREA.—The term ''urbanized area'' has the meaning given that term by the Director of the Bureau of the Census.

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**SA 2777.** Mr. UDALL of New Mexico submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 33, after line 18, add the following:

**SEC. 207. EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO INCLUDE SERVICE ON ACTIVE DUTY IN ENTRY LEVEL AND SKILL TRAINING UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES.**

(a) FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO SERVE BETWEEN 18 AND 24 MONTHS.—Section 3311(b)(5)(A) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking ''excluding'' and inserting ''including''.

(b) FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO SERVED IN OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, OR CERTAIN OTHER CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS.—Section 3311(b) of such title is amended in paragraphs (6)(A) and (7)(A) by striking ''excluding service on active duty in entry level and skill training'' and inserting ''including service on active duty in entry level and skill training for individuals who served on active duty in the Armed Forces in Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, or any other contingency operation (as that term is defined in section 101 of title 10) and excluding service on active duty in entry level and skill training for all other individuals''.

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**SA 2778.** Mr. BOOKER submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 110, between lines 13 and 14, insert the following:

**SEC. 345. REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF PATIENT-CENTERED COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 450 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and not later than September 30 each year thereafter for two years, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the program described in subsection (b).

(b) PROGRAM DESCRIBED.—The program described in this subsection is the program carried out by the Veterans Health Administration that offers veterans access to non-Department of Veterans Affairs inpatient specialty care, outpatient specialty care, mental health care, limited emergency care, and limited newborn care, commonly known as the ''Patient-Centered Community Care Program''.

(c) ELEMENTS.—Each report submitted under subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) A description of the specific factors used by the Department to determine the use of the program described in subsection (b) by facilities of the Department.

(2) An analysis of the 10 health care services most frequently provided through the program and any recommendations by the Secretary to expand access to such services at facilities of the Department.

(3) An analysis of the quality of care provided through the program, including feedback from health care providers.

(4) An analysis of whether required medical documentation from health care providers participating in the program is provided to the Department in a timely and comprehensive manner for inclusion in the electronic health records of veterans.

(5) An analysis of the timeliness of payments made by the Department to health care providers for services provided through the program.

(6) A description of the specific factors used by the Department in determining if a veteran is eligible for care through non-Department providers, including such care that is not provided through the program.

(7) A description of the impact of the program on veterans participating in the program, including—

(A) the average increase or reduction in any travel required by such veterans for care;

(B) the average increase or reduction in wait-times by such veterans for care; and

(C) an analysis of the satisfaction of such veterans with the program.

(8) In response to information compiled or analyses conducted under paragraphs (1)

through (7), a description of any proposed mechanisms—

(A) to reduce travel required by veterans to receive care;

(B) to reduce wait-times for veterans receiving care; or

(C) to increase the quality of care received by veterans.

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—This section shall take effect on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

**SA 2779.** Ms. COLLINS submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes; which was ordered to lie on the table; as follows:

On page 291, after line 21, add the following:

**Subtitle E—Other Claims Processing Matters**

**SEC. 641. INSPECTOR GENERAL INVESTIGATION INTO WHETHER EMPLOYEES OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS DESTROYED FILES TO MISREPRESENT BACKLOG OF CLAIMS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall commence an investigation to assess—

(1) whether employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs have destroyed files; and

(2) whether the destruction of such files was carried out in order to misrepresent the backlog of claims filed with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary.

(b) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Inspector General shall submit to Congress a report on the findings of the Inspector General with respect to the investigation carried out pursuant to subsection (a).

## AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 26, 2014, at 10:30 a.m., to hold a hearing entitled ''Treaties.''

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

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 26, 2014, at 2:15 a.m., to hold a hearing entitled ''Prospects for Peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Great Lakes Region.''

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

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 26, 2014, at 10 a.m., in room S–216 of the Capitol Building.

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

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Indian Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 26, 2014, in room SD–628 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing entitled ''Early Childhood Development and Education in Indian Country: Building a Foundation for Academic Success.''

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

PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 26, 2014, at 9:30 a.m., to conduct a hearing entitled ''Offshore Tax Evasion: The Effort to Collect Unpaid Taxes on Billions in Hidden Offshore Accounts.''

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ANTITRUST, COMPETITION POLICY, AND CONSUMER RIGHTS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Antitrust, Competition Policy, and Consumer Rights, be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate, on February 26, 2014, at 10 a.m., in room SD–226 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, to conduct a hearing entitled ''An Examination of Competition in the Wireless Market.''

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support of the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 26, 2014, at 2:30 p.m.

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions, and Family Policy of the Committee on Finance be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 26, 2014, at 10 a.m., in room SD–215 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, to conduct a hearing entitled ''Retirement Savings for Low-Income Workers.''

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Personnel of the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 26, 2014, at 10 a.m.

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

## PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Jason Dean, a military fellow in my office, be granted the privilege of the floor for the remainder of this Congress.

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

## UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—S. 1752 AND S. 1917

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, with the concurrence of Senator MCCONNELL, the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 251, S. 1752; that if a cloture motion is filed on the bill, there be 2 hours of debate on S. 1752 and S. 1917, equally divided between the two leaders or their designees; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate immediately proceed to the vote on the motion to invoke cloture; that if cloture is invoked, all postcloture time be yielded back and the Senate immediately proceed to vote on passage of the bill; that no amendments, points of order or motions be in order to the bill prior to the vote on passage; that if the motion to invoke cloture on S. 1752 is not agreed to, the bill be returned to the calendar; that upon the conclusion of the consideration of S. 1752, the Senate immediately proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 293, S. 1917; that if a cloture motion is filed on the bill, the Senate immediately proceed to a vote on the motion to invoke cloture; that if cloture is invoked, all postcloture time be yielded back and the Senate immediately proceed to vote on passage of the bill; that no amendments, points of order or motions be in order to the bill prior to the vote on passage; that if the motion to invoke cloture on S. 1917 is not agreed to, the bill be returned to the calendar.

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

## CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 363.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 363) celebrating Black History Month.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 363) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under ''Submitted Resolutions.'')

## ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2014

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 27, 2014; that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, and the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day; that following any leader remarks, the Senate be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half; and that following morning business, the Senate resume consideration of S. 1982, the veterans benefits bill, with the time until 2 p.m. equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with Senator SESSIONS controlling 30 minutes of the Republican time and Senator GRAHAM or his designee recognized at 1:45 p.m.

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

## PROGRAM

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there will be a series of rollcall votes tomorrow starting at 2 p.m. We also expect to consider the nomination of Michael Connor to be Deputy Secretary of Interior tomorrow.

## ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 9:30 A.M. TOMORROW

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it adjourn under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 6:57 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, February 27, 2014, at 9:30 a.m.

## NOMINATIONS

Executive nominations received by the Senate:

### THE JUDICIARY

ROBIN L. ROSENBERG, OF FLORIDA, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA, VICE ADALBERTO JOSE JORDAN, ELEVATED.

### IN THE AIR FORCE

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR APPOINTMENT IN THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE TO THE GRADE INDICATED WHILE ASSIGNED TO A POSITION OF IMPORTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 601:

*To be lieutenant general*

LT. GEN. GREGORY A. BISCONE

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR APPOINTMENT IN THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE TO THE GRADE INDICATED WHILE ASSIGNED TO A POSITION OF IMPORTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 601:

*To be lieutenant general*

MAJ. GEN. THOMAS J. TRASK

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR APPOINTMENT IN THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE TO THE GRADE INDICATED UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 624:

*To be brigadier general*

COL. ANDREW J. TOTH

THE FOLLOWING AIR NATIONAL GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES OFFICERS FOR APPOINTMENT IN THE RESERVE OF THE AIR FORCE TO THE GRADE INDICATED UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTIONS 12203 AND 12212:

*To be brigadier general*

COLONEL MARK W. ANDERSON
COLONEL DAVID P. BACZEWSKI
COLONEL JEFFREY W. BURKETT
COLONEL CONRAD C. CALDWELL III
COLONEL JEFFREY B. CASHMAN
COLONEL CHARLES W. CHAPPUIS
COLONEL JOEL A. CLARK
COLONEL PATRICK J. COBB
COLONEL THOMAS B. CUCCHI
COLONEL JOHN B. DANIEL
COLONEL GEORGE M. DEGNON
COLONEL WILLIAM D. DEHAES
COLONEL WILLIAM D. DOCKERY, JR.
COLONEL MICHAEL E. GUILLORY
COLONEL ANDREW E. HALTER
COLONEL TIMOTHY J. HARMESON
COLONEL PAUL G. HAVEL
COLONEL JILL L. HENDRA
COLONEL ALAN K. HODGDON
COLONEL JOSEPH M. JABARA
COLONEL WENDY K. JOHNSON
COLONEL TIMOTHY M. JONES
COLONEL THOMAS J. KENNETT
COLONEL KERRY L. MUEHLENBECK
COLONEL TIMOTHY A. MULLEN
COLONEL JOHN W. OGLE III
COLONEL RYAN T. OKAHARA
COLONEL THOMAS J. OWENS II
COLONEL RUSSELL A. RUSHE
COLONEL DAVID P. SAN CLEMENTE
COLONEL DIANA M. SHOOP
COLONEL JESSE T. SIMMONS, JR.
COLONEL DAVID A. SIMON
COLONEL MARK C. SNYDER
COLONEL JOHN G. SOTOS
COLONEL RONALD C. STAMPS
COLONEL RANDOLPH J. STAUDENRAUS
COLONEL FRANK H. STOKES
COLONEL SCOTT A. STUDER
COLONEL MICHAEL R. TAHERI
COLONEL RONALD B. TURK
COLONEL STEVEN C. WARREN
COLONEL ROGER E. WILLIAMS, JR.
COLONEL RONALD W. WILSON
COLONEL BRYAN F. WITEOF
COLONEL BRETT A. WYRICK
COLONEL RICKY G. YODER

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR APPOINTMENT IN THE GRADE INDICATED IN THE REGULAR AIR FORCE UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 531:

*To be major*

DARVIN E. WINTERS, JR.

THE FOLLOWING NAMED INDIVIDUALS FOR APPOINTMENT TO THE GRADES INDICATED IN THE REGULAR AIR FORCE UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 531:

*To be lieutenant colonel*

BRUCE E. STERNKE

*To be major*

BRIAN D. LAYTON
ELIZABETH M. F. LIBAO

### IN THE ARMY

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR REGULAR APPOINTMENT IN THE GRADE INDICATED IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 531:

*To be major*

JEFFREY A. UHERKA

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR REGULAR APPOINTMENT IN THE GRADE INDICATED IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY AS A CHAPLAIN UNDER TITLE 10, U.S. C., SECTIONS 531 AND 3064:

*To be major*

STEVEN K. WHITE

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICERS FOR APPOINTMENT IN THE GRADES INDICATED IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY NURSE CORPS UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTIONS 531 AND 3064:

*To be lieutenant colonel*

DANIEL B. THOMPSON

*To be major*

JOCHEBED B. ADEOSHIFOGUN
RENITA J. ELDERYETT
FESTINA R. HUMEDAWSON
MICHAEL W. KINSHELLA
TODD A. MORRIS

### IN THE MARINE CORPS

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR TEMPORARY APPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE INDICATED IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 6222:

*To be lieutenant colonel*

JASON K. FETTIG

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR TEMPORARY APPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE INDICATED IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 6222:

*To be major*

MICHELLE A. RAKERS

### IN THE NAVY

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR APPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE INDICATED IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 624:

*To be lieutenant commander*

OGWO U. OGWO

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR APPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE INDICATED IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 624:

*To be captain*

WILLIAM RABCHENIA

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICERS FOR TEMPORARY APPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE INDICATED IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 5721:

*To be lieutenant commander*

MATTHEW M. ANTHONY
JOHN T. APPELBAUM
KURT C. ASTROTH
MICHAEL L. BECKMAN
CHRISTOPHER G. BOEHM
MARTY E. BURNS
MARK W. CARTWRIGHT
MARIO G. CASTELLANOS
DONALD E. COOMES
KEVIN M. DORE
HENRY P. ESHENOUR
STEVEN L. EVANS, JR.
TIMOTHY A. FOX
RYAN C. GEORGE
LEIF E. GUNDERSON
SAMUEL F. HARTLEY
PHILLIP C. HERNDL
ISAIABENETTE E. INFANTE
AMEIAN JEREMIAH
BJORN A. JOHNSON
LAUREN M. JOHNSON
PHILLIP C. JOLLEY
JOSHUA C. KING
KENNETH M. KIRKWOOD
REED A. KITCHEN
WILLIAM E. KNIPS
KERRY M. MAJOR
MICHAEL C. MARSH
NATHAN P. MATHERLY
STEVEN G. MAY
ALEXANDER M. MCMAHON
JAMES T. MCRANDLE
MATTHEW J. MINCK
BRAD W. MUSKOPF
ROBERT C. NEMETH
PAUL G. ODANIEL
ART K. PALALAY
LEON W. PLATT, JR.
TIMOTHY L. REEDER
CHRISTOPHER V. SEIVERS
JEFFREY M. SKLADZIEN
JUSTIN B. SMITH
MATTHEW E. SMITH
ROBERT B. SUTTER
THOMAS A. WILLIAMS