United States of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 160 WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2014 No. 33

Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable BRIAN SCHATZ, a Senator from the State of Hawaii.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, we find joy in obeying Your commands. With all our hearts, we thank You for Your guidance that keeps us on the road of abundant living. Today, make our lawmakers instruments of Your providence, measuring up to the challenges of these momentous times. As they seek to honor Your great Name, transform their common days into transfiguring and redemptive moments. Cleanse the fountains of their hearts from all that defiles, making them fit vessels to be used for Your honor. Guide today's deliberations, debates, and decisions.

We pray in Your holy 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 bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, February 27, 2014.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable BRIAN SCHATZ, a Senator from the State of Hawaii, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. SCHATZ thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 309, the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The bill clerk read as follows:

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.

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 one hour. The majority will control the first half and the Republicans the final half.

Following morning business the Senate will resume consideration of S. 1982, the veterans benefits bill.

I filed cloture on the substitute amendment and the underlying bill. As a result the filing deadline for first-degree amendments is 10:30 this morning and for second-degree amendments it is 1:30 p.m.

At 2 p.m. there will be a series of votes in relation to the veterans bill. We also expect to consider the nomination of Michael Connor to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior today.

PROTECTING VETERANS

Mr. President, there are lots of issues on which Democrats and Republicans will always disagree. That is OK. But, historically, Democrats and Republicans have been able to agree on one issue: Congress should do everything in its power to protect those who risk their lives to protect our country.

I had hoped this work period would be more bipartisan; that the Senate could tackle issues and would be able to stop the political games we have seen so often from the minority.

That is why I scheduled floor time for a bill to expand health care and job training for veterans of the Armed Forces—a very, very comprehensive bill, worked on by the Veterans Affairs' Committee, led by Senator SANDERS. The bill is loaded, as Senator SANDERS and I discussed yesterday in detail, with Republican provisions that he put in the bill.

Democrats and Republicans alike should be able to support this bill, which is sponsored, as I have indicated, by Senator SANDERS from Vermont.

Democrats were even willing to work with our Republican colleagues to consider relevant amendments to this legislation. So it was disappointing—but, sadly, not surprising—when Republicans almost immediately injected base partisan politics into a debate over a bill that should—should—be bipartisan, insisting on an unrelated amendment on Iran that they knew would kill the bill.

I do not know what they say to the 26 veterans groups. Millions of veterans really supported this bill and did everything they could to help the chairman of the committee, the junior Senator from Vermont, to move this bill forward. But they did it on an unrelated amendment on Iran that they knew would kill the bill. I do not know all the reasons, but we had a number of speeches, especially one from Dr. COBURN, the junior Senator from Oklahoma, who came to the floor and had questions about the bill.

I did not agree with all of his assertions, but he has a right to dispute

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

Printed on recycled paper.

what is in the bill, and he wanted to offer amendments to the bill. We agreed he should be able to offer amendments to the bill, but the Republicans, I guess, are in turmoil internally and did not want him to be able to offer any amendments that they may have to vote for or vote against, so they figured the way to do it is to just kill the bill.

I hope all the veterans groups have witnessed this contortion the Republicans have done to defeat this bill—because it will be defeated. That was their aim from the very beginning.

Like our support for veterans, the Senate's Iran sanctions policy has historically been solidly bipartisan. The idea of Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon is unthinkable. Democrats and Republicans always worked together on this policy. Iran should not have nuclear capability. We all agree on that—I hope so at least. I know on this side of the aisle we do. But it seems Republicans are trying to erase that history and politicize an issue that has historically been above partisanship.

They are trying now—the Republicans—to mislead the American public by saying that a bipartisan majority supports moving forward with new sanctions right now. Of course, it is wrong. Absolutely, of course, it is wrong.

In fact, many Senators, including some who have cosponsored the new sanctions bill, believe we should not move forward with the bill at this time or on this important bill for veterans. It should not be used as an effort to kill this veterans bill.

But in addition to that, 10 committee chairs wrote a letter to me saying: Do not do anything now. They are some of the biggest supporters of Israel there are. But we also have Israel's strongest supporter, AIPAC, also agreeing it is not the time now to bring a sanctions package to the floor. AIPAC was unequivocal in its request for a delay on additional sanctions. In fact, this is what they said: ''Stopping the Iranian nuclear program should rest on bipartisan support and . . . there should not be a vote at this time on the measure.''

Many veterans groups have also come out against including the Iran amendment on this bill, including virtually every veterans organization but especially the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, consisting of millions and millions of veterans. We also have the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America saying: Do not do it at this time. We need help. We, the veterans, need help. This legislation would give us that help. Here is specifically what the American Legion said:

> 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.

But Iran should make no mistake. We know that. If they fail to comply with the current interim agreement or fail to make progress toward a comprehensive agreement eliminating their nuclear weapons development efforts, Congress will act without hesitation to pass additional sanctions. We have said that time and time again.

That decision will be made in the interest of our national security, not on a partisan ploy. There is too much at stake to play politics with our Nation's Iran policy. Likewise, Republicans should stop putting American veterans at risk and help Democrats pass this crucial legislation.

Shame on the Republicans for bringing base politics into a bill to help the veterans. I have learned that the Republicans here in the Senate have many different ways of saying no, but, as always, it is just plain obstruction, I am sorry to say, again, on a bill to help millions of veterans.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE IRS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today is an important day. It is the last day of the so-called comment period when Americans can officially register their opinions on the IRS's latest effort to suppress free speech. So far, nearly 100,000 comments have come through—100,000. Nearly every one I have seen is opposed.

Just to put things in perspective, that is basically the largest number of comments ever—ever—for a rule like this. Even the head of the IRS said he saw more comments on this proposal than ever before ''on any regulation,'' and that was 70,000 comments ago; 70,000 comments ago the Commissioner of the IRS said this was the most comments he had seen on any regulation.

So people are certainly making their voices heard—and loudly—and the message they are broadcasting is pretty clear: Leave the First Amendment alone. Leave it alone. Get out of the censorship and harassment business. Stick to the job you are actually supposed to be doing.

Let's be clear. The folks who are logging opinions like these run straight across the political spectrum.

Labor unions are upset. Business organizations are upset. Civil liberties activists are upset. Taxpayer groups are upset. Grassroots groups right across the political map are upset at what they view as an assault on their First Amendment rights. All you have to do is read their own words.

One group of primarily left-leaning First Amendment advocates said the new regulation would ''impose serious burdens on free speech and hinder the democratic processes it serves.''

An official with the ACLU described the IRS's proposed regulation as creating ''the worst of all worlds.'' The proposal, he wrote, could ''seriously chill legitimate issue advocacy from nonprofits on [both] the right and left,'' and would ''disproportionately affect small, poor nonprofits that cannot afford the legal counsel to guarantee compliance. . . . ''

Here is what one labor union had to say:

> Given the history of misuse and abuse of the IRS' immense powers in the not-so-distant past, it is disappointing and disturbing that this fundamental principle has been forgotten and that this . . . [regulation] is the IRS' proposed response to its recent missteps.

So left, right, center—folks understand what a threat this rule poses to the most cherished of civil liberties.

They also realize that a group the administration favors today could easily become a group the IRS targets tomorrow. That is why this fight is so important, why it is so inappropriate to hand this kind of power to any administration. I do not care what party the President is in. That is why I, along with several of my colleagues, recently sent a letter to the new Commissioner of the IRS explaining in some detail why the agency's proposal was such a bad idea, a terrible idea.

In that letter we also reminded the Commissioner of something else: The ball is in his court on this one. The ball is in his court. He could stop this rule tomorrow. And given the comments he made about restoring integrity to the IRS when the Senate voted to confirm him, that is exactly what we expect of him. In fact, that was essentially the mandate on which he was confirmed.

So here is the choice before him. This is the choice the Commissioner of the IRS has. He can either fulfill that mandate to the American people by restoring integrity to an agency they no longer trust, he can be a hero and say no to those who are pressuring him to crack down on the First Amendment rights of ordinary citizens—that is what the IRS Commissioner told Richard Nixon. He said: I am not going to cooperate with your efforts to target your enemies—or he can serve political masters over in the White House, and he can implement regulations that would erode our most fundamental civil liberties, regulations that would almost certainly lead to the harassment of conservative groups today and, quite possibly, the harassment of left-leaning groups in the future. In fact, a recent letter Representative CAMP received from the Treasury Department appears to suggest that unions in particular have a lot to fear from this proposal.

So, look. Now is the time to act. America's free speech advocates are standing with one voice. Thousands upon thousands made their voices heard in the opinion process. I suspect millions more are right there with them in spirit. Some who oppose this rule picked the President in the last election. Some voted for his opponent. Some may have even cast a ballot for another person entirely. But what unites us is our love of the liberties that have allowed Americans to disagree civilly for centuries.

Commissioner Koskinen, do the right thing. Stop this regulation.

IRAN

Later today the Senate will vote on the motions related to S. 1982, a bill

that was not considered in committee, that greatly expands spending without any realistic offset and would vastly overwhelm the Veterans' Administration health care system. It is shameful that Senate Democrats would seek to score political points by rushing to the floor a bill which the committee did not consider and which could otherwise have been handled in a bipartisan manner through the regular order.

Unfortunately, it has become standard practice around here for the majority to pursue partisan legislation in a sort of ''take it or leave it'' manner, so it is unsurprising that nobody other than the majority leader and the committee chairman have been allowed the opportunity to amend the bill. Senators on both sides have been shut out of the legislative process. For example, we cannot even vote on the ranking member's veterans amendment—legislation I support—which will not add to the deficit. I am a cosponsor of this legislation, which provides full COLA restoration for servicemembers entering the military in 2014, provides advanced appropriations for VA mandatory accounts, improves services and benefits for victims of military sexual trauma, enhances benefits for survivors and dependents of disabled veterans, encourages the hiring of veterans, and, unlike the Sanders bill, is fully paid for.

As for the Iran sanctions language in the Burr amendment, as I noted yesterday, there is significant disagreement between the President and many Members from both parties in both the House and the Senate concerning the best way to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

The Iranian regime has carried out its best attempt at a charm offensive to forestall not only the implementation but the legislative consideration of even tougher sanctions should the regime fail to fulfill its commitments according to November's interim agreement.

The interim agreement included a Joint Plan of Action, agreed to by Iran. According to that Joint Plan of Action, the U.S. administration, acting consistent with the respective roles of the President and the Congress, will refrain from imposing new nuclear-related sanctions. The agreement is spelled out clearly to the Iranians: Acting consistent with our respective roles. The Iranians can read the plain language and understand that this Congress did not agree to renounce additional sanctions. We did not agree to do that. Yet the majority leader is determined not to allow a single vote on the Kirk-Menendez bill, which could be fully debated by this body prior to a vote. We will not have that debate, apparently, nor will we vote on any amendments related to the bill before us.

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 1 hour, with Senators permitted in speak therein 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.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Mexico.

VETERANS LEGISLATION

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, lest we forget, more than 30,000 brave Americans are still serving in harm's way in Afghanistan. Hundreds of thousands of men and women in uniform are serving around the world. They all volunteered. In return for their volunteerism, we made a number of promises. The ability to maintain the strongest and most dedicated military force in the world depends on our Nation's ability to keep those promises.

I am a proud cosponsor of the legislation being debated this week, S. 1982, which is perhaps the most significant veterans legislation to come before Congress in many years. This legislation has the strong support of virtually every veterans organization in the country, including the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, the Vietnam Veterans of America, and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. These organizations support the bill because it renews our promise to our veterans.

I am very fortunate to represent the State of New Mexico, which has one of the highest rates of military volunteerism in the Nation. New Mexico, a small State of 2 million people, is home to more than 170,000 veterans, and 2,000 New Mexicans endured the Bataan Death March during World War II.

New Mexico is home to many of our Nation's finest military installations: Kirtland Air Force Base, the Air Force's sixth largest base, with over 100 partners and a strategic role in ensuring our Nation's safe, secure, and reliable nuclear weapons complex; Cannon Air Force Base, the fastest growing Air Force base in the country, leading the fight in special operations; Holloman Air Force Base, an indispensable Air Force base with unparalleled airspace now and into the future; and White Sands Missile Range, the largest military installation in the Nation, with a testing and training environment that is unmatched anywhere in the world.

Additionally, New Mexico's National Guard employs roughly 3,800 full-time and part-time military personnel.

Collectively, there are 18,000 military personnel serving today in New Mexico. Volunteerism is not simply a career choice for New Mexicans; it is a way of life. It is ingrained in our State's rich history of putting community and country first.

The bill before us today renews our promise to all of them and to all of those who are willing to lay down their lives for their country. It provides benefits to all generations of veterans and their families, and it eliminates the cost-of-living adjustment penalty on military retirees.

The legislation incorporates bills and ideas from both Democrats and Republicans to address the disability claims backlog, including one of my own. Across New Mexico I have heard from too many veterans who are frustrated with the delays they experience in receiving their disability benefits.

Last June Senator HELLER of Nevada and I introduced the Veterans Benefits Claims Faster Filing Act, which requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to ensure that every veteran is informed of the vast differences in times for processing compensation claims when filing a fully developed claim versus a non-fully developed paper claim.

It takes, on average, 113 days for veterans to receive a final disability rating if they file a fully developed claim online. Compare that to over a year if they file a non-fully developed paper claim. Filing claims online through the Fully Developed Claims Program accelerates turnaround time and makes processing more efficient. Doing so also provides an additional year of retroactive benefits as an incentive to veterans who file a fully developed claim.

The Faster Filing Act and other legislative efforts represent a collective effort to reduce the backlog and ensure that our veterans receive the benefits they have earned.

I am also proud to have cosponsored legislation introduced by my colleague from Alaska Senator BEGICH to provide advanced appropriations for all—all—VA spending accounts. This would ensure that veterans receive uninterrupted access to the benefits they have earned, even in the midst of a government shutdown such as the one that so irresponsibly occurred last fall. It is unacceptable that veterans would fall victim to the partisan politics of a government shutdown. The legislation today includes a fix to ensure that never happens again.

The bill also helps put veterans back to work. It reauthorizes a 2-year extension for the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, which retrains unemployed veterans for high-demand occupations. It requires the VA to establish a 3-year program to provide young veterans under 30 the opportunity to serve in an internship that would pair veterans with private sector employers so they can gain civilian work experience.

The bill expands the VA's successful caregivers program to provide caregiver benefits to veterans of all generations, in a similar manner as post-9/11 veterans.

America's service men and women consider our Nation's principles important enough to defend them against all enemies and at any cost. They volunteer to do so. But volunteerism only works if we fulfill our promises. Few sacrifices are as selfless as those our military men and women make in defense of this Nation. We owe them more than a debt of gratitude; we owe them action in both our words and our deeds. This bill backs our word with action. It fulfills our promises. I hope we see it pass this week.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, on Tuesday I came to the floor to talk about one issue that we are rarely divided on in this building; that is, our duty to keep the promises we have made to provide not only care but opportunity to all those who have honorably served in our Nation's Armed Forces.

The comprehensive veterans legislation that is now before us is really the test for many Members of Congress. Can we all put politics aside for the good of our Nation's veterans to keep that promise? Can we show these heroes that despite our differences, we will work as diligently toward getting them the benefits and care they have earned as they worked for our Nation?

Now, unfortunately, some of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are indicating they would now prefer to put politics over promises, under the guise of an alternative to this bill. Given what we have seen recently on other bills—supported, by the way, by a majority of Americans—we should not be surprised, but I truly did think and hope this bill would be a different story because it contains ideas from both Democrats and Republicans and because this is an issue which has historically united this body and because we have all pledged to do whatever it takes on behalf of our veterans.

So once again where we are today is that some of our colleagues have decided to use unrelated issues to sour this entire effort for our veterans and their families who stand to benefit the most from this comprehensive legislation we are offering.

With their alternative bill they have now proposed to strip away life-changing programs for veterans who are looking to take the skills they learned on the battlefield to the boardroom. With this alternative, they have decided to halt the expansion of opportunities for our caregivers who are integral to the health and well-being of some of our most vulnerable heroes.

But among these and many other examples of the Republican effort to derail this landmark legislation, there is one issue I find most egregious; that is, their shameful opposition to provide our catastrophically wounded heroes with access to reproductive services they so desperately need to start a family.

This shouldn't be a political issue. This is about giving veterans who have sacrificed everything every option we have to help them fulfill a simple dream of starting a family.

As we all know, our men and women in uniform have become increasingly susceptible to reproductive, spinal, and traumatic brain injuries due to the changing weapons of war. But as we know, thanks to modern medicine, many of these servicemembers are being kept alive and they are returning home. In fact, as of the new year, there are 2,348 servicemembers who are living with reproductive, urinary or pelvic injuries as a result of this war. Similar to so many of our veterans, these men and women come home and want to return to their lives. They want to find employment and, importantly, they want to start a family.

Yet what they find when they go to the VA is that the fertility services that are available don't meet their extremely complex needs. In fact, veterans who suffer from these injuries find that the VA is specifically barred from providing more advanced assisted reproductive techniques such as IVF. They are told, despite the fact that they have made such an extreme sacrifice for all of us, we cannot provide them with the medical services they need simply to start a family.

These are families such as SSG Matt Keil and his wife Tracy. Despite returning home from Iraq as a quadriplegic, Staff Sergeant Keil and Tracy started talking about exploring the possibility of starting a family together, but because his injuries prevented him from having children naturally, Tracy turned to the VA and began to explore her options for fertility treatments. But because of that VA ban they were told no and turned away. They were out of options, and the Keils decided this was important enough to them that they were willing to pay out-of-pocket, out of their own pockets, for IVF treatment in the private sector to the tune of $32,000 per round of treatment.

Thankfully, Staff Sergeant Keil and Tracy welcomed twins Matthew and Faith into the world after only one round of treatment.

Tracy said after their birth:

> The day we had our children something changed in both of us. This is exactly what we had always wanted, our dreams had arrived.
>
> The VA, Congress and the American people have said countless times that they want to do everything they can to support my husband or make him feel whole again and this is your chance.
>
> Having a family is exactly what we needed to feel whole again. Please help us make these changes so that other families can share in this experience.

Tracy and Matt aren't alone. There are many men and women out there who share this common thread of a desperate desire to fulfill their dream of starting a family, only to find that the catastrophic wounds they sustained while defending our country are now preventing them from seeing that dream through.

It shouldn't be that way. Unfortunately, Republicans are indicating they will not join us today in overturning this absurd and antiquated ban. Apparently, they would rather our Nation's heroes spend tens of thousands of dollars of their own money in the private sector to get the advanced reproductive treatments they need to start a family. They don't see the problem in letting our veterans' marriages dissolve because of the stress of infertility, in combination of course with the stress of readjusting to life after such a severe injury, driving relationships to a breaking point.

Any servicemember who sustains this type of extremely serious injury deserves a lot more. We came very close actually to making this bill a reality in the last Congress. In fact, Tracy Keil, whom I just talked about, watched from the gallery when we unanimously passed this legislation—unanimously.

But I am, once again, imploring Republicans to stand and explain to our men and women in uniform—who I know are paying very close attention to this debate—why they now want to turn their backs on the catastrophic, reproductive wounds that have become a signature of these wars.

Only yesterday I spoke to a crowded room of heroes from Disabled American Veterans and told them the heartbreaking story of the Keil family that I just shared and why this legislation is so important. If their cheers and applause are any indication, I would say they wholeheartedly agree our women veterans deserve this, our male veterans deserve this, and certainly our military families deserve this.

I am on the floor to ask my colleagues a simple question: Are you willing to tell those brave men and women who didn't ask those questions when they were put in harm's way that you are going to let politics get in the way of our commitment to them?

The catastrophic wounds we have seen from injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan have meant that our veterans' dreams to start a family have been put on hold because of the tremendous cost of IVF services. We believe that is a cost of war, and we believe the VA absolutely should cover it, and it is unacceptable to let unrelated issues stand in the way.

Even the major veterans service organizations and their leaders have said to us that issues such as the Iran sanctions—that the other side wants to offer—have no place in this comprehensive veterans legislation, people such as American Legion Commander Daniel Dellinger, who said: ''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,'' or IAVA founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff, who called this

comprehensive legislation ''a game changer that will change the trajectory for millions of veterans for decades to come.''

As serious and as timely as they may be, unrelated issues such as Iran sanctions are just calculated attempts to dismantle our bipartisan effort to expand health care, education opportunities, employment, and benefits for our Nation's heroes. We can't allow our commitment to them to lapse or get caught up in separate issues of political grandstanding.

I thank the Senator from Vermont and all of his staff for their tireless work on this comprehensive legislation they have brought to the floor. I truly hope our colleagues will reconsider opposing this commonsense and important step to give those who have sacrificed everything the reproductive treatments they need to start a family.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, may I inquire how much time remains for the Democrats during morning business?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Twelve minutes remain.

Mr. KAINE. I ask unanimous consent to use the remainder of the Democrats' time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection.

SYRIA

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I rise this morning to speak about the widening dimensions of the slaughter in Syria. A country of 23 million people, a proud country, is being transformed before our eyes into skeletons, refugees, and ghosts.

Three million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries. That number will likely exceed 4 million by the end of the year. Nearly 7 million Syrians are refugees within their own country, driven from their homes by the atrocities of the Assad regime. More than 130,000 innocent people have lost their lives during the 3-year civil war. We are witnessing one of the greatest humanitarian crises since World War II, and it can be stopped.

Last summer my Committee on Armed Services colleague Senator ANGUS KING of Maine and I visited Turkey and Jordan to explore the dimension of the refugee crisis in both of those nations. We visited refugee camps and talked to government leaders and NGOs about the damaged lives and the stressed communities that result from this unprecedented displacement of Syrians.

Last week the Senator from Maine and I visited Lebanon to see the scale of the Syrian crisis in that country. In a country of only slightly more than 4 million people, there are already over 1 million Syrian refugees who have fled into Lebanon over the last 3 years, one in four. Think of the scale of that refugee crisis. If we were to receive in the United States war refugees at that scale, it would be 75 to 80 million people, nearly one in four.

In Lebanon last week we met with government leaders, NGOs, and the U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees. What we learned is staggering. The Lebanese people have been unbelievably resilient and welcoming, almost beyond the point of belief. The water and health infrastructure of that Nation is strained to the breaking point.

The Lebanese economy, already fragile, is teetering. Schools in Lebanon now operate on double shifts with Lebanese children in the morning and refugee children in the afternoon, accommodating tens of thousands of refugee children, with more coming every day.

The decision by the Lebanese terrorist militia Hezbollah to go all in to support the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad has led to a wave of extremist bombings against Hezbollah-connected sites and leaders within Lebanon in which many civilians are casualties. Senator KING and I witnessed a bombing in downtown Beirut while we were there, seeing it miles away. Many in our group saw the explosion, saw the smoke rise. We felt certain that our meetings would be canceled that day, but one of the most grim aspects of our trip is a bombing, a suicide bombing that killed 5 people and injured nearly 100, caused no one to change their daily routine. That is what life is in Lebanon largely because of the Syrian civil war.

The crisis extends beyond Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. Refugees are streaming into nearby Iraq by the thousands—30,000 in 1 day in August—exacerbating the deterioration of that country's stability and drawing it deeper into sectarian conflict.

This photo is on the Iraq border with Syria, and we see these refugees stretching into the distance in the hills beyond. This is what is happening with all of the neighboring countries to Syria.

The United States is the largest provider of assistance to the refugees who have fled outside of Syria. We have provided $1.3 billion in aid thus far, $340 million in Lebanon alone, but getting relief into Syria is the next challenge.

The conditions in Syria are even worse than the conditions I described in Lebanon. Nearly 7 million Syrians are displaced within their own country, more than 9 million Syrians need humanitarian aid, but they have not been able to receive basic humanitarian aid, food, and medicine due to the actions of the Bashar al-Assad regime and also due to the complicity of the regime's patron, Russia.

The denial of humanitarian aid is a war crime, pure and simple. Thousands are dying of starvation. Cases of tuberculosis, polio, typhoid, and other diseases are expanding at an exponential rate. None of this is an accident. The Assad regime is using forced starvation and forced sieges as a weapon to destroy the Syrian people.

Last month I met in the Senate with Syrians who had survived the chemical weapons attacks carried out by the Assad regime in August of 2013. They described in gruesome detail what they and their families, many young children, endured in August. But the most shocking moment of the interview came when a 22-year-old survivor, who had fled Syria through Lebanon, said if she had to pick, she would rather die a death because of chemical weapons than be hit by a barrel bomb or starved to death because death by chemical weapons would be quicker.

In recent weeks nothing has epitomized the brutality of the regime more than the use of these barrel bombs. The bombs are crude weapons. They are simple oil drums that are filled with shrapnel and explosives. Helicopters often deliver the weapons, and helicopters often hover over neighborhoods for minutes to just scare everyone who knows what is coming. The barrel bombs drop. They explode shrapnel and level neighborhoods.

This is an example of a neighborhood in Aleppo. At one point hundreds were killed when barrel bombs were dropped on Aleppo earlier this month. We see the size and scope of the devastation and see families and their children fleeing the area in the aftermath of a barrel bomb, and this is going on every day in Syria. Secretary Kerry has rightly called these barrel bomb attacks unacceptable and barbaric.

The primary architect of these crimes is Bashar Assad, but he has a patron who funds and supports what he does and who has the ability to stop the atrocities. Russia is Assad's principal support, and since the start of the Syrian civil war Russia has shown it is complicit in these war crimes. But it is also capable of stopping them.

In the United Nations Russia has used its veto power and threat of veto on the Security Council numerous times to block international action to help the Syrian people. Three of these vetoes were used to block basic humanitarian aid. What possible reason could any civilized nation have to deny war victims food and medical supplies?

But Russia has shown it can be persuaded or shamed into taking action to promote the basic safety of the Syrian citizens. In August, with the threat of U.S. military action to punish the Assad regime for use of chemical weapons against its own civilians, Russia realized it could no longer be the sole global apologist for this atrocity. So it persuaded Syria to admit to the crime, acknowledge the existence of a stockpile, and commit to the complete destruction of these inhumane weapons. While that process has been slow, the weaponry has not been used since Russia realized the world would not tolerate such a clear violation of international law.

Similarly, after repeatedly blocking U.N. action to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria, Russia decided, in the midst of the Sochi Olympics, it could

no longer stand in the way of basic humanitarian aid. The eyes of the world were on it and it knew it could no longer be seen as the sole obstacle blocking people from receiving food and medicine. So it finally agreed to U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139 calling for the provision of humanitarian aid inside Syria.

When Russia could no longer comfortably block progress, when the eyes of the world were on it in the middle of the Olympics last week, it finally joined with the rest of the world in calling on Syria to allow aid to its people. In the aftermath of that resolution, the real test lies ahead, because those were words on paper and now we must see whether the aid will be delivered.

This is the situation in Syria today. This is a recent photo from a suburb of Damascus that has been under siege by the Assad regime without access to food and basic medical care. Witness this photo. Look at the destruction; look at the rubble; look at the throng of hungry people stretching to oblivion in the distance. See the hunger in their faces and bodies, and look at the questions in their eyes. It is incumbent upon the Syrian regime to allow unhindered access of humanitarian aid to all Syrians. Opposition groups have that same obligation.

In conclusion, let me say a final word about Russian responsibility to respond to these poor Syrian people. When the Russian Government and its people see this picture, it should remind them of their own history. During the siege of Leningrad during World War II, the Nazis deliberately used these same techniques and tactics—forced starvation and siege—as a tactic of war to cause horrible deprivation to the Russian population of that city. Russians should look in the eyes of these victims of intentional starvation and grapple with their responsibility to them.

Russia can cause the Assad regime, just as it did in August, to open access so these people can have food and medicine. Russia has finally agreed to words on paper at the U.N., but the world will watch the actions of this nation.

One final thought. When Senator KING and I were traveling last week in the Middle East, we went to other countries as well. In one country, where we are engaged in a back-and-forth over the provision of U.S. military assistance, where we are raising what we think are legitimate questions about some democracy reforms this nation needs to undertake if we are to be better and better partners, a leader of that nation said to me: If the United States won't provide assistance, then we will find a way to make Russia our partner.

Well, to anyone who thinks making Russia your partner is a good thing, you ought to look at this photo too, because this is what has become of Syria choosing Russia as its principal partner. Is this the kind of partner you want?

We must keep the spotlight on these atrocities; we must keep the spotlight on Assad's responsibility; we must keep the spotlight on Russia's complicity to bring an end to these atrocities and work with other nations to find a resolution to the Syrian civil war.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, first of all, I want to say I am glad Senator KAINE has been here talking about this important issue today—the tragedy of Syria, the tragedy of the barrel bombs, this hideous way to kill people where you fly over with helicopters and first terrorize people who are wondering where you are going to drop these weapons, and then basically shove them out the side door of a helicopter, and the Russian complicity in this.

We are seeing even today that Russia is beginning to flex its muscles as it relates to the people of Ukraine. I had the Prime Minister from Georgia in to see me on Monday, and of course the day the Olympics were over the Russians were there the next day, more aggressively, partitioning off that part of Georgia they have seized in the last couple of years, the same argument they could easily try to make in Ukraine.

Ukraine, of the Soviet satellite states, is the one that has potentially the most future positive impact on Russia, if they could get it back. The countries of the West, the countries of the European Union, and the United States should be aggressively uniting and trying to reinforce the desire for people in Ukraine to want to have economic freedom and want to have personal freedom, and sending the strongest possible message against those who work against that, whether they are in Russia or whether they were complicit in the activities of Ukraine.

With this sudden moving around of Russian troops today, unannounced until just the last few hours that they would be maneuvering, it is usually no coincidence the Russians are moving troops around at a time of crisis on their borders. We should be very vigilant in sending the message of freedom, the message of supporting people who want freedom.

My concern about Syria is that our policy hasn't worked there either and, frankly, our policy hasn't worked in such a way that it makes it hard for us now to say there will be consequences for Russia if something happens in Ukraine. We need to be sure the world knows, when the United States talks about consequences, that there will be consequences, they will be meaningful, they will be certain, and that things such as are happening in Syria can't be allowed to continue, and worse things, such as those happening in Ukraine, can't be allowed to happen.

HEALTH CARE

I came to the floor today to talk about health care again. I heard the leader's comments over the weekend—Senator REID's comments—where he is referring to the President's health care plan. He said: There are plenty of horror stories being told. Then Senator REID said: They are, all of them, untrue. All of them are untrue.

I don't think anybody has come to the floor more frequently than I have in the last 2 months, 3 months, 10 weeks. I believe I have been coming to the floor every week, the 10 weeks we were in session, with stories from Missourians. We call them. We talk to them about it. We say: Senator BLUNT is going to the floor and he is going to talk about what you have talked to us about. He would like to mention your first name, where you are from, but if you don't want him to do that, he won't do that. In virtually every case, they say: We told you these stories because we want other people to know. We want people to know how we are being affected by the President's health care bill.

They seem to have plenty of facts backing them up, way beyond Senator REID's assertion that all of them are untrue. They are not all untrue. In fact, I have every reason to believe they are all true, and there are many more stories out there to be told.

Today I wanted to talk about the changes in Medicare Advantage and I had to have some discussion with our team, and they asked: Well, how many of these stories are you not going to tell this week if you just tell the stories about Medicare Advantage? If you are in agreement with Senator REID's view of the world, I guess you think the active imagination of Missourians is running wild, because they are contacting our office constantly telling us about higher premiums, higher deductibles, insurance they used to have that worked and insurance that doesn't work, and it doesn't work because the Federal Government, without thinking through the goal of trying to be sure more people had access to insurance, didn't think about all of the unintended consequences.

The latest broken promise—I am afraid it won't be the last; I wish it would be the last broken promise, but it won't be the last, I suspect—relates to the 15 million people in America who have Medicare Advantage—something they liked and something they are not going to be able to have, in many cases, the way they used to have it. This is another application of that promise of if you like your insurance, you can keep it. Well, all the 15 million Americans who have Medicare Advantage, many of them, are going to find they can't keep it. And before this is over, all of them may find out they can't keep it.

The President's health care plan has already cut hundreds of billions of dollars from Medicare—not to save Medicare but to fund the new program. Everybody knows Medicare is one of the

great challenges we have going forward. How are we going to maintain Medicare? Only in Washington would you be able to get by with saying: Medicare is in real trouble, so let's cut it to start another program. This is the only place in America you wouldn't be laughed off the city council dais or off the legislative floor if you said: We have this one program that is in big trouble. We are not going to do anything to reform it, we are just going to cut it so we can start another program. Yet that is what has happened here.

We have already cut Medicare by $300 billion—that is Medicare Advantage—and on top of this cut to Medicare Advantage we now see that plans are being changed, and they are being changed in significant ways.

Why did we have Medicare Advantage for States such as mine—the State of Missouri—with lots of rural areas, lots of rural hospitals, without always having competitive health care providers? Medicare Advantage provided the competition. It was that competition that made Medicare Advantage and Medicare Part D work and made them work at much less cost than anybody had anticipated. The marketplace works if you focus on a competitive marketplace rather than trying to run health care to be sure there is competition out there. That is what Medicare Advantage did. In our State, 1 out of 4 people on Medicare is on Medicare Advantage—237,000 Missourians on Medicare Advantage.

On February 14, I joined my colleagues in urging CMS not to make any more cuts to Medicare Advantage. There were 40 of us who signed that letter, and 19 of the 40 Senators who signed that letter were Democrats, with 21 Republicans. So there is a pretty bipartisan sense that something must be happening out there to hurt these programs. That is true, not untrue.

Why would we continue to do that? I don't know. So I have joined the Republican leaders in a letter this week calling on Secretary Sebelius to stop moving forward with these misguided policies that do things that impact people on Medicare Advantage; that do things that impact people who had health insurance with a deductible they could afford but now no longer have.

The administration's proposals continue once again to contradict the promise that if you had health care you liked, you could keep your health care policy; that if you had doctors you liked, you could keep your doctors. More and more people are seeing that is not true.

These many stories I have heard I firmly believe to be true, not untrue, no matter what the majority leader of the Senate might have said. Let me share a few of those today as I move toward the conclusion of what I want to talk about today.

Darcie from Kansas City, MO, is a registered nurse and works with Medicare patients daily. She sees firsthand the effect the rising expenses on Medicare Advantage are having on people she deals with. This is a quote from her letter:

> Our seniors and other Medicare Advantage members should not, as they already do, have to make choices between paying for medicines and other healthcare related expenses or food or housing expenses.
>
> I hope you are able to see the bigger picture, as I do, as a 30-year-old professional nurse who is on the frontlines each and every day taking care of these individuals and their families.

This sounds truthful to me.

Edward and his wife, from Saint Peters, MO, live on a fixed income. He said:

> My wife and I are retired seniors living on a fixed income. I have Medicare Advantage, which is provided by Mercy—a Missouri based health insurance company. I am told I will lose coverage next year due to ObamaCare cuts. Why must the cost of ObamaCare—which Missourians did not want—be paid by cuts to seniors? Please change the ObamaCare law to leave Medicare Advantage alone.

Again, 19 Democrats and 21 Republicans signed a letter last week asking the same question. This letter didn't even say: Go back and reverse what you have done. Just stop making these cuts being made right now.

Ronald from Raytown, MO, says his copay has increased as a result of the administration's cuts to Medicare Advantage plans.

> Please protect our Medicare Advantage plans. As you know, Medicare is presently underfunded. I do not appreciate those that permit Obama to willfully take [hundreds of billions of] dollars that we seniors have paid into Medicare and use those monies to fund ObamaCare. I am counting on you to protect our Medicare Advantage plans and realize that the less government involvement in our Medicare Advantage plans, the more efficient the plan. As a result of ObamaCare, my copay has increased.

My guess is Ronald knows whether or not his copay has increased. In speaking with him, I am certainly persuaded that the facts he is presenting—like the other people we are talking about today—are absolutely true.

Jennifer from Blue Springs, MO, says:

> My husband and I are both on Medicare already . . . the co-pays for our ''Medicare Advantage'' plans have doubled and, in some cases, tripled from 2013 to 2014 . . . [and that is why I'm responding with a nightmare story].

The other thing Jennifer said is she and her husband are retired. They are musicians, and they had a business where they would go to nursing homes and play gospel music just for their expenses. She points out that because of the increased health care costs, nursing homes no longer have room in their budget for something that is entertaining, such as live gospel music. The reverberations of what happens when the government decides that the government is better prepared to manage not just Medicare and Medicaid—as if we didn't have enough challenges already—but 16 percent or 17 percent of the economy are seen out there every day.

I certainly believe there have to be some people who are benefiting from this, but the numbers don't suggest that the overall benefit is nearly as good as the overall damage: people losing insurance at greater numbers than people getting insurance; premiums going up more than going down; deductibles rising.

It would be nice for those who supported this to convince people that all these stories are untrue, but I think too many people have true stories to tell for their neighbors and their friends not to realize what is happening because of this government interference with a health care system that was working instead of doing the handful of things we could have done to make the best health care system in the world work better. They were there. They were offered. The President knew they were there. That is not the course we followed, and the course we are following is not leading to a place where most Americans want to be.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, may I inquire what the order is in morning business relative to time?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 15 minutes remaining on the Republican side.

IRAN

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I appreciate this opportunity to come to the floor to speak about a different subject but one which is imminent and necessary for us to consider; that is, the current Iranian sanctions issue.

Back in 2007, when Iran had ''only'' about 700 centrifuges spinning to enrich uranium, we—and by ''we,'' I mean nearly the entire international community—determined that the behavior by the Iranian regime was simply too dangerous to tolerate. The U.N. Security Council began the process of passing a series of resolutions demanding that Iran stop enriching uranium entirely. The United States, led by many here in the Senate, began the very careful and painstaking process of amassing an international coalition to back increasingly tough sanctions, all aimed explicitly at forcing the Iranian regime to end enrichment activities.

The reason for this was because we believed a nuclear weapons-capable or -armed Iran posed an imminent threat not just to the Middle East but to the world community. That was the consensus agreed to by the world community and supported by resolution after resolution from the Security Council of the United Nations and by proclamations by not only our country but by countries around the world.

The entire effort had, for some years, been devoted entirely to ending uranium enrichment activities. The consensus was that nuclear weapon possession or capability posed unacceptable

consequences. Now that goal is nowhere in sight. Neither the interim agreement currently being employed, nor the administration, nor any of the negotiating partners even refer to these resolutions or this multiyear strategy of achieving the objective we set out to accomplish. The objective was that Iran would cease enrichment of uranium, which could be used to achieve nuclear weapons capability. This goal has suddenly been totally abandoned.

The current interim agreement explicitly concedes to the Iranians their right to continue enrichment activities with only meager limitations, all of which can be reversed by the mullahs in Iran in an instant. The mullahs in Iran boast publicly of this great negotiating victory for them, which goes against everything we have been trying to do for the past 6 or 7 years.

It seems unassailable that Iran came to the negotiating table at long last directly as a consequence of the hardship that was achieved by these international economic sanctions that were imposed on this regime. They resisted coming to the negotiating table until these sanctions really started to hit home.

But what is equally clear is that the regime wants sanctions relief and has sought this interim deal to accomplish it—and unfortunately, we have given it to them. And what do we get in return? What we get in return is having negotiated away our very core purpose for doing this in the first place. Instead of using our leverage to continue the progress we had made to bring Iran to cease uranium enrichment, we blunted our very best leverage and our very best tool. Instead of pressing our long-term advantage, we have begun to relieve the pressure on Iran to cease their efforts to gain nuclear weapon capability. And why have we abandoned our goal to stop uranium enrichment? Because the Iranian negotiating team has told us they would never tolerate an end to their long, expensive path to an enrichment industry.

So here is my central conviction on this matter: If those on the other side of the table tell us in advance that our long-held conviction and purpose is asking too much, instead of meekly complying with their request, then we must increase pressure until they change their minds, not abandon our own goal because it is perceived as too tough.

So what have we bought with this interim agreement? According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, of which I used to be a part, the main practical consequence of this claimed ''freezing'' is that the time Iran now needs to produce a critical mass of highly enriched uranium—20 kilograms—with current centrifuges has gone from an estimated 59 days to 63 days. What did we gain from the agreement? Four days—four days longer that it will take Iran, once they flip the switch, to get highly enriched uranium, which allows them nuclear capability.

It seems clear that among Iran's principal objectives now is to break apart the strong international consensus we have worked so hard over so many years to forge. Prospects for Iran to do so look pretty darned good. Clearly Iran has not lived up to what they agreed to do or what we asked them to do. But there seems to be no prospect in place for our returning to sanctions unless the Senate, on a bipartisan basis—and there is bipartisan support for this—is able to impose the next round of sanctions should this interim agreement not achieve its objectives. Yet we are currently being blocked from bringing this legislation to the floor.

I repeat: This is bipartisan legislation led by Senator MENENDEZ of New Jersey and those who have been actively engaged and involved. But now we are being asked to stand down. We are not even given a chance to exercise our vote on this, which we are attempting to add to the pending legislation here. Again, delay, delay, delay is putting us in a position of essentially conceding to the Iranians what they want and giving them the opportunity to continue to pursue their quest for nuclear weapons capability.

Obviously, for them, it is just fine if they can turn the protracted uncertainty and gradual sanctions relief into a series of lesser agreements. But for us, more interim agreements will mean our allies will become accustomed to these gradual changes and the increasing commerce in Iranian oil. They will become less inclined to again reverse course almost regardless of Iranian actions. Following that prolonged process, we confront a stronger Iran but a weaker international coalition opposed to Iranian nuclear ambitions. Iranian ambitions and capabilities will grow, our efforts to halt the Iranian quest for nuclear capability will diminish, and we will then be left with a choice of containing or taking military action against a nuclear-capable, if not nuclear-armed, Iran.

The President has said repeatedly that ''containment'' is not an option. It is not for me either. Since he also said military force is an option, it seems clear to me this current course is more likely to bring us to that stark point than to a negotiated settlement.

We must be determined to do what we can in the Senate to prevent us from reaching that point. Not only must we refocus our government and other friendly governments on the need to eliminate Iran's nuclear infrastructure in any final agreement—no matter how difficult that might be—we must also oppose Iran's likely intentions to prolong the negotiation process intended to continue to weaken our coalition.

The Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act that I have cosponsored will give us great leverage in doing that. It will make it clear that the Senate will not support playing Iran's game any longer than we already have.

I deeply regret that we are not being given the opportunity to debate this issue before the American people and among ourselves, that we are not allowed to have a vote in the Senate as to whether our current policy that this administration is pursuing is the right policy to achieve the goal which we all agreed to.

The last four Presidents—two Democrats and two Republicans—have declaratively said: A nuclear-capable Iran is unacceptable. President Obama has stated that over and over. Yet here we are engaged in a process that advances that prospect.

We are put at a disadvantage, and we are giving away the one tool that has brought Iran to the negotiating table. They have trumpeted publicly about how they have outsmarted us and outnegotiated us and achieved what they wanted to achieve and diminished our opportunity to achieve what the world community wants to achieve. We will rue the day that we almost had Iran to the point where we could have achieved our goal but stepped back and conceded to their promise and commitment to continue to enrich, to continue to add centrifuges, and to continue their pursuit of nuclear weapons capability.

If Iran is armed with nuclear weapons, it will pose unimaginable consequences to us. There has been total agreement on that among the world's Nations. Yet here we stand at the moment of decision—right when we, in a sense, had them where we wanted to get them, and we conceded that.

I deeply regret that we have not been able to move forward with these additional sanctions to be employed if—in this first interim agreement—Iran does not live up to the objectives and goals which we have demanded.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 report.

The legislative 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.

Pending:

Reid (for Sanders) amendment no. 2747, in the nature of a substitute.

Reid amendment no. 2766 (to amendment no. 2747), to change the enactment date.

Reid motion to commit the bill to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, with instructions, Reid Amendment no. 2767, to change the enactment date.

Reid amendment no. 2768 (to (the instructions of the motion to commit) amendment no. 2767), of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment no. 2769 (to amendment no. 2768), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 2 p.m. will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I am thrilled that we are here at this moment debating benefits for our veterans. Our veterans have stood up for America by fighting for us overseas, and when they come home we need to be standing up for them. Over time we have come to recognize that there are a number of shortfalls in the way we address our benefits for veterans that need to be corrected, and that is what this bill is all about.

Yesterday we had a motion to close debate on whether to debate this bill, and that was successful, so here we are at this moment. Let's recognize that America has been at war for more than 12 years, that more than 6,000 Americans have lost their lives in service to our country, that more than 50,000 Americans have been wounded in combat.

At some point 2½ million Americans have left their homes and their families to serve their country in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these men and women have served more than 1 deployment, and 400,000 men and women have served more than 3 deployments. They have gone back to the theater of war repeatedly, with sacrifices on a personal level, sacrifices for their family and sacrifices for their health. They have gone into perilous situations on behalf of our Nation. Today we need to make sure the benefits promised are there, and where the benefits are insufficient, that they are improved.

I am hearing there is a possibility there may be an effort today to block this bill—this bill on behalf of our veterans. I certainly hope that will not be the case. How can we explain that the ongoing partisan politics that have so poisoned and paralyzed our Nation are more important than addressing the benefits of our veterans—our service men and our service women—who have fought for our country. Today is not a day for partisan politics. It is a day for keeping faith with those who have served our Nation.

I will address a particular provision that is in this bill today. The bill takes on many issues, one of which is to work very hard to shorten and eliminate the big lag in time that occurs when our veterans apply for benefits. Benefits delayed are, for a period of time, benefits denied. The Department of Veterans Services has made progress with more progress to come. This bill will make a difference in eliminating the backlog and will address the needs of our veterans in a timely fashion, and timeliness is very important.

There is another provision in this bill that I particularly want to emphasize because it comes out of conversations that occurred 6 years ago when I was talking to folks about running for the Senate. People in Oregon said: We need to take care of our Gold Star families—our families who are striving and struggling to be on their feet after they have lost a servicemember in combat. This is a challenge, of course, for the children and it is a challenge for the spouses.

A veteran brought up the fact that we needed to provide much better educational benefits. I am very pleased to have a bipartisan sponsor, Senator HELLER of Nevada, because there is nothing about helping our veterans that should be a partisan issue. There is nothing about addressing the needs of our Gold Star families who have lost a member of the family in combat that should be a partisan issue.

Mr. Robert Thornhill, a veteran, talked to me in 2008, right before I came to this Chamber, about this issue of educationed benefits for the children and for the spouses. When the primary wage earner for a family is struck down in battle, the rest of the family needs a lot of help regaining their feet, and that means educational opportunities for the children. But let's not forget that the spouse who has to take over major financial responsibilities also needs educational benefits.

Shortly before I came here, the post-9/11 GI bill went into effect creating the Machine Gunnery Sergeant Fry Scholarship. That scholarship fulfilled the vision that Robert Thornhill and I had talked about, and it went even further to include housing and book stipends and support for attendance at private universities, but it only did so for the children of the fallen.

Mr. Thornhill followed up with me. He noted that we need to take on and extend these benefits to spouses as well. Over the long term children need help going to college, but in the short term spouses often have to be retrained to adopt their new role as the major breadwinner for the family.

For several years I have been advocating that we fulfill this vision of taking care of the educational opportunity issues for our Gold Star families. Education is a powerful tool to rebuild a family's financial foundation, but it has to be affordable.

There is a provision in this bill that Mr. Thornhill championed, a provision that is fundamental to fairness for our spouses of those who have fallen, and it is a provision that is fundamental to the future success of our Gold Star families.

This provision—this Spouses of Heroes Education Act—is one element among a number that our Committee on Veterans' Affairs has so ably assembled to address shortfalls in the programs that assist those who have stood for our country.

Let us not forget what we are working to do: to keep faith with those who have served our country. Let us set aside the petty, partisan, poisonous games and let's hold the faith and keep our veterans in mind.

Let's get this bill done. Let's get it to conference with the House. Let's get it to the Oval Office. Let us keep faith with those who have stood for our country.

I thank the Presiding Officer. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I am delighted the Senate is talking about our veterans. I am disappointed the bill before us did not go through the entire committee process. I am grateful that Senator BURR, the ranking member, has brought forward a side-by-side bill which I wish to discuss for a moment. I am particularly glad the Burr bill brings up the Iran sanctions issue. I know the administration has kind of backed away from the sanctions because of some things that have happened recently and does not want a sanctions bill to pass the Senate.

I have followed closely what has happened in the Middle East. I recall back to 1979 when Georgians were held hostage in the American Embassy in Tehran for 444 days. I have a lot of experience with that part of the world and I think there are some things of which we should be reminded.

This bill, the Burr bill that includes the veterans' benefits, also includes nuclear weapons sanctions on Iran and most of the provisions of the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act. In particular, three things included are important to note.

No. 1, it reimposes existing sanctions suspended under the interim agreement if Iran cheats on its commitment, drags its feet in negotiations, or threatens the West with long-range missiles or terrorism.

No. 2, it ensures the final agreement must require Iran to dismantle its illicit nuclear infrastructure to prevent Iran from being able to produce nuclear weapons.

No. 3, it threatens to impose additional economic sanctions in the future should Iran cheat on its commitment or fail to agree to the final deal that dismantles its nuclear infrastructure.

I have watched the television set. I have seen the international reports. I have listened to what the Iranians are saying since we have had this interim agreement, and here is what it says: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani pledged that under no circumstances—and that is a direct quote—would Iran agree to dismantle a single centrifuge in a final nuclear agreement.

This is what he is saying now and we are talking about getting to a final agreement months from now.

Second, during Iran's national day celebrations in which American flags were burned, Rouhani declared: ''We will permanently continue to progress our nuclear technology.''

Third, former Iranian top nuclear negotiator Hossein Mousavian told Iranian media in a recent interview that the Islamic Republic will never—I underscore never—agree to dismantle portions of its nuclear infrastructure.

Iran nuclear negotiator Majid Takhte Ravanchi reiterated Iran would not accept the closure of ''any of its nuclear sites.''

Next, an Iran official on February 12 set aside the idea of potentially altering a nuclear reactor so that other nations would fear the production of atomic bomb fuel.

Finally, Iran will determine its needs regarding uranium enrichment on its own, the country's chief nuclear scientist said on February 25, and will not—and I underscore not—accept foreign powers dictating its enrichment policy.

Iran is advancing its nuclear ballistics testing system and it has fired nuclear missiles to test its capability. Iran has deployed two ships in the Atlantic as a show of force on the United States of America. They continue in every way possible to be a surrogate fighter in Syria, empowering the Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, and they continue to cause the disturbances throughout the Middle East.

Why should we not as a Congress of the United States, in talking about our veterans, include within that talk a clear shot across the bow to the Iranians that America will not stand for them laughing at us or poking their finger in our face when we talk about a nuclear-free Iran?

We do not need a nuclear armed Iran in the Middle East for a plethora of reasons. Most importantly, if they get one, there will be a nuclear arms race in a very unstable part of the world. It is the home of terrorism. It is the home of the biggest fear the United States of America has, and our best ally, Israel, lies in the path of Iranian resistance. So it is important the sanctions be reinstated and that we have conditions on the Iranians so that if they violate their promises or they look the other way on their commitments or they do what they are saying on their own national television networks today, they understand there will be a consequence to their actions.

I remember 1979. I remember when ''Nightline'' became a television show because for 444 days Americans were held hostage in Tehran. I remember that just the day before President Reagan was sworn in as President of the United States, President Carter finally negotiated a release of the hostages in Iran, for one simple reason: Iran knew that once President Carter was out of office and President Reagan came into office, he would follow through on what he said, and that is he would do whatever it took to free the hostages.

There is only one thing the Iranians understand. They understand someone who will fight and stand up to them, someone who will take them on, and somebody who will not settle for their looking the other way on the agreement they made. It is critical and important the Senate of the United States send a clear message to the Iranians that we will not be lied to, we will not be misled, and we expect them to live up to the commitments they have promised to live up to. If they don't, there will be consequences for their actions.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are already pointing out that the economy of Iran is now improving, with the interim agreement we currently have. We have no certainty on a final agreement that is coming in the next few months. We have no certainty the Iranians are going to do what they say they are going to do anyway. If we sit here passively saying it will be all right, if we don't let them know there will be conditions if they violate the sanctions, if we don't let them know we mean business, then America will have turned its back on the most dangerous enemy we have, and that is the enemy of terrorism and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

I appreciate our veterans and the sacrifice they have made to try and free us from terrorism. I appreciate the volunteers who have sacrificed their sacred treasure and their families and their own personal blood and their own personal life trying to defend America and liberate the people of Iraq and the people of Afghanistan. I don't want us to turn and leave the Middle East. I want to let the Middle East know, and its biggest ogre, the Nation of Iran, that we will not stand for a nuclear weapon in Iran. If they continue to try and progress toward that, there will be sanctions that will be crippling. America will not turn its back on Iran; we will stand toe to toe with them and say this will not stand.

I commend Senator BURR for his leadership in including that in this portion of the veterans bill, as well as those members of the Foreign Relations Committee and the other 57 Members of the Senate who have signed the Iran sanctions bill. It is my hope and plea that sometime in the weeks ahead, before the Iranians think we have no teeth left at all, that we will do the right thing on the floor of the U.S. Senate and enhance the conditions of sanctions against the Nation of Iran if they lie to us or fail to keep the promises they have made in the interim agreement and the ultimate permanent agreement we make.

Mr. President, 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. SESSIONS. 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. SESSIONS. Mr. President, we have a lot of challenges before this Nation and this Congress. I believe the most critical challenge is how we handle financial matters that have been entrusted to us, how we handle the budget and spend the debt we are approving in America, and are we able—do we have the will, do we have the integrity—to stand up and put this Nation on a sound fiscal path.

I would note to all my colleagues that the week before last before the Budget Committee, our own Congressional Budget Office Director Mr. Doug Elmendorf repeated once again—which is absolutely accepted by virtually every economist in America—this country remains on an unsustainable debt course. This is an unsustainable path we are on. He indicated and said flatly we could, indeed, face a fiscal crisis, something like 2007, perhaps, something like Greece, because our debt is so large and growing at such a pace. We have never been here before. We are in the red zone on the tachometer. We are in the danger area, and we need to get out of it.

So I would say to my colleagues, isn't this true? Does anybody doubt it? Does anybody deny it? Then why don't we respond in an appropriate way?

I was shocked, deeply disappointed, amazed, and saddened that this headline appeared earlier in the week in the Washington Post. This is what it said: ''With 2015 budget request, Obama will call for an end to era of austerity.''

What does this mean? Every Member of this Congress knows what it means. It means the President of the United States is no longer interested in fiscal responsibility. He is saying: We no longer need to tighten our belt. He is saying he is going to attack anybody who suggests more spending is bad. He is going to say that he is going into this election with the idea that he is going to promise, promise, promise more and more spending, more debt, and he is not concerned about it. That is what it means. I am not exaggerating. I think every Member of this body knows exactly what that signal was.

So we will see the budget. It will be out next Tuesday, and we will have a hearing in the Budget Committee, of which I am the ranking Republican, on Wednesday. But I suspect and am confident it will do just like his last two budgets. It would increase spending $1 trillion above the amount of spending we agreed to in 2011 and reaffirmed essentially with the Ryan-Murray bill that he signed about 2 months ago into law.

We cannot do this. This is how we destroy a country, how we weaken an economy. I cannot—I do not have words to express it.

I will say one more point. Economists are telling us that our economic growth today is below what it otherwise would be because of the size of the debt this country faces right now—not in the future, right now. It is a wet blanket on economic growth. The Rogoff-Reinhart study talks about the slower growth, and we have consistently seen projections for growth not being met.

Director Elmendorf, in his testimony—I asked him about it 2 years ago. He predicted 2013 would allow us to see 4.6-percent economic growth. It came in at 1.9 percent—a stunning miss, well below. Below 2-percent growth means you are not creating jobs, you are not creating wealth, you are basically stagnant with an increasing population.

We need to be at 4.6 percent. We need some of that kind of growth. One reason we are not is bigger government, more taxes, more regulations, and more debt.

We are not going to get out of it until we get off that path.

So now we have a veterans bill before us. Nobody, I do not believe, is more committed to veterans in this body than I have been, and so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle want to do the right thing for veterans. But it is an audacious thing we are seeing here today.

Let's review some of the history.

Two months ago, every Senate Democrat—every Senate Democrat—voted for a bill to cut military pensions for our soldiers, our military retirees, and even our disabled veterans. It was in their bill.

Senate Democrats then blocked—not once but twice—my efforts, other Republican efforts to restore those cuts by closing a tax credit loophole for illegal immigrants.

Mr. President, I see my colleague and friend, Senator SANDERS, in the Chamber. I am going to get to the point. I will do it now because I know he has a busy agenda, and I think I know how the script will all play out.

I say to Senator SANDERS and colleagues, the pending measure before us today, S. 1982, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014—which is a good title for a bill—would cause the aggregate level of budget authority and outlays for fiscal year 2014, deemed pursuant to section 111 of Public Law 113–67, to be exceeded. Therefore, I raise a point of order under section 311(a)(2) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Alabama for accommodating my schedule. I will have more to say on this issue later this afternoon. But let me at this point simply say: Mr. President, pursuant to section 904 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 and the waiver provisions of applicable budget resolutions, I move to waive all applicable sections of that act and applicable budget resolutions for purposes of the pending bill, and I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

Mr. SESSIONS. Well, Mr. President, reclaiming the floor, now you have it in stark clarity. This bill proposes to spend more than we agreed to spend passing the Ryan-Murray Act a few weeks ago. President Obama signed it 2 months ago. The ink is hardly dry on it, and here we have another bill to raise that, to raise the spending again. And it will not be the only one. We are going to see bill after bill after bill, and it is part of the President's strategy.

What is it? The era of austerity is over. He signed Ryan-Murray. He signed the Budget Control Act. But he had no intention of complying with it. He will not support enforcement of it. That is a failure of leadership of a monumental proportion. It is a stunning event.

I do not know why we have a Congress, why we pass laws that say we are only going to spend so much money and then we waltz in, just a few weeks later, and spend billions more than we agreed to. And, oh, we will just waive the budget we just passed. Oh, this is important. But everybody knew when we passed the limits on spending that there were going to be important bills.

I am actually shocked, even by Senate and congressional standards, how blasé this body has been about these laws. I thought at least people would pretend to honor them. There is no pretense here. And it is a failure of responsibility in this body if such spending were to pass.

So our colleagues voted to cut the retirement pay of veterans, which I opposed and Republicans opposed. That was already in law—a commitment we made to military people that if they served 20 years, they get this retirement benefit.

They waltzed in to save $6 billion, supposedly, and they were going to reduce their pension benefits. I did not feel, No. 1, it was necessary. There were other ways to save money. And I felt we had ways to save the money in a different way and offered legislation to that effect. So the attempts to fix it were blocked twice.

What was in the Ryan-Murray bill was fiscally responsible—bad policy but responsible fiscally. This bill is not. This bill increases, creates new veterans programs, new spending for veterans, and it is not paid for in any way. It is all borrowed money. We are already in debt, so when we enter and commit ourselves to additional obligations above what we have agreed to, every penny of that is borrowed, every penny of that will add to the debt of our country.

This bill busts the caps we agreed to. These are caps we all voted for—or at least our colleagues did, the Democratic colleagues, because I did not vote for the Ryan-Murray bill. I thought it eroded the Budget Control Act more than I wanted it to and it raised the caps. But it kept them in place. It eased pressure in several areas where the shoe was pinching badly. It eased that pressure. But that is not enough now? We have to have more?

It is using the veterans as a political tool, in my view. I do not think our veterans want their programs to be enhanced if every penny of money that is going to enhance those programs is added to the debt of the United States of America.

This is eight times at least since the Budget Control Act was passed that we have seen efforts to bust it. So our military men and women who worked tirelessly, selflessly, for the good of this country, have always put duty first. Shouldn't we put duty first?

This massive Federal budget of ours is filled with waste, filled with projects that cannot be defended intellectually. It was our duty to get rid of wasteful pet projects and do the right thing for our veterans.

I say to my colleagues, for example, you could have closed the tax credit loophole for illegal immigrants that is costing America billions of dollars. The cut to the veterans pension was about $6 billion over 10 years. Annually, according to the President's own inspector general at his own Department of Treasury, we are losing $4 billion a year in improper tax credit payments to illegal aliens. Why don't we fix that? The inspector general asked that we fix that. It would save $20 billion over 10 years. No, sir. What do they tell us? We are not doing anything on immigration.

Well, the first thing you should do to create a lawful system of immigration in America is to quit rewarding people financially who come illegally. That is the first thing. For Heaven's sakes, what is wrong with that? Is that immoral?

We had an instance in which there was a trailer, I believe in Indiana. A number of people lived there. No children. They claimed 19 children and got refunds from the United States of America of $30,000—all of which were not proper, none of which were proper.

That is what the inspector general was talking about. You are not entitled to come to America illegally—have children in some other country—and then demand that we give you a tax credit, which is the equivalent of a direct check from the U.S. Treasury. A tax credit is not a deduction. It is a check from the U.S. Treasury.

But, oh no, we will not even discuss that. That is a nonstarter. So it looks like politics trumps helping veterans. So if we had had a plan to fix the veterans retirement, that could have all worked together on a good basis. Here we have now another veterans bill that is not going to work. Are there no programs, are there no spending plans out

there that could not be trimmed, eliminated or reconfigured that could help us honor the commitments we have made to our veterans? There surely are. Lots of them. We have seen a lot of them offered.

So I challenge any of our colleagues, Senate Democrats, to come to the floor and name one program they are willing to terminate in order to help fund our veterans adequately. Come down and let's hear it. There is a circling of the wagons in this administration. What did the President mean when he said: The era of austerity is over, as the Washington Post reported? What did me mean? He meant that we are not cutting anything else. He meant that he is going to propose, as he has in the past, new spending programs, not fewer spending.

We can't even get amendments up on this legislation. The majority leader has filled the tree. He will not allow us even to vote on alternative proposals. We cannot have an honest debate in this Chamber over how to legitimately and responsibly meet the needs of veterans or any other group, it appears. So really, in effect, the majority leader and his caucus will not allow votes on proposals. He will not allow our veterans to have a vote really. As long as that is the case, you have got no right to proceed with this legislation, in my opinion.

So to those who come to the floor and attack Republicans, saying we do not care about veterans, I will issue this challenge: Tell your leader—because he cannot function without your support—tell your leader to let us offer some amendments. Let us offer some offsets that would help pay for this. Tell your leader to let this Chamber work its will in the Constitutional and historic way.

If you do not, it is clear that your goal is to create a misleading headline and not do what is right for veterans. One more thing, because Congress has refused to live within its means, interest on our debt is surging, unbelievably so. It will crowd out this kind of spending, defense spending, education spending, highway spending, throughout our whole government.

Let me draw your attention to this chart. This is what Director Elmendorf told us 2 weeks ago—last week—in his testimony before the Budget Committee on the budget of the United States of America. He told us that the interest we pay this date, this past year, was $230 billion.

The savings from reducing veterans' retirement over 10 years was $6 billion. The Federal highway bill for 1 year is approximately $40 billion. The amount of money we spend on education is around $100 billion. That is all of those programs that we spend it on. The amount of money we spend on the Defense Department is about $500 billion.

So last year, we spent $230 billion on interest. When we borrow money, we go into debt. We borrow the money. People loan us the money. We give them Treasury bills, with interest. Look at this chart. This year, 2013, it is $230 billion. Look at the increase Director Elmendorf told us we can expect over the next 10 years. In 2024, 10 years from now, colleagues, interest on the debt will be $870 billion in 1 year.

How many good projects are going to have their programs cut to just pay the interest on the debt? It is the fastest growing item in the United States budget. What do we have? We want to do something for veterans a few weeks after we agree to limit spending. We come right in with a bill to waive the budget limit, spend above that, borrow every penny of that money, and increase this interest and debt situation.

The Director did not count that. His calculations assume we honor the Budget Control Act and the Ryan-Murray spending limit. He assumes we are honoring what is in law. But what do we have? A motion to waive. Spend above that limit. This whole reckless spending is what Admiral Mullen meant when he said: The greatest threat to America's security is our deficit, our debt. It is going to crowd out other spending. It threatens our economic viability, our growth potential, and it actually places us at risk for some financial crisis in the years to come.

Our voters deserve better. Look at how they tend to maneuver this legislation. It is so absurd sometimes. We should laugh about it if it were not so serious. It is serious. The Sanders bill, the veterans bill—we are being told we must vote for it or they will accuse us of being unkind and unsupportive and unsympathetic to our veterans. That day is over. We are not going to be intimidated on this. We are going to do the right thing for veterans and America.

This bill would exceed the spending limit for the current fiscal year that Congress and the President agreed to just 3 months ago. Initially—it gets worse in the outer years—it would clearly add another $260 million in mandatory spending and authorize another $182 million this year, fiscal year 2014, which we are already in—$182 million. It gets worse.

So we agreed in 2011, August of 2011, to set certain spending limits. The President signed that. Both Houses of Congress voted for it. Come January, the President of the United States, who signed that bill, laid forth his budget, which would increase spending $1 trillion over the limits that we agreed to in August. So less than 6 months later, he was coming back before Congress completely ignoring the will, the established law, the Budget Control Act limitations on spending that he agreed to.

He actually bragged about it. This is no way to get our country on a sound financial path. It is not any way to do it. Let me point out one more thing. They say that we are cutting spending, that this is austerity, that America is cutting its spending. Look at this chart. It is just a simple chart.

In 2007, before we had the fiscal crisis, we were spending about $2.6 trillion in that year. In 2011, right before we signed this August Budget Control Act agreement to limit the growth of spending—only the growth. It did not limit spending. It limited growth. We were spending about $3.5 trillion. The CBO baseline projects that in 2015, that is the year we are working on now, trying to prepare our budget and so forth, we are going to spend even more than we spent then.

So the spending is going up. We made a few adjustments to curtail the growth in spending, which is good, but really not enough to get us on a sound path. The reason I assure you that we are not on a sound path, as this chart shows that, is the interest we are going to be paying over 10 years. This is last year, 2013. This is what they tell us we are going to be paying in interest in 2024. It goes up every single year. We are on an unsustainable path. You can't get something for nothing. Julie Andrews tells us: Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could. It can't.

So I am flabbergasted really. The most disappointing thing to me is I know now what we are going to see in the President's budget come next Tuesday. Any hint at belt tightening is going to be gone. We are going to see proposals for massive increases in spending. Oh, not spending, investments. That is what we are going to see.

But we do not have the money. We do not have to damage America. We do not have to destroy our country. This is what we agreed to now. It shows continual growth. Under the Budget Control Act, we are going to see growth in spending every year. There is no reduction in spending. It is going to grow every year for the next 10 years. It will not grow quite as fast, as if we did not have a Budget Control Act.

It looks like, if we continue to have efforts to waive the budget and just spend above that, it will be even worse than this. The growth will be even greater.

I want to share one point, and I will wrap up. The bill also relies on a budget gimmick. It claims that it has got some pay-for, that it is not all borrowed money. It claims this pay-for. It is really a gimmick that every honest observer who has commented on it has just mocked it. It is the OCO gimmick. The bill proposes to reduce Overseas Contingency Operations programs used to combat terrorism worldwide, Iraq and Afghanistan, our OCO, Overseas Contingency Operations.

Every penny of that is borrowed. It is not in the regular budget. It is spent above that as emergency spending, war spending. That is how it has been done. For good or ill, that is the way it is done. At least while I am troubled by the President's policies with regard to Iraq and Afghanistan, the costs are coming down. They are projected to come down every year until we basically eliminate those costs.

It claims that reducing the amount of money we borrow to fund the war and support our military is somehow now available to spend on whatever the project of the day is. Today it is veterans. It will be something else tomorrow. They have tried this before. It is ludicrous. It is like claiming credit today for the end of Vietnam. We are not borrowing money to fight the war in Vietnam, so we can spend that money.

This is how a great Nation goes broke. They want to do this to the tune of $18 billion. That is what it is going to take to fund Senator SANDERS' bill. The problem is, the money was never going to be spent at this rate. It is not a real savings. Every piece of legislation that the majority has tried to move since January has exceeded the levels that we reached in the December agreement: unemployment insurance, the farm bill, flood insurance, and now the veterans bill. All of them spend above what we agreed to.

Colleagues, these measures represent critical needs. I know we want to do something about all of them, and acknowledge that people have suffered and are suffering under the policies that promised to do so much good but have not.

The solution is not to abandon fiscal discipline. The solution is not to breach the agreements we reached only a few weeks ago to have some modest limitation on the growth of Federal spending.

This approach has been widely derided as a gimmick. The Congressional Budget Office says this is not real money that can be spent. Of course it is not.

Mr. Elmendorf followed up with a letter to Congressman PAUL RYAN. Budget director Mr. Elmendorf wrote:

> Establishing caps on discretionary appropriations in the future would not affect spending under current law and would not offset changes in direct spending or revenues. Further, appropriations for war-related activities have declined in recent years and may decline further as military operations in Afghanistan wind down. Caps on OCO appropriations that are lower than baseline projections might simply reflect policy decisions that have already been made and that would be realized even without such funding constraints. Moreover, if policymakers believed national security required appropriations above the capped amounts in future years, they would almost certainly provide emergency operations that would not, under current law, be counted against the caps.

It points out that this is an unacceptable way to count money.

Experts on the Federal budget have said the same. Maya MacGuineas, a capable observer with the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, said:

> Using the war gimmick to offset other costs or to count toward deficit reduction would send a message to the American public and our investors that we are not serious about controlling the debt. In fact, it would send the message that not only are we not serious, but we are going to try to trick everyone that we're actually doing something productive on the deficit. That's the height of irresponsibility.

Maya MacGuineas—respected on both sides of the aisle, a person committed to getting this Nation to fiscal responsibility—is from the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. She said that last November.

So we are not going to go for this. We are not going to waive the budget in this fashion. It is not going to pass, and it should have been known beforehand when Senator SANDERS and Senator REID sought to push this bill through that it was never going to pass because there are enough Senators in this body who have enough strength of will to honor the commitment we made a few weeks ago in the Ryan-Murray legislation. We are not going to use some bogus gimmick to justify busting the budget. The deal is over, nada. It is not going to happen. And I will defend my commitment to veterans and seeing that they are treated fairly in this country.

There are a lot of positive things we need to be doing in America. This is certainly not one them. We need to figure out how to run this government on the spending increases to which we have already agreed. In fact, we need to reduce those increases more than we have.

Otherwise, we are placing at risk our economy today, job creation today, and the future of our children.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. I rise this morning to speak about two issues. The first will be on the matter that is before us, the veterans legislation.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this legislation. I commend the work of Chairman SANDERS and others who have brought us to this point. We know we have a challenge ahead of us to pass this legislation.

The good news is that these issues are bipartisan. Both parties have a real concern about what happens to our veterans and what happens to our veterans' families. We often have different pathways to get there, but I do think we have a bipartisan concern.

Perhaps it is appropriate to start with a reflection on what I think our obligation is as Members of the Senate, but it is our obligation as citizens as well.

Years ago I heard it expressed—we often express it by using the word ''worthy.'' When we consider what our veterans have done for us, it is important that we express gratitude in so many different ways. Sometimes that is one-on-one expressing to a veteran: We appreciate your service. And when there is a parade or another demonstration of public support for our veterans, that is important.

But the question we have to ask ourselves both as elected officials and as citizens is the following: Are we doing everything we can to prove ourselves worthy of the valor of our veterans? The answer to that question—depending on what year it is or depending on what time period it is, we will get different answers to that question.

Most of the time we like to believe that the Congress is worthy of the valor of those veterans, that we are doing everything we can to help them. But we have to be honest with ourselves and say that there are substantial periods of time when this body and the other body—both the Senate and the House—have not been worthy of the valor of our veterans because we haven't done enough to help veterans and their families.

We hope, we pray this can be one of those moments when we prove ourselves worthy of the valor of those veterans who served their country. They didn't ask the price; they didn't put down conditions; they just served their country, and they asked us to enact legislation and policy that is commensurate with the sacrifice and the commitment they made to their country. It is about keeping promises, and I hope we can be in one of those moments right now.

As many across the country know, the bill improves VA health care coverage. It reauthorizes important job-training programs for unemployed veterans and provides instate tuition assistance benefits for all post-9/11 veterans through the GI bill.

We know that when we look at the unemployment data, some of the highest percentages for any sector or category are post-9/11 veterans—a much higher unemployment rate than the overall unemployment rate and an even higher unemployment rate than all of their fellow veterans.

In this case, for this bill, hundreds of people across Pennsylvania have reached out to my office, urging that the Senate pass this bill. It has the support from various veterans service organizations, including the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the American Legion, and the VFW, just to name a few.

I wish to address a couple of provisions in the bill, ones that are particularly significant to Pennsylvania and some of the work we have been doing.

The VA health care system in Pittsburgh had a terrible tragedy not too long ago where several veterans lost their lives while in the care of the VA health care system. There was a Legionnaires' outbreak. Legionella was the problem in the water system, and that terrible tragedy was obviously a devastating loss for those families. Not only the city of Pittsburgh but all of southwestern Pennsylvania was affected. We are thinking of them today when we reflect upon some of the provisions in this bill.

Veterans and their loved ones need to feel confident and secure in the care they receive at all health care facilities. The failures—and there is no other way to describe them—that occurred at the VA in southwestern Pennsylvania surrounding this outbreak of Legionnaires' disease is, in a

word, unacceptable. Frankly, that is not a strong enough word to express the outrage I know people felt across southwestern Pennsylvania and beyond, so I worked and it led to the introduction of legislation. Portions of what we worked on are included in this bill, and we are very pleased about that.

Specifically, the bill requires the VA to implement local and State reporting requirements of infectious diseases. The bill also requires that the VA develop performance measures to assess whether the veterans integrated service networks and medical centers are complying with these requirements. We are pleased that is part of the legislation.

Mr. President, I wish to highlight a part of the legislation that is very important to me.

Fortunately, it includes the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz Act, which Senator TOOMEY and I introduced last year. The bill renames the VA medical center on Woodland Avenue in Philadelphia after Corporal Crescenz. He was the city of Philadelphia's only Medal of Honor recipient from the Vietnam war. I will give a description of why he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his service in Vietnam. We know it is the highest honor that can be granted to any soldier.

In this case, for his actions in Vietnam on November 20, 1968, his Medal of Honor citation states that he gave his life when he ''left the relative safety of his own position, seized a nearby machine gun and, with complete disregard for his safety, charged 100 meters up a slope toward the enemy's bunkers which he effectively silenced. . . . As a direct result of his heroic actions, his company was able to maneuver freely with minimal danger and to complete its mission, defeating the enemy.''

We are grateful that his family will have some measure of peace of mind that his sacrifice and his service are remembered.

I thank Chairman SANDERS for including this in the bill, and I know Senator TOOMEY joins me in that note of gratitude.

(The further remarks of Mr. CASEY are printed in the RECORD under ''Morning Business.)

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I come to floor today as a cosponsor of the legislation that is being considered now in the Senate, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014.

The package of reforms included in this bill will help provide our Nation's veterans, to whom we owe so much, more job opportunities, greater health care access, improved educational programs, and increased oversight of the disability claims backlog, which is a real challenge that so many of our veterans are facing.

I thank the leadership of Senator SANDERS, who chairs the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. This bill includes provisions that have been sponsored by both Republicans and Democrats in the Senate, which is why more than 20 veterans service organizations have endorsed the legislation, including the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

As the heroes of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan return home, they deserve our utmost gratitude and appreciation. Many of our returning veterans served multiple tours of duty, sacrificing so much to protect this Nation. They deserve nothing less than access to the best health care, the best education, and the best opportunities for employment.

Medical care for injured servicemembers is at the heart of the VA's mission. We have a basic responsibility to care for the men and women injured while protecting this country. This legislation addresses one of the most common requests from our veterans: expanded access to the VA's dental care program.

I was meeting with some folks recently who told me one of the biggest reasons our men and women serving in the military on Active Duty are not able to be deployed overseas is because they do not have some of the basic dental care they need. Anyone who has suffered from dental issues knows it can be completely debilitating. So simply put: Veterans should not have to suffer because of a lack of capacity to support this basic medical need.

The bill also contains provisions that will help expand treatment options for young men and women who have sustained major injuries that may prevent them from starting a family. Starting a family is one of the most rewarding joys of life, and we should do everything possible to make sure our military men and women are able to overcome any reproductive challenges they may face.

Access to mental health care and counseling, both for our returning service men and women and their families, is also critically important. When our brave heroes deal with these kinds of health issues, their families are also affected. This legislation would expand mental health resources available to veterans and their family members.

One of the most significant reforms that is included in this legislation is moving the entire Department of Veterans Affairs to an advanced appropriations cycle. This means that Congress would pay the VA's bills 1 year in advance, making it absolutely certain there will be no gaps in funding for veterans programs.

Several years ago Congress moved the Veterans Health Administration to a 1-year advanced appropriation. The intent was to provide increased budget certainty and protection for the hospitals, community clinics, and other health care providers taking care of our wounded veterans. By funding the Veterans Health Administration in advance, Congress made sure that budget delays would no longer affect veterans health care. But the rest of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including the Veterans Benefits Administration, does not receive that advanced appropriation. That means during last year's government shutdown veterans were at risk of not receiving their disability payments, and some personnel involved in decreasing the disability claims backlog were not working. Veterans should not have to wait longer or be put at risk of losing their benefits because of political disagreements here in Congress, and this bill will ensure that will not happen again in the future.

As I have talked with New Hampshire veterans over the past year, this advanced appropriations process has consistently been one of their top requests. I am very glad to see it is included.

The bill also takes important steps to help create job opportunities for veterans. It reauthorizes parts of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, including a joint program between the VA and the Department of Labor which provides 12 months of training for high-demand occupations to unemployed veterans. So far, this program has provided job retraining benefits to more than 50,000 eligible veterans.

The legislation also includes programs which help veterans train for new careers and identify and apply for existing job openings. It will award grants for hiring veterans as first responders and would cut redtape for veterans seeking licenses for skills they have developed during their military service.

We should do all we can to get our veterans in the workforce. There are far too many veterans, particularly post-9/11 vets, who have not been able to get jobs and are experiencing so many of the unfortunate consequences of being out of the workforce.

This is why I have filed amendments to this bill which will create new tax incentives for businesses to hire veterans, and will make it more affordable and easier for veteran-owned small businesses to participate in Small Business Administration loan programs.

I have also filed amendments to address the backlog at the Board of Veterans Appeals, which is one of the really unfortunate situations we have for our veterans. We have veterans in New Hampshire who have been waiting up to 4 years to have their appeals heard before the board.

Finally, another amendment I filed to the bill is in memory of my friend

Charlie Morgan. Charlie was a member of the New Hampshire National Guard 197th Fires Brigade. After the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, she became one of the first servicemembers in the country to come forward and talk about the challenges of keeping her family and her private life secret while she served in the military.

What also prompted Charlie to come forward was, in addition to those challenges, she was also dealing with breast cancer. Sadly, we lost Charlie last year to breast cancer. She was just 48 years old.

I met Charlie while she was serving as a chief warrant officer in the New Hampshire National Guard, but she had actually enlisted in the Army in 1982. After serving on active duty, Charlie joined the Kentucky National Guard in 1992, because that is where she was living then. But shortly after the 9/11 attacks, she joined the 197th Fires Brigade of the New Hampshire National Guard.

I have said it before and I will say it again today: There is a very special place in this Nation's history for those who step forward to defend this country and protect the very same freedoms denied to them out of uniform. Charlie Morgan never gave up the fight for her civil rights, and neither will we.

My amendment is cosponsored by Senators MARK UDALL, BLUMENTHAL, GILLIBRAND, and the Presiding Officer, Senator BALDWIN. It ensures that all veterans and their families—no matter where they live, no matter their sexual orientation—get the benefits they have earned by putting their lives on the line for our country.

My bill passed the Veterans' Affairs Committee last July by a voice vote. I hope, first of all, we will get an amendment process on this veterans bill which allows me and so many of my colleagues to offer relevant amendments which I think would improve the bill we are hoping to consider. I hope my colleagues will support all of my amendments but particularly this important Charlie Morgan amendment because our veterans deserve nothing less.

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. HOEVEN. 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. HOEVEN. Madam President, I rise today to talk about the Iran sanctions legislation, but first I want to talk about the veterans legislation we are on, and why it is so important that we include the Iran sanctions provision.

I believe we all want to make sure we take care of our veterans. We will have on the floor two bills today which deal with our veterans, one offered by Senator SANDERS of Vermont and another offered by Senator RICHARD BURR of North Carolina.

I am asking the majority leader to allow an open process so we can craft a good bill for our veterans. This means allowing amendments. This means allowing a vote on both bills. I believe that with an open process—with an open amendment process, by allowing votes as I have described—we can in fact build the kind of bipartisan support, the kind of bipartisan consensus we need to pass this legislation. There are provisions in the bills which I think have broad bipartisan support, which is why it is so important we have this open process.

One such provision which can help us build that kind of bipartisan support is the Iran sanctions provision in the legislation. It is sponsored by Democratic Senator BOB MENENDEZ of New Jersey and also Republican Senator MARK KIRK of Illinois, and it is cosponsored by 57 other Senators, including myself. So we are talking about a piece of legislation within the Burr bill which has 59 Senators cosponsoring the legislation.

If this legislation is put on the floor included as part of the Burr bill, it is pretty much guaranteed we can pass it. It has 59 cosponsors. If we pick up one more vote, we pass the bill. It is good for our veterans and it is also very important for our national security.

Let me talk about the Iran sanction provision for a minute.

Right now the Obama administration is trying to negotiate an agreement with Iran to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, and while the administration is negotiating, Iran continues to develop its nuclear weapon. While President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry negotiate with President Hassan Rouhani, Iran continues to build a nuclear bomb. While the administration and our Secretary of State talk with our allies in Europe about the negotiations with Iran, the Supreme Leader and Iran continue to build a nuclear bomb.

The reality is the only thing which has brought Iran to the negotiating table is sanctions and only continuing those sanctions will get them to stop building a bomb. The sanctions should be reinstated, and they should not be lifted until, one, Iran agrees they will not build a bomb, and we have an open, verifiable transparent process to make certain they are not doing so.

Sanctions take time to work. The sanctions we applied more than 1 year ago—particularly the Kirk-Menendez banking sanctions—have had a real impact on Iran's economy. I bring a background as a banker to my work experience, both as a Governor for 10 years, and my work experience here in the Senate. The reality is that the Kirk-Menendez banking sanctions have been extremely effective. It is a well-crafted piece of bipartisan legislation which passed this body overwhelmingly, which is really effective. The reason it is so effective is because it prevents any company, any country which wants to do business with the U.S. banking system—and countries and companies worldwide have to be able to transact with the U.S. banking system, but they are not allowed to transact with our banking system if they also do business with Iran.

If Iran can't sell its oil because it can't get paid for its oil, they are in a very tough situation. Not only do they not have the resources or the funds to build a bomb, their administration—the regime—does not have the money to operate their country. So we not only prevent them from building a bomb, but we put the regime itself at risk if they continue to build a bomb. That is why the Kirk-Menendez sanctions—those banking sanctions—have been so effective. But they work over time. They work over time.

When the sanctions are lifted, the relief is immediate, the relief is immediate because now Iran can sell and get payment for their oil. They can purchase what they need, not only to continue to build a bomb but to keep their country and keep the regime in power.

When we are talking about sanctions and negotiating an agreement to get them to stop building a bomb, it is important that we have a process that is open, transparent, and verifiable. We need to know that they have stopped building the bomb and are dismantling their nuclear weapons enterprise.

It is very important to understand that sanctions work over time, but when sanctions are lifted, the relief is immediate. That is why we cannot lift sanctions while we negotiate the agreement. We have to get Iran to stop first and give us a process to verify that, in fact, they have stopped before we can lift those sanctions.

We have the opportunity in this body right here, right now, today, to address that problem. It is incredibly important that we do address this issue. We have 59 sponsors on the legislation. We are one short. If you put it up for a vote, we will have well more than 60 votes. If we impose those sanctions now, we will tell Iran: You stop, and we make them stop. That is the option before us today. That is what we need to do.

If we don't do it, what are our options? A military strike? That is the last option. That is what we don't want to have to do. We don't want to have to do a military strike to take out their bomb-making capability. But if we don't act and reimpose those sanctions, that is the option that is left.

Today we have a choice. I ask that we be allowed to vote on the Burr legislation, that we be allowed to vote on amendments, and that we be allowed to vote to reimpose sanctions on Iran.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that following the

disposition of S. 1982, the veterans benefits bill, the Senate proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 561, Michael L. Connor, to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior, that there be 2 minutes for debate equally divided in the usual form, and that all other provisions of the previous order remain in effect.

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

The Senator from Montana.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. WALSH. Madam President, in Montana we have a long history of being represented by true statesmen—larger-than-life figures such as Senator Mike Mansfield. These men always served us well, while at the same time defending Montana's principles and freedoms. These statesmen never took their privileges for granted, and they always had the courage to put their differences aside to do what is right for our country. At a time when privilege seems to be gaining on principle, I pledge to find the same courage to do what is right.

Senator Mansfield called Butte, MT, home. Born and raised in Butte, I was brought up with a great deal of respect for Senator Mike Mansfield. It is a tremendous honor for me to stand today where he stood so many years ago and pledge to you and the people of Montana that I will take responsibility for my actions and that I will have the courage to do what is right no matter what the consequences.

Of course, I would not be where I am today without the love and support of my wonderful family. My wife of 29 years, Janet, who is here today, our sons Michael and Taylor, our daughter-in-law April, and our 9-month-old granddaughter Kennedy have stood by my side through every challenge life has handed us.

Last week, while at home, I traveled across Montana as Montana's newest Senator. I had an opportunity to talk to a lot of Montanans who believe we need more courage in Washington, and I tend to agree.

As a public servant, I have sworn an oath to protect and defend Montanans, our Nation, and our Constitution.

I am no stranger to answering the call to serve. I spent 33 years in the Montana National Guard where I served for 9 of those years as an enlisted man before becoming an officer.

I also had the honor of leading over 700 of Montana's finest young men and women into combat in Iraq. It was the largest deployment of Montana's soldiers and airmen since World War II.

In August of 2008, Governor Brian Schweitzer asked me to serve as the adjutant general of the Montana National Guard, and I was truly honored by the opportunity to continue serving our State and our Nation.

I am also extremely proud of my oldest son Michael who is now 28 and is following in my path of public service. He is currently serving in the National Guard and is deployed to the Middle East as a C–12 pilot and a Black Hawk medivac pilot.

Throughout my many years of service, and now with my son's service, ensuring our veterans and their families have access to the services and benefits they have earned is a responsibility I take very seriously and very personally.

I recently met with student veterans at Montana State University in Bozeman, MT, where I heard from young men and women who are concerned about their mounting student debt. I also heard from veterans from all across Montana about their frustrations with the long delays in processing disability benefit claims. I have heard from veterans from across the State who are frustrated with the distances they have to travel to receive care. These failings on behalf of our veterans and their families cause me grave concern. We must, and I will, fight for them every day I am serving in the Senate.

The face of modern war has changed and the VA must keep up with the changing times. Medical care must include robust mental health benefits, and it must also include proper screenings to help mitigate the effect of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries. As a military commander, I also know firsthand what the unseen injuries have done to America's heroes and their families. We can and we must do better.

The oath I have taken is one I take very seriously. It is an honor, it is a privilege, and a great responsibility that I will work tirelessly to fulfill.

To honor their service and sacrifice, we must welcome our heroes home and help them during their transition from active duty back into civilian life. I know how difficult that transition can be. I have experienced it firsthand, I have witnessed it, and I will take responsibility to improve it.

On these and other issues facing our State and our country, I look forward to working with my friend and colleague Senator JON TESTER to solve problems not only for our veterans but for all Montanans.

Last week JON and I traveled the State. We heard from members of the Little Shell Tribal Council about the importance of Federal recognition and ways to help Indian-owned businesses grow and create jobs. We heard from tribal nations across Montana about the Land Buy-Back Cooperative Agreement Program within the Department of Interior. I made a commitment to Montana's tribal leaders that I would work hard to make sure the Federal Government is being responsive and working to move this program forward in a way that works for our sovereign tribal nations.

We also had the opportunity to speak with business owners in Miles City and Wolf Point, MT, who are working hard to grow jobs while at the same time dealing with infrastructure challenges caused by the oil boom in eastern Montana. My job is to bring their voices to the Senate.

One additional issue I heard loudly and clearly from every corner of Montana is that our government is not doing enough to protect our civil liberties. As I have throughout my career, I will continue to fight to protect our civil liberties, our freedoms, and our Montana values. We must do what it takes to protect our Nation and the freedom we enjoy—something I have dedicated my life to. But we must, and we can, do it without trampling on the rights we have fought so hard for.

Bulk data collection with no transparency, whether by the government or by private corporations, is unacceptable. That is why during my first week in the Senate, I signed on to a bipartisan bill that is an important first step in this fight.

I have also heard loudly and clearly from Montanans that our national debt is unacceptable. Washington has a spending problem that we must get under control. There is no better example of privileges gaining on our principles. Responsibly cutting our debt and wasteful spending is one of my top priorities as a Senator, just as it was as Montana's lieutenant governor working alongside Governor Steve Bullock.

Congress needs the courage to cut spending without doing it on the backs of our veterans, our children, or our seniors. Almost everyone I talked to in Montana told me where they see waste in government, and they all have specific examples. We need to find the courage to stand up to special interests and cut that wasteful spending. But we must not do it on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens.

Having served for 33 years in the military, I am confident we can make the Defense budget more efficient while at the same time enhancing programs that grow our economy and protect our children and seniors.

We should start by reducing waste in contracting and procurement. Today we spend millions to have contract security guards check IDs at our bases rather than servicemembers, but no one is any safer. I take responsibility to fix this.

It is a privilege to be chosen to serve on the Agriculture Committee. I am the only member of Montana's delegation to sit on the agriculture committee. This committee is so important to Montana where our No. 1 industry is agriculture. From livestock disaster assistance to crop insurance, commonsense forest reforms, I look forward to making sure the farm bill works and works efficiently for Montana's farmers and ranchers.

I also look forward to serving on the commerce committee where I will focus on transportation, energy, rural telecommunications, and tourism. Tourism is Montana's second largest sector. It not only contributes to our State's economy, but also helps preserve the outdoor heritage that makes Montana such a slice of heaven.

I will bring Montana courage to the Senate where I will fight on behalf of the people of Montana to protect Social Security and Medicare in my new role on the aging committee. I am also prepared to help fix some of Washington's problems while serving on the rules committee.

I know I only just joined this distinguished body, but I also know there is very real work to be done to get our country on the right track again. Beginning on day one, I rolled up my sleeves and started working. My purpose here is to have the courage to do what is right for the people of Montana, our veterans, and the United States of America.

Thank you for this amazing opportunity and may God bless the United States of America.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

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.

TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I rise today to commemorate a very special day in Texas history, and I would say in American history. This is a day that inspires pride and gratitude in my State. I rise to commemorate Texas Independence Day, which is celebrated on March 2, this Sunday.

I will read a letter that was written 178 years ago from behind the walls of an old Spanish mission that is now in San Antonio, TX. It is known as the Alamo. It is a letter written by 26-year-old Lieutenant Colonel William Barret Travis. In doing so, I am carrying on a tradition started by the late Senator John Tower, who represented Texas in this body for more than two decades. This tradition was later upheld by his successor, Senator Phil Gramm, and thereafter by Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. It is a tremendous honor that this privilege has now fallen to me.

On February 24, 1836, with his position under siege and outnumbered nearly 10 to 1 by the forces of the Mexican dictator Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, Travis penned the following letter:

> To the People of Texas and all Americans in the World:
>
> Fellow citizens and compatriots—
>
> I am besieged by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna. I have sustained a continual bombardment and cannonade for 24 hours and I have not lost a man. The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion. Otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken.
>
> I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls.
>
> I shall never surrender or retreat.
>
> Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism and everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid with all dispatch.
>
> The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily and will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days.
>
> If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself for as long as possible and die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor and that of his country.
>
> Victory or death.
>
> Signed: William Barret Travis.

As we have since learned, in the battle that ensued, all 189 defenders of the Alamo gave their lives. But they did not die in vain.

The Battle of the Alamo bought precious time for the Texas revolutionaries, allowing General Sam Houston to maneuver his army into position for a decisive victory in the battle of San Jacinto. With this victory Texas became a sovereign nation and an independent republic.

For nine years the Republic of Texas thrived, as I said, as a separate nation. Then, in 1845, it agreed to join the United States as the 28th State.

Many of the Texas patriots who fought in the revolution went on to serve in the Congress. I am honored to hold the seat originally held by then-General Sam Houston but later the president of the republic and U.S. Senator for Texas. More broadly, I am honored to have the opportunity to serve 26 million Americans that call Texas home because of the sacrifices made by these brave patriots 178 years ago.

May we always remember the Alamo, and may God continue to bless Texas and these United States.

IRS INTRUSION

Madam President, I will spend the rest of my time on a separate topic about which many Americans are greatly concerned, and I am one of them.

It has been more than nine months since we first found out that the IRS was deliberately targeting certain political organizations for their political beliefs. At first, the Obama administration acknowledged that any abuse by the IRS was unacceptable. But then, in subsequent days and months, it has tried to play down the scandal and blame it on a few rogue operators in the Cincinnati Field Office. Yet the more we have learned, the more we realize the abuses involved significant coordination with the IRS headquarters here in Washington, DC.

Because of these abuses, millions of Americans now worry that the Internal Revenue Service and their own Federal Government have been corrupted, and we have become more like a banana republic. This damage to the public confidence and the public trust is immeasurable, and much of the damage may end up being irreversible.

Of course, the right response when the administration and Congress learned of these abuses would have been to clean house at the agency and give the American people ironclad assurances this would never, ever happen again. Of course, the right response would have been accountability, firing people, and strong support for congressional investigations on a bipartisan basis and the adoption of new safeguards against potential future abuses.

Instead, we have seen that the investigations, most notably led in the House of Representatives, have been met with whitewash, and there have been active efforts to prevent Congress from actually uncovering the full story. That is a shameful response, and it is dishonest. Unfortunately, it is about to get worse.

The Obama IRS is now proposing a new political speech rule that would force many 501(c)(4), or grassroots organizations, to dramatically change their activities or else form formal political action committees. If the groups are forced to register as political outfits, they will be subject to new campaign finance rules, which, of course, may be the whole point.

As the Wall Street Journal noted earlier this week:

> The purpose of this disclosure is to set up donors as political targets for boycotts and intimidation so that the costs of participating in politics will be too steep.

I might note the Supreme Court of the United States addressed this concern in a very important case decades ago, NAACP v. Alabama, where they held that under the First Amendment to the Constitution, the NAACP was not required to disclose its membership list because, at the time, sadly, they were worried about intimidation and targeting of their members. So the Supreme Court of the United States said that under the First Amendment of the Constitution and the freedom of association included there, the NAACP did not need to disclose its membership list because of this bona fide threat.

These are not contrived concerns today. Back in 2012, donors to the Mitt Romney presidential campaign found themselves publicly attacked and slandered for daring to support Governor Romney and participating in the political process. For that matter, something even more sinister happened to one Idaho businessman by the name of Frank VanderSloot. In April of 2012, Mr. VanderSloot was one of 8 Romney donors who were condemned by an Obama campaign Web site and called ''less than reputable.'' Shortly thereafter, a Democratic opposition researcher began searching for Mr. VanderSloot's divorce records. Meanwhile, the IRS decided to audit 2 years worth of tax filings for Mr. VanderSloot and the Labor Department announced a separate audit of the workers employed on his cattle ranch. Coincidence? I suspect Mr. VanderSloot was targeted because of his political activities. It was a deeply troubling question in 2012, and it is even more troubling today, given all we have learned about the IRS targeting since that time.

I offer as my next example the experience of one of my constituents, Catherine Engelbrecht in Houston, TX. Ms. Engelbrecht is a Texas businesswoman

who founded both the King Street Patriots and an organization called True the Vote. She was mainly concerned about the integrity of the ballot and training people to participate in the process and express themselves more effectively through that process. But she found herself targeted by multiple Federal agencies, including the IRS, the FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and OSHA, none of which had ever contacted her family's businesses before her involvement in grassroots activism. As Ms. Engelbrecht recently told a House committee investigating:

> We had never been audited, we had never been investigated, but all that changed upon submitting applications for the nonprofit statuses of True the Vote and King Street Patriots. Since that filing in 2010, my private businesses, my nonprofit organizations, and family have been subjected to more than 15 instances of audit or inquiry by federal agencies.

Make no mistake. The proposed IRS rule would make it even harder for people such as Ms. Engelbrecht to participate in the political process—something that is her constitutional right—and it would strongly discourage other similarly interested and concerned citizens from exercising their rights. In other words, it would strike at the very heart of self government, and at the very heart of the American democracy.

The IRS was meant to be a tax collection agency, period—not to be the police of political speech and political activity. But now we know, after the Affordable Care Act was passed—now more commonly called ObamaCare—we now know the IRS is in charge of enforcing ObamaCare by collecting the penalties for people who don't buy government-approved health insurance. But, still, that is apparently not enough of a job for the IRS, even though the work they are already doing they are not doing very well. With this now 501(c)(4) rule, the IRS would effectively become a campaign finance regulator.

As the advocates for this rule are aware, we already have an agency responsible for enforcing campaign finance rules. It is called, strangely enough, the Federal Election Commission, and it is a strictly bipartisan institution, as it should be. If the President and my friends across the aisle want to change campaign finance laws, they should either draft legislation or make their case to the Federal agency that has the jurisdiction to deal with them: The election commissioners at the Federal Election Commission. But turning the IRS into a de facto arm of the FEC is just more political overreach, and it is going to be ripe for abuse. Indeed, not only would the proposed 501(c)(4) rule further distract the IRS from its core mission, it would trample the First Amendment, intimidate people from exercising their rights of free speech, and it would weaken our participatory democracy.

I also note the rule would not cover the political activities of some other tax-exempt organizations. I am sure this was just an oversight. Labor unions are exempted. So why, if the Treasury is proposing this rule—why, if this is going to be given to the IRS—would we carve out some of the largest donors and participants in the political process in America today, which is organized labor? Not for reasons of fairness, I suppose but, rather, because the proponents of this rule basically want to tilt the scale in their favor, once again, and they want to suppress the speech and the political activity of people they disagree with—which is un-American.

Not surprisingly, the IRS has received tens of thousands of comments on the rule, and most of these comments have been critical. This morning in the Senate Judiciary Committee, my colleague Senator CRUZ read a comment from the American Civil Liberties Union that was critical of this rule. I don't agree with a lot of the policies of the American Civil Liberties Union, but they are absolutely right in this instance. Given the tremendous importance of this issue, including the potential consequences and damage to First Amendment rights, we need to make sure this rule is not implemented as proposed. I urge all of my constituents in Texas and all Americans and everyone within the sound of my voice to continue making their voices heard and to continue to urge President Obama and the IRS commissioner to stop this dangerous IRS power grab.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Madam President, I come to the floor today in support of S. 1982, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014.

I believe we must keep the promises we have made to our veterans. We can do this by giving them the same quality of service they gave us, and by providing them with the care they deserve. That is why I support this bipartisan bill.

The bill contains a number of provisions that will improve the lives of the men and women in uniform and our veterans by:

> Restoring the full cost-of-living adjustment for all military retirees;
>
> Reforming the system for processing veteran's disability claims to reduce the existing backlog;
>
> Providing in-State tuition assistance for post 9/11 veterans pursuing a college degree;
>
> Expanding programs designed to help veterans find a job;
>
> Requiring new services for survivors of sexual assault: and
>
> Improving health care services related to mental health, traumatic brain injury and other conditions.

In addition to supporting this bill, as the Chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I have put money in the Federal checkbook to improve the veteran's health care system so that wounded and disabled warriors get the care and benefits they need. I have worked to ensure veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, or a Traumatic Brain Injury, TBI, receive better diagnosis and treatment through the Defense Department and the VA.

I have also led the charge to reduce the backlog in processing veteran's disability claims. I brought Secretary Shinseki to Baltimore to create a sense of urgency to end the backlog by 2015. I used my power as Chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee to convene a hearing with the top brass in the military and members of the Committee to identify challenges and get moving on solutions. I cut across agencies to break down smokestacks and developed a 10-point Checklist for Change enacted as part of the FY2014 Omnibus Appropriations bill. This plan includes better funding, better technology, better training and better oversight of the VA.

We made a sacred commitment to honor those who served by giving them the benefits they've earned. This legislation is a significant step in the right direction, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, the Veterans Benefits Act, S. 1982, purports to place caps on future years' expenditures for Overseas Contingency Operations, ''OCO'', ostensibly to pay-for the added expenditures authorized by the bill.

OCO is an emergency expenditure. Therefore, it does not count against the statutory budget caps. How much OCO, if any, will be needed in any given year is a determination made year by year in an appropriations bill and can only be made in that year, when we know what national security contingencies our military will actually face.

If OCO caps could be used to pay for this bill, there would not be a need to waive the budget points of order against the bill. So, my vote to waive budget points of order is not a vote to use OCO caps as an offset, because they cannot be so used. Instead, my vote is a vote in favor of the worthwhile expenditures for veterans' benefits that S. 1982 authorizes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MERKLEY). The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs' Committee, I want to thank many people for helping me bring forth the legislation we are going to be voting on this afternoon.

I thank those people who have come down to the floor to speak on behalf of our veterans. That includes Majority Leader REID, who has been so helpful throughout, Senators MURRAY, BLUMENTHAL, HEINRICH, PRYOR, DURBIN, MERKLEY, WALSH, SHAHEEN, and CASEY. I suspect I have left out some Members.

I thank my entire staff at the Veterans Affairs' Committee—Steve Robertson, Dahlia Melendrez, Travis Murphy, Kathryn Monet, Kathryn Van Haste, Elizabeth Austin, Carlos Fuentes, Ann Vallandingham, Rebecca

Thoman, Jason Dean, Shannon Jackson, Shanna Lawrie, and Rafael Anderson—for their help on this effort.

I thank the 28 cosponsors of this important legislation. I will not read their names. They know who they are, and I thank them very, very much.

As I indicated earlier, this legislation is not BERNIE SANDERS' legislation. This is legislation that, by and large, comes from the hearts and souls of the veterans of this country.

As chairman of the committee, I thought it was my obligation to listen to what the veterans of our country were saying about their problems and their needs and how we might go forward, and that is what I and others on the committee did. We listened. That is the reason why this legislation is being supported by virtually every veterans organization in the United States of America, representing millions and millions of veterans. I thank them for their support—and not only for their support but for their help in crafting this legislation: the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Wounded Warrior Project, Gold Star Wives, Student Veterans of America, Air Force Sergeants Association, American Ex-Prisoners of War, Association of the United States Navy, Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, National Guard Association of the United States, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, Fleet Reserve Association, Marine Corps League, Marine Corps Reserve Association, Military Officers of America Association, Military Order of the Purple Heart, National Association of Uniformed Services, Non Commissioned Officers Association, Retired Enlisted Association, American Military Retirees Association, National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, National Association of State Veterans Homes, and many other veterans organizations. Thank you very much for your support for this legislation.

It is no secret that Congress today is extremely partisan and to a significant degree dysfunctional. That is why the approval rating of Congress is somewhere around 15 percent. There are problems facing the American people, and we cannot address those problems. The American people are profoundly disgusted with what we do and, in fact, with what we do not do.

I had hoped from the bottom of my heart that at least on this issue—the need to protect and defend the veterans of this country and their families, others who have given so much to us—we could rise above the day-to-day rancor and the party politics we see here on this floor almost every single day.

We will, in fact, see within a short while whether we will rise to the occasion, whether we will, in fact, stand with the veterans of this country, or whether once again we are going to succumb to the same-old, same-old politics that we see almost every day.

Let me very briefly touch upon some of the objections my Republican colleagues have made to this bill. Some of them—not a whole lot, by the way, but some have come to the floor and they have objected to this bill. So let me respond to some of their concerns.

Some of my Republican colleagues have said they cannot vote for this bill because they could not get the opportunity to offer an amendment on the Iran sanctions situation.

Mr. President, you know what. The issue of Iran sanctions is an important issue, but it has nothing to do with the needs of veterans. In case people do not understand it, this is a comprehensive veterans bill, and while Iran sanctions may be important, they have nothing to do with what we are discussing today. That is not just my opinion. Far more importantly, we have the opinion of the largest veterans organization in this country, which represents over 2 million veterans, and that is the American Legion. Here is what Daniel M. Dellinger, the national commander of the American Legion, said just yesterday on this issue:

> Iran is a serious issue that Congress needs to address, but it cannot be tied to S. 1982—

This veterans legislation—

> 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.

That is Mr. Dellinger, the national commander of the largest veterans organization in this country. I thank him very much because he is exactly right, and he reflects what the overwhelming majority of the American people believe: Deal with the issue at hand.

But it is not just the American Legion I want to thank. The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America tweeted the other day:

> The Senate should not get distracted while debating & voting on the vets bill. Iran sanctions, Obamacare, etc. aren't relevant to S. 1982.

They are absolutely right. Let's talk about veterans' needs.

Now, some other Republican colleagues, in objecting to this bill, have said they cannot vote for it because it is not bipartisan enough and it has not been fully marked up in committee.

Well, that is not quite true. Almost all of the provisions in this bill did come out of the committee. In fact, two of the major components of this bill—two separate omnibus bills—were passed by a unanimous vote. You cannot get much more bipartisan than when you have two major provisions in a bill passing with all Republicans and Democrats voting for it. That is pretty bipartisan where I come from.

Furthermore, this legislation contains a number of provisions authored and supported by Republican members of the Veterans Affairs' Committee. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, there are 26 separate provisions that Republican members have authored or cosponsored.

This legislation also includes two key provisions that were passed in a bipartisan way by the Republican House of Representatives. With almost unanimous votes, the House passed a provision that we have in this legislation that would authorize the VA to enter into 27 major medical facility leases in 18 States and Puerto Rico. In other words, this was a new provision that I did add to this bill, was not discussed in committee but, in fact, has overwhelming bipartisan support. The second provision we added to the bill not discussed in committee also passed the House with broad support, and that deals with the very important issue of ensuring that veterans can take full advantage of the post-9/11 GI bill and get instate tuition in the State in which they currently live.

So to as great a degree as possible I have tried to make this bill a bipartisan bill. That is where we are.

Now, other Republicans have come to the floor and they have objected to this bill because they argue that by expanding VA health care to veterans currently not eligible for it—veterans who in some cases are trying to get by on $28,000, $30,000 a year in this tough economy; and it is true, we do expand VA health care to those veterans who do not have a whole lot of money—the Republicans who object say, well, that would open the floodgates for millions or tens of millions—I think somebody said 22 million veterans—every veteran in America would be eligible for VA health care, that the health care system would be swamped and health care, especially for those most in need, would deteriorate because so many people came into the system.

As I mentioned yesterday, this is absolutely untrue. No new veteran would be added into VA health care until the VA had the infrastructure to accommodate those new veterans. So we are not opening the door for millions of new veterans—not true—and, as currently is the case, those with service-connected disabilities would continue to get the highest priority service, as they currently do and which, in my view, should always be the case. Those who were injured in war are the top priority, and those folks must always be the top priority, and that is certainly the case in this legislation.

Then last but not least there is the objection that we are going to be dealing with in about 45 minutes—the vote

we will be having—and that is that some of my colleagues basically say: Senator SANDERS, this bill is just too expensive and we just cannot afford to pass it. This bill costs $21 billion—that is a lot of money, I do not deny it—and that is just too much money, and we cannot afford to pass this bill, which helps millions of veterans.

I want to respond to that point in two ways. First, I want to address it from an inside-the-beltway, more technical perspective, and then I want to talk to the American people about the cost of war and what we can afford and what we cannot afford.

In terms of the funding of this bill, the Congressional Budget Office—the nonpartisan scorekeeper—has estimated that mandatory spending in this bill will total $2.88 billion over the next 10 years—$2.88 billion. All of this mandatory spending is completely offset. Let me repeat that. All of this mandatory spending is completely offset, not by OCO funds, but through more than $4.2 billion in actual savings from the programs within the jurisdiction of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. As a result, CBO has determined that overall mandatory spending in this bill will be reduced—will be reduced—by more than $1.3 billion.

That is what the CBO said. In addition, this bill authorizes $18.3 billion in discretionary spending. We have 4.2 in mandatory, more than offset, and then we have 18.3 billion in discretionary spending over the next 5 years.

As the Presiding Officer knows, there is no rule in the Senate that an authorization of funding has to be offset. That is what the Committee on Veterans' Affairs is. We are an authorizing committee. We are not an appropriations committee. In essence, the discretionary spending provisions in this legislation are just recommendations on how much additional funding we believe is needed for our Nation's veterans. It will be up to future legislation in the Appropriations Committee, as is always the case, to approve or disapprove of these recommendations.

In other words, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, an authorizing committee, has made a recommendation. The final word, as is always the case when we spend money, rests with the Appropriations Committee. The discretionary spending authorized under this bill is, in fact, paid for by using savings from winding down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, otherwise known as the OCO fund.

Again, these are recommendations. The Appropriations Committee has the final word. CBO estimates that spending for Overseas Contingency Operations will total a little over $1 trillion over the next decade. Spending as a result of this legislation to improve the lives of millions of our veterans will be less than 2 percent of that $1 trillion. So anybody who comes down to the floor and says this bill is going to take away from the needs of our men and women in Afghanistan or elsewhere is simply inaccurate.

One trillion dollars is what is in the fund for the next 10 years. We spend less than $20 billion of that fund. Some people say, well, yes, that is fine. But OCO funding has to go into ammunition, it has to go into planes, it has to go into tanks. That is where it goes.

That is not quite the case. Let me give you an example of how we have spent past overseas contingency operation funds.

Since 2005, the Defense Department has used OCO funding for childcare centers, for hospitals, for traumatic brain injury research, for equipment, and schools. In 2010, $50 million of OCO funds were used for the Guam Improvement Enterprise Fund. To my mind, if we can use money for the Guam Improvement Enterprise Fund—I do not know much about that—I do believe we should be able to use some of the OCO funds to protect the needs of men and women who made enormous sacrifices defending our country.

Last year OCO funds were allocated to a number of countries around the world: Egypt, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Somalia, South Sudan, and many other countries.

This year $28 million in OCO funding is being used for the TRICARE health care program. In other words, we are using a tiny percentage, less than 2 percent of the funds in the OCO fund, to protect veterans. We have seen over the years OCO funding used in a whole lot of other areas.

I happen to believe that what we are trying to do with OCO funds falls well within the definition of what that fund is supposed to be used for. If we are supposed to be using that fund for military purposes, then we take care of the military personnel who served our country—totally legitimate, totally consistent.

That is kind of the technical, inside-the-beltway explanation for why I think the funding mechanism we have chosen and the approach we have taken is legitimate. But let me get actually to the far more important reason as to why this bill should be passed and it should be paid for; that is, very simply, this bill in a small way attempts to pay back and help veterans and their families for the enormous sacrifices they have made for this country, sacrifices which in the deepest sense can never, ever be fully paid back.

This is what this bill does. This bill helps Members of Congress, on Memorial Day or Veterans Day, when they go out and they meet with veterans and their families, that if a Member of Congress, Member of the Senate bumps into a young veteran who is in a wheelchair, who because of a war-related injury is unable to have a baby and start a family that he or she wanted, some of those injuries, maybe the spinal cord, some of them may have taken place in the genital region, but for whatever reason—we have over 2,000 veterans in this country today who are unable to naturally have babies. Many of them want families. If a Member of the Senate wants to look that veteran in the eyes and say to him or her that they think we cannot afford to help that individual who sacrificed so much for this country have a family, well go do that. Tell that individual that you think we cannot afford to help him or her, but when you do that, I hope you will also tell him why you voted to give $1 trillion in tax breaks to the top 2 percent at a time when the wealthiest people in this country are doing phenomenally well. Virtually all of my Republican colleagues thought it was appropriate to provide huge tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires.

So when you speak to that young veteran who can no longer have a child and you are going to explain why we cannot afford to help that family, tell them it was OK to vote for tax breaks for the Koch brothers or the Walton family, but we do not have enough money to help them start a family.

If you as a Senator see a 70-year-old woman or 75-year-old woman pushing a wheelchair for a veteran who lost his legs in Vietnam, tell that woman, have the courage, have the honesty to tell that woman we cannot extend the caregiver benefits to her that we have, quite appropriately, for the post-9/11 veterans. Tell that woman who may be taking care of that disabled vet 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, who lives under enormous stress, that we do not have the resources to help her with a modest stipend; we do not have the resources as the U.S. Government to maybe have a nurse come in once a week to relieve her. We do not have the resources to give her some technical help for herself, for her husband. Explain to her that we cannot afford to do that.

But then in the same breath, if you please, explain how you can support a situation where one out of four corporations in this country does not pay a nickel in Federal income taxes. It is OK for General Electric, some of the largest corporations in the world in a given year, not to pay a penny in Federal income tax, but we somehow do not have the money to give a little bit of help to a 70-, 75-year-old wife who is working 24/7 to give support to their loved ones.

I say to my follow Senators: If you happen to meet a veteran who is trying to get by on $28,000, $30,000, $35,000 a year, and you notice that the teeth in his mouth are rotting, if you notice that person may not have health insurance, one of the million veterans in this country who have no health insurance, I want you to go up to that veteran and have the courage, the honesty, to tell them that you believe the United States of America does not have the money to take care of his needs, to get him VA health care, to help him fix his teeth.

But explain to him why you may have voted for more than $100 billion in tax breaks for the wealthiest three-tenths of 1 percent because you think we should repeal the estate tax that only applies to the wealthiest three-

tenths of 1 percent, the wealthiest of the wealthy. You are prepared to vote, and virtually all Republicans are, to give millionaire and billionaire families, the wealthiest of the wealthy, the top three-tenths of 1 percent, $100 billion in tax breaks, but we are not prepared, we supposedly do not have the money to get VA health care for someone making $28,000, $30,000 or dental care for someone whose teeth are rotting in his mouth.

You go explain that. Have the honesty, the courage, guys, to say: Yes, tax breaks for billionaires, but we do not have the resources to get you into VA health care. I want you to explain to a young woman who left the military, maybe broken in spirit because she was raped or sexually assaulted while in the military, tell her America does not have the resources to get her, through the VA, the proper care she needs to get her life back together after her sexual assault. Tell her that.

If you happen to meet a young man who was eligible for the post-9/11 GI bill, who today cannot afford to go to college where he lives because he is not eligible for in-state tuition and there is a gap between what the GI education bill pays and what is required in the State he is living in of $10,000, he cannot afford it, cannot go to college, explain to him that we do not have the money to help him.

If you bump into an old veteran—we have heard some discussion in the last couple of days that the VA lacks adequate health care facilities, we do not have enough around the country. This legislation that we are voting on right now, that in fact was already passed in the House, provides for the VA to enter into leases for 27 medical facilities all across this country in 18 different States.

Tell him, tell that 70-year-old veteran or the 80-year-old veteran who wants access to primary health care near where he lives that we do not have the resources to provide that primary care, but we can spend billions of dollars rebuilding the infrastructure in Afghanistan, where most of that money is stolen by a corrupt leadership.

Maybe, colleagues, one of you will see a young veteran, one of hundreds of thousands of veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who are dealing with PTSD or traumatic brain injury or maybe it is a young man who has come back who just cannot find a job in this very tough economy. Go up to him and say: Yes, tax breaks for the rich are great; corporations not paying taxes, that is OK, but I do not believe we should be providing help to you.

The bottom line is what we believe in. It is not just speeches we give on Memorial Day and on Veterans Day. I know my colleagues give great speeches.

The question is, and the more important issue is, not your fine rhetoric, but are you prepared to vote for programs that help human beings in need. Speeches are great, but action is better and far more important.

This is about who we are as a people. It is about what our priorities are. In my view, at the very top of our priority list has to be to protect and defend those people who protect and defend us, those people who have given much more than we can ever repay.

There are gold star wives who want to go to college, and we allow that in this bill. They lost their husbands. They are trying to take care of their kids. They want a new shot at life. They need a college education. We say they should have that. I don't think that is asking too much.

Enough of the rhetoric, enough of the speeches, enough about how everybody loves the veterans. Now is the time for action. I implore all of my colleagues to overcome this vote, to give us the votes that we need to go forward to protect those who have protected us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. I ask unanimous consent for Senator MCCAIN, Senator AYOTTE, and me to engage in a colloquy for approximately 20 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

Mr. GRAHAM. My colleagues will be here in a moment. I will start. Thank you for recognizing me.

Senator MCCAIN has arrived.

The time has come, colleagues, for us as a body to provide some oversight that is missing when it comes to the death of four Americans at the Benghazi consulate on September 11, 2012. I will try not to get emotional.

The bottom line is all of us very much appreciate those who serve in harm's way in the State Department and in the military. When bad things happen that can cost someone their life, that is sometimes the consequence of service.

But when the system breaks down, it is utter and complete failure, nothing responsible happens to those who allow the failure, and when we really don't know the truth about how the system has failed, then they have died in a fashion that is unacceptable.

I am urging my colleague, the Democratic leader, to form a joint select committee of the relevant committees, the Armed Services Committee, the intelligence committee, the Foreign Relations Committee, and any other committee that is relevant, to get to the bottom of what happened in Benghazi.

I have come to conclude that this issue is not going away. It will not die out because four Americans lost their lives.

We have compiled an event timeline that I think does the following. The story told by Susan Rice and the President himself shortly after the attack on September 16, and for a couple of weeks later, has absolutely collapsed. It is not credible. It is a fabrication. It was a manipulation of the intel 7 weeks before an election, and I think it is abundantly clear that the information coming from Libya never suggested there was a protest and identified this as a terrorist attack from the very beginning. On September 16, 5 days after the attack U.N. ambassador Susan Rice assured the Nation that the consulate was substantially, significantly, and strongly secured.

There is absolutely nothing in the talking points about that. Clearly that was not the case. Why did she say that?

Her story about a protest caused by a hateful video being the most likely cause of the attack is not based on any facts or any reporting from Libya. We will walk through the timeline, but the head of the CIA in Libya on September 15 sent a message, an email, a cable, to the No. 2, Mike Morell, in the CIA in Washington, saying this was not—not—a protest that escalated into an attack.

That story line about a protest was misleading. It was false, it was politically motivated, in my view. The No. 2 at the CIA, Mike Morell—his testimony before the House and the Senate is highly suspect. He testified on November 14 or 15, 2012, to the Senate and House intelligence committees.

There was one episode where Mr. Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence said: He did not know who changed the famous talking points. The talking points originally identified Al Qaeda as being involved, identified this as a terrorist attack and were completely changed in the protest story line, not mentioning Al Qaeda at all.

Mike Morell, in May of 2013, admitted to changing the talking points. But when Director Clapper said: We don't know who changed the talking points. Mike Morell was sitting right by him and never said a word.

About 10 days later, Susan Rice asked to meet with me, Senator MCCAIN, and Senator AYOTTE to explain her side of the story. This was November 24 or 25; I can't remember the date. But Mike Morell accompanied her, and we had a meeting in the classified portion of the Capitol, the secure portion of the Capitol.

One of the first questions I asked Mr. Morell was: Who changed the talking points?

He said: We believe the FBI changed the talking points.

Senator MCCAIN asked him: Why did the CIA not know about the contents of the FBI interviews of the survivors on September 15, 16, and 17? Why didn't the CIA pick up a phone and call the FBI agents interviewing the Benghazi survivors in Germany on the September 15, 16, and 17, days after the attack?

Mike Morell said: The FBI basically would not share that information because it was an ongoing criminal investigation.

My mouth dropped. When the meeting was over I ran back to my office, called the FBI, and reported to them that the No. 2, the acting director at that time, Mike Morell, has claimed

that your agency, the FBI, changed its talking points, deleting all references to terrorism and Al Qaeda.

They went ballistic. They also denied that their agents ever withheld information from the CIA because it was an ongoing investigation. The FBI literally went ballistic on the phone. Hours later we got a call from the CIA saying the acting director misspoke: We may have changed the talking points, but we don't know why.

In light of this, it is now time for a joint select committee to be formed. How can we get to the bottom of the truth of what happened in Benghazi if no one has ever talked to Susan Rice about why she said what she said. Now is the time to recall Mike Morell to ask him questions about the validity of his testimony, the accuracy of his testimony to Congress.

There are a lot of people who think this is no big deal, apparently, particularly in the Congress on the other side. There are a lot of Americans who feel as if their government has not been straightforward and honest with them about what happened in Benghazi.

The role of the Congress is to provide oversight. I will conclude with this thought. When the war in Iraq was going fully, when Abu Ghraib became a disaster, when Guantanamo Bay tactics became exposed and they were outside of our values, Senator MCCAIN and I joined with Democrats to get to the bottom of it. After 9/11, the Bush administration originally did not want the 9/11 Commission to be formed.

Senator MCCAIN and Senator LIEBERMAN led the charge. We are doing no more now than we did then. We just need willing partners.

I cannot say to any family member or anyone who served our Nation in harm's way that we know the truth about what happened in Benghazi at this stage.

I can say this. We know what was told to us as a nation does not hold any water, and we know that people have manipulated the facts 7 weeks before an election.

I am still not comfortable with the fact that nobody could provide help to these people for over 9 hours. Before the attack, not one person who allowed the security to deteriorate to the point of where it became a death trap in Benghazi, to the point it became a death trap—not one person—has been fired. That is unacceptable.

With that, I will turn it over to my colleague Senator MCCAIN and eventually Senator AYOTTE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to engage in a colloquy with the Senator from South Carolina and the Senator from New Hampshire, who are on the floor.

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

Mr. MCCAIN. My colleague from South Carolina laid out many of the salient facts according to how they transpired and didn't transpire.

I will go forward a bit to last Sunday where on ''Meet the Press,'' Ambassador Rice was asked by David Gregory:

> When you were last here, Ambassador Rice, it was an eventful morning on the story of Benghazi and the horrible attack on our compound there. We haven't seen you in a while. As you look back at your involvement in all of that, do you have any regrets?
>
> David, no. Because what I said to you that morning, and what I did every day since, was to share the best information that we had at the time.

The Senator from South Carolina has just outlined the fact that the information he had at the time was drastically different from that which was articulated that Sunday morning following the attack on our embassy and the death of four great Americans. So it was not the information that we had at the time.

Then she said:

> And that information turned out, in some respects, not to be 100% correct. But the notion that somehow I or anybody else in the administration misled the American people is patently false.

The American people were misled. They were misled because she said, right after the attack, on ''Face the Nation,'' that it was ''based on the best information we have to date''—I quote from her statement back then, a few days after the attack—but based on the best information of what their assessment is:

> What happened in Benghazi was in fact initially a spontaneous reaction to what had just transpired hours before in Cairo, almost a copycat of the demonstrations against our facility in Cairo, prompted by the video.

We know now for sure, and we knew then, before Ambassador Rice went on that Sunday show, that it was not because as the Senator from South Carolina just pointed out, the station chief sent a message immediately following saying that this was not—repeat, not—a spontaneous demonstration. I will submit that for the record.

Somehow we have Ambassador Rice saying this was a hateful video that sparked this demonstration. It says: Whether there were Al Qaeda affiliates, whether they were Libyan-based extremists, is one of the things we have to determine. But, again, she said: Sparked by this hateful video. There was no involvement of the hateful video.

I hate to quote myself, but I was on that same program, and immediately after she spoke I said:

> Most people don't bring rocket-propelled grenades and heavy weapons to a demonstration. That was an act of terror and for anyone to disagree with that fundamental fact I think is really ignorant on the facts.

We know now that we now have facts that she was absolutely wrong. Of course, the question also remains what in the world was Susan Rice doing speaking that morning? What was she doing there? She had nothing to do with it. She was the Ambassador to the United Nations. And Secretary Clinton was ''exhausted,'' I believe was the rationale given why she wasn't on every Sunday morning show.

So the fact is we knew at the time Susan Rice said—and this is what it really was all about. It was all about a Presidential campaign and the narrative of bin Laden is dead, al-Qaeda is on the run, because then Susan Rice, in response to Bob Schieffer, said: President Obama said, when he was running for President, that he would refocus our efforts and attentions on Al-Qaeda. Then she said—get this—we have decimated Al-Qaeda; Osama bin Laden is gone. He also said we would end the war in Iraq responsibly. We have done that.

Is there anybody here who thinks the war in Iraq has been ended responsibly?

He has protected civilians in Libya, and Qadhafi is gone.

Obviously, we have not decimated Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaida is not on the run. In fact, Al-Qaeda is increasing everywhere across the Middle East and North Africa. Anybody who believes when the black flags of Al-Qaeda are flying over the city of Fallujah, where 96 brave Americans, marines and soldiers died, and 600 were wounded, that things were ''ended in Iraq responsibly,'' obviously that is not the case.

I think we have to understand the timing of all this. It was all part of a Presidential campaign. The President of the United States, in debate with Mitt Romney, said: Oh, I called it an act of terror. He didn't call it an act of terror. He didn't. In fact, 10 days later, at the U.N., he was still talking about hateful videos that sparked spontaneous demonstrations. The American people were badly misled.

I yield for my colleague from New Hampshire.

Mr. GRAHAM. Perhaps the Senator from New Hampshire could walk us through some of the reasons we now know the story line of a protest caused by a video doesn't hold water.

Ms. AYOTTE. I thank the Senator from South Carolina and the Senator from Arizona for everything they have done on this important issue and to get to the truth.

Frankly, I will quote the Senator from Arizona from last weekend, when he was asked what Ambassador Susan Rice said on ''Meet the Press,'' because I agree with his sentiment: I am speechless.

I am speechless because when Ambassador Rice was asked on ''Meet the Press,'' do you have any regrets about what you said on every single Sunday show on September 16 of 2012, she said she didn't have any regrets. She said: What I said to you that morning, and what I did every day since, is to share the best information we had at the time. The information I provided, which I explained to you, was what we had at the moment.

Actually, that is not the full picture and the information they had at the moment. That is why I think the word ''speechless'' applies. The fact she would have no regrets about misleading the American people is deeply

troubling. Because we know that immediately after he heard about the attacks, GEN Carter Ham, who was the commander of U.S. Africa Command at the time, told Secretary of Defense Panetta this was a terrorist attack. In fact, Secretary Panetta testified before the Armed Services Committee, as did the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chairman Dempsey, they knew at the time it was a terrorist attack.

But apparently, when Ambassador Rice went on to tell the story about this being the result of a hateful and heinous video and protest that started in Cairo, she missed that testimony and this incredibly important information held by key security leaders in our government.

We also know on September 12, 4 days before she appeared on the Sunday shows, the day after the attacks, according to testimony given before the House Oversight and Governmental Reform Committee given last May, Beth Jones, who was then the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs, sent an email on behalf of our government to the Libyan Ambassador in Washington, DC, which said the following:

> The group that conducted the attacks, Ansar al-Sharia, is affiliated with Islamic terrorists.

This was 4 days before Ambassador Rice went on all the Sunday shows and said this was in response to a hateful and offensive video.

That was not the case.

Let's go further. This wasn't the best information they had at the time. This raises questions as well about the role of Mike Morell, who at the time was the Deputy CIA Director. I was part of the meeting with Mike Morell and Ambassador Rice at the time, and one of the things I learned in that briefing also troubled me a great deal about the representation Ambassador Rice made on those Sunday shows, including her statement that she has no regrets, apparently, and the claim they had the best information at the time.

One of the things that goes out is called the Presidential daily brief. In fact, Ambassador Rice had a very important position in our government at the time. I still wonder why she was the person who was sent out on every Sunday show with regard to the attacks on our consulate in Benghazi, but the daily intelligence briefing at the time actually contained references to the potential involvement of Al-Qaeda in these attacks. Yet somehow, when she went on the Sunday shows, she felt she could make the statement that Al-Qaeda has been decimated and then blamed the attacks on our consulate on this hateful video, further contradicting the information we had at the time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's 20 minutes has expired.

Ms. AYOTTE. I ask unanimous consent for 1 minute to wrap up.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. AYOTTE. I thank the Chair.

I will defer to my colleagues, but the bottom line is this: We are speechless by what Ambassador Rice said last Sunday. We need to have her testimony before the Congress to get to the bottom of why these misrepresentations were made. Mr. Morell needs to be brought back before the Congress, and ultimately we need a select committee.

I defer to my colleague from South Carolina to wrap up.

Mr. GRAHAM. I thank my colleagues.

Now is the time for us to move forward to set the stage for a vote; is that correct?

Well, I will say, No. 1, as to the amendment of Senator BURR, it takes care of veterans similar to what Senator SANDERS is proposing, but it pays for it in a more responsible way. Unlike the proposal of Senator SANDERS, we have an additional element in the Burr amendment that not only takes care of veterans but it deals with a national security imperative, which is the Iran sanctions legislation. This is bipartisan in nature, with 59 cosponsors, including 17 Democrats. This would reimpose sanctions at the end of the 6-month negotiating period if we do not have an acceptable outcome regarding the Iranian nuclear program; we need to dismantle the reactor, remove the uranium, and stop enrichment.

That is the goal of the Iran sanctions legislation, and I am very pleased Senator BURR would bring that before the body. I am urging my colleagues to allow us to vote on Iran sanctions. The sanctions are literally crumbling.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All Republican time has expired.

Mr. GRAHAM. With that, I understand Senator BURR and others on our side have filed an amendment which would impose additional sanctions against the Government of Iran if it violates the interim agreement with the United States, and I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending motion so I may offer amendment No. 2752.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SANDERS. Reserving the right to object, I do find it interesting that, in the midst of this important debate about the needs of our veterans, my Republican colleagues are on the floor of the Senate and have virtually nothing to say about veterans.

This bill is not about Benghazi. This veterans bill is not about Iran sanctions, it is not about Hillary Clinton. It is about protecting the needs of our veterans. So the amendment of Senator BURR does not go anywhere near as far as we need to go in terms of veterans issues. It brings the Iran sanctions issue into a debate where it should not be brought.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. GRAHAM. In addition to Burr amendment No. 2752, there are many amendments on our side of the aisle waiting to be offered.

Parliamentary inquiry: Is it correct that no Senator is permitted to offer an amendment to this bill while the majority leader's amendments and motions are pending?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

Mr. GRAHAM. In addition to the Burr amendment No. 2752, there are many amendments on our side of the aisle waiting in the queue to be offered.

Further parliamentary inquiry: If a motion to table the Reid motion to commit is successful, would there be an opportunity to offer a motion to commit the bill to the Veterans' Affairs Committee to be reported back as a fully amendable bill with the Iran sanctions bill included?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If the motion to table is agreed to, there would be an opportunity for Senators to offer another motion to recommit with instructions to which the Senator's amendment could be offered.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, in order to offer amendment No. 2752, the Iran sanctions amendment, I move to table the pending Reid motion to commit and 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 are ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND), the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON), and the Senator from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW) are necessarily absent.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KING). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 44, nays 52, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 45 Leg.]

YEAS—44

Alexander	Enzi	McConnell
Ayotte	Fischer	Moran
Barrasso	Flake	Paul
Blunt	Graham	Portman
Boozman	Grassley	Risch
Burr	Hatch	Roberts
Chambliss	Heller	Rubio
Coats	Hoeven	Scott
Coburn	Inhofe	Sessions
Cochran	Isakson	Shelby
Collins	Johanns	Thune
Corker	Johnson (WI)	Toomey
Cornyn	Kirk	Vitter
Crapo	Lee	Wicker
Cruz	McCain	

NAYS—52

Baldwin	Cardin	Hagan
Begich	Carper	Harkin
Bennet	Casey	Heinrich
Blumenthal	Coons	Heitkamp
Booker	Donnelly	Hirono
Boxer	Durbin	Johnson (SD)
Brown	Feinstein	Kaine
Cantwell	Franken	King

Klobuchar
Landrieu
Leahy
Levin
Manchin
Markey
McCaskill
Menendez
Merkley
Mikulski
Murphy
Murray
Pryor
Reed
Reid
Rockefeller
Sanders
Schatz
Schumer
Shaheen
Tester
Udall (CO)
Udall (NM)
Walsh
Warner
Warren
Whitehouse
Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Gillibrand
Murkowski
Nelson
Stabenow

The motion was rejected.

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be 2 minutes equally divided in the usual form prior to the vote on the motion to waive; further, that the remaining votes in this sequence be 10 minute votes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? The Chair hears none, and it so ordered.

Who yields time?

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, this budget point of order we are now going to vote on tells us in a very significant way who we are as a people. If you vote for this budget point of order, you are saying that in this great country we do not have the resources to help our veterans with their health care, education, and to be able to deal with sexual assault. We need to help older veterans get the nursing care and build new medical facilities that they desperately need.

I personally—and I have to say this honestly—have a hard time understanding how anyone can vote for tax breaks for billionaires, millionaires, and large corporations and then say we don't have the resources to protect our veterans. We should not be supporting this point of order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, my only wish is that we had been on the Senate floor debating reforms within the system so we could fulfill and keep the promises we made to our veterans who are currently in that system.

I yield back the remainder of our time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The yeas and nays were previously ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON) is necessarily absent.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER) and the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER) would have voted ''nay.''

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 56, nays 41, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 46 Leg.]

YEAS—56

Baldwin
Begich
Bennet
Blumenthal
Booker
Boxer
Brown
Cantwell
Cardin
Carper
Casey
Coons
Donnelly
Durbin
Feinstein
Franken
Gillibrand
Hagan
Harkin
Heinrich
Heitkamp
Heller
Hirono
Johnson (SD)
Kaine
King
Klobuchar
Landrieu
Leahy
Levin
Manchin
Markey
McCaskill
Menendez
Merkley
Mikulski
Moran
Murphy
Murray
Pryor
Reed
Reid
Rockefeller
Sanders
Schatz
Schumer
Shaheen
Stabenow
Tester
Udall (CO)
Udall (NM)
Walsh
Warner
Warren
Whitehouse
Wyden

NAYS—41

Alexander
Ayotte
Barrasso
Blunt
Boozman
Burr
Chambliss
Coats
Coburn
Cochran
Collins
Corker
Cornyn
Crapo
Cruz
Enzi
Fischer
Flake
Graham
Grassley
Hatch
Hoeven
Inhofe
Isakson
Johanns
Johnson (WI)
Kirk
Lee
McCain
McConnell
Paul
Portman
Risch
Roberts
Rubio
Scott
Sessions
Shelby
Thune
Toomey
Vitter

NOT VOTING—3

Murkowski
Nelson
Wicker

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 56, the nays are 41. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is rejected. The point of order is sustained, and under section 312 of the Congressional Budget Act the bill is recommitted to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF MICHAEL L. CONNOR TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Michael L. Connor, of New Mexico, to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all time be yielded back.

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

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Michael L. Connor, of New Mexico, to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior?

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON) is necessarily absent.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. COBURN) and the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. WARREN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 97, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 47 Ex.]

YEAS—97

Alexander
Ayotte
Baldwin
Barrasso
Begich
Bennet
Blumenthal
Blunt
Booker
Boozman
Boxer
Brown
Burr
Cantwell
Cardin
Carper
Casey
Chambliss
Coats
Cochran
Collins
Coons
Corker
Cornyn
Crapo
Cruz
Donnelly
Durbin
Enzi
Feinstein
Fischer
Flake
Franken
Gillibrand
Graham
Grassley
Hagan
Harkin
Hatch
Heinrich
Heitkamp
Heller
Hirono
Hoeven
Inhofe
Isakson
Johanns
Johnson (SD)
Johnson (WI)
Kaine
King
Kirk
Klobuchar
Landrieu
Leahy
Lee
Levin
Manchin
Markey
McCain
McCaskill
McConnell
Menendez
Merkley
Mikulski
Moran
Murphy
Murray
Paul
Portman
Pryor
Reed
Reid
Risch
Roberts
Rockefeller
Rubio
Sanders
Schatz
Schumer
Scott
Sessions
Shaheen
Shelby
Stabenow
Tester
Thune
Toomey
Udall (CO)
Udall (NM)
Vitter
Walsh
Warner
Warren
Whitehouse
Wicker
Wyden

NOT VOTING—3

Coburn
Murkowski
Nelson

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid on the table.

The President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will resume legislative session.

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. FLAKE. Madam President, I would like to speak about an issue, but first I would like to yield to the minority leader.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2011

Mr. MCCONNELL. I am here in support of what our colleague from Arizona is going to be talking about shortly. It is basically this. We have a White House that is busily at work trying to quiet the voices of those who oppose them by doing the following: They are proposing a new regulation directed at 501(c)(4) organizations that have been active for over 50 years in expressing themselves about the issues of the day in our country. This regulation actually predates the IRS abuses we saw during the 2012 election.

I have spoken a number of times—including a couple of major speeches at one of the think tanks here in town—about what a threat it is to citizens when the heavy hand of the IRS comes down on them because they speak up against policies of the government.

This regulation that Senator FLAKE is going to speak about here in a few minutes that we would like to see delayed for a year has generated 120,000 comments. I would say to my friend from Arizona that I am told there has been no regulation in the history of the IRS that has even approached 120,000 comments. Is that the understanding of the Senator from Arizona?

Mr. FLAKE. That is. In fact, to give some kind of scale here, the Keystone Pipeline, which has been extremely controversial for months and months, has generated about 7,000 comments—7,000 comments for an issue such as that. This has generated north of 100,000.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I think it is reasonable to assume that the reason for that is there are groups out there all across America, on the right, on the left, and in the center who have taken a look at this new regulation and understand that it is the Federal Government using the heavy hand of the IRS to try to shut them up, to make it impossible for them to criticize the government or people like the Senator from Arizona and myself. It is none of the business of the government to be quieting the voices of the American people.

I know our Democratic friends are upset because some conservative groups have been very active. I do not recall the same sense of outrage over the last 50 years when groups on the left were actively involved.

I would say to my friend from Arizona, since these comments are coming from all over, it appears, does it not, that there is a lot of collateral damage here, that the administration may have wanted to target their enemies, but they are hitting some of their friends as well?

Mr. FLAKE. That is correct. Many of the organizations that have sounded alarm bells here are organizations such as the ACLU, the Sierra Club, and others, social welfare organizations that advocate for policy as well, that are concerned that this goes too far.

Mr. MCCONNELL. The final thing I would say to my friend from Arizona is that we have a new Commissioner of the IRS. He has an opportunity, does he not, to clean up an agency that is already in a lot of trouble because of the IRS scandals, because of the new responsibilities they have been given to enforce ObamaCare? This is an agency in trouble already before it wades into a political thicket such as this, particularly when it appears as if this whole regulation really originated at the White House, not at the IRS.

I am reminded that the Commissioner of the IRS during the Nixon administration was asked by the White House to help target President Nixon's enemies, and the Commissioner of the IRS said: No. No.

I wonder if my friend from Arizona agrees with me that the appropriate response from the new Commissioner of the IRS—responsible for cleaning up this troubled agency—to the White House ought to be, no, I am not going to participate in your effort to quiet the voices of your political foes.

Mr. FLAKE. I would certainly agree. If the IRS wants to establish or re-establish credibility that has been lost, then the Commissioner should say to the White House: I will act independently here.

To go forward with this rule, after what has gone on, would simply be going in the other direction and would be seen—and I think justifiably so—to be working hand in glove with the White House to stifle free speech.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I commend the Senator from Arizona for his leadership on this very important issue. I do not think there is anything more important to our democracy than First Amendment freedom of speech. The last thing an agency whose principal responsibility is to collect revenue for the Federal Government—the last thing an agency like that needs to be involved in is quieting the voices of the critics of this administration—or any other administration, for that matter.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. FLAKE. I thank the Senator from Kentucky. I certainly echo his comments. I do rise today to urge the Senate to pass legislation to prevent the IRS from trampling on free speech rights, particularly those of 501(c)(4) organizations.

The Stop Targeting of Political Beliefs by the IRS Act—it is a mouthful, I know—is sponsored by Senator ROBERTS from Kansas and myself. It would prohibit for 1 year the finalization of a proposed IRS regulation that would specifically limit the advocacy and educational activities of these groups.

This bill would also prevent additional targeting of 501(c)(4) organizations by restoring the IRS standards and definitions that were in place before the agency started targeting conservative groups back in 2010.

Last spring we learned that the IRS was targeting conservative groups applying for 501(c)(4) tax-exempt status, thanks to a report by the agency's inspector general. Since this discovery several IRS employees, including the Acting Commissioner, have resigned. Investigations by the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Department of Justice are ongoing.

Nevertheless, on November 29 the IRS published a proposed rule that would restrict the activities of 501(c)(4) organizations, limit their speech, and curtail their civic participation. This rule singles out the same groups that were previously targeted by the IRS and threatens to limit their participation in a host of advocacy and educational activities, even nonpartisan voter registration and education drives. These activities have a clear role in promoting civic engagement and social welfare, which is the precise purpose for which 501(c)(4) organizations are structured.

Unfortunately, this proposed rule would suppress these organizations' voices by forcing them to quit these activities or be shut down.

While this administration may be focused on quieting its conservative critics, even liberal groups have denounced the rule and called attention to the detrimental impact on free speech by organizations of all ideologies. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, this rule ''will produce the same structural issues at the IRS that led to the use of inappropriate criteria in the selection of various charitable and social welfare groups for undue scrutiny.''

In response to the Obama administration's claim that these tax groups have become confusing in the aftermath of a Citizens United decision, Nan Aron of the Alliance for Justice Action Campaign has commented that 501(c)(4) organizations ''weren't invented in the last election cycle; they've been around for generations. Their purpose isn't to hide donors, it's to advance policies.''

Even the Sierra Club has hammered the IRS rule.

As of this morning, I believe it is at least 94,000 comments the minority leader mentioned, and it may be north of 100,000 now, on the proposed rule have been submitted. This marks the largest number of comments ever submitted to any rulemaking. Let me repeat that. This is the largest number of comments ever submitted to any rulemaking.

As I said before, to put it in perspective, the Keystone Pipeline proposed rule we have heard so much about has registered just over 7,000 comments. That is compared to somewhere near 100,000 comments here. Clearly the public sees through this administration's veiled attempt to quash free speech and to shut down opposition to its priorities.

Yesterday the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed this same legislation, identical legislation in the House, by a vote of 243–176. Already, this legislation in the Senate has 40 Senate cosponsors. It clearly deserves the consideration and support of the full Senate.

However, this legislation has not been permitted to come up for debate in the full Senate. Earlier today Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee voted to oppose it, stalling further consideration. I suppose the veto threat issued by the President may have had something to do with that. This veto threat is unfortunate. It is clearly a disproportionate response to legislation aimed at protecting free speech rights of conservatives and liberals alike.

This bill is simple. It only suspends new IRS rulemaking related to 501(c)(4)s until the ongoing investigations are completed. It simply suspends for 1 year. That is prudent and necessary.

I urge my colleagues to join me in support of free speech rights by these groups by approving this legislation to prevent the finalization of the IRS's rule or any other that seeks to continue to target groups based on ideology.

Madam President, with that, I ask unanimous consent that the Finance Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 2011, that the bill be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid on the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WYDEN. Reserving the right to object, Madam Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. This bill is clearly within the jurisdiction of the Senate Finance Committee, because it changes the Tax Code. For many months before I became the Chair of the committee, the Finance Committee staff, on a bipartisan basis, worked very hard and very comprehensively in a thoughtful way to address this issue, interviewing 28 IRS employees and reviewing approximately 500,000 pages of documents.

It is my hope—and again, I have been the Chair of the committee for only a little bit over 1 week—it is my hope and expectation that our report will be ready for release next month or in early April.

The Finance Committee, as I have indicated, is the committee of jurisdiction. It has the technical resources, the expertise, and experience to best fashion the appropriate remedies. My view is these matters are simply too important to be handled on the floor without the opportunity for the Finance Committee to address these issues, examine them in hearings, and to have meaningful debate.

The Senator from Arizona believes that the new rules from the IRS are not fair because they limit the public debate. I want to indicate to him and to our colleagues that I don't take a back seat to anybody in terms of promoting public debate. Free speech and fair treatment for all Americans—all Americans—in the political process is absolutely central to what I believe government ought to be all about.

I have tried, with our colleague from Alaska, Senator MURKOWSKI, to show that even in these difficult, polarizing political times, the parties can come together. Senator MURKOWSKI puts it very well in terms of what the future ought to be all about. It truly embodies our campaign disclosure bill—which, I would mention, is the first bipartisan campaign finance bill in the Senate since the days of McCain-Feingold.

Senator MURKOWSKI says it best when she says that what she wants, with respect to the rules for political debate in this country, is the ''even-steven'' rule. She wants to make sure the same principles that apply to the NRA apply to the Sierra Club, so that all Americans, in the course of political debates, are treated fairly. Also, we both believe that shining a light on the dark money that pulses through the American political system is not going to inhibit free speech. To the contrary, it is going to enhance the public's right to know about who is behind the political ads that bombard them during the political season without accountability or transparency.

I agree with Justice Scalia when he said:

> Requiring people to stand up in public for their political acts fosters civic courage, without which democracy is doomed.

So there are two reasons for my objection. First, the Finance Committee is the committee of jurisdiction that ought to have the opportunity to address these questions, and I want to assure my friend from Arizona—whom I have worked with many times on issues—that having just become the Chair, I intend to work very expeditiously on this matter, particularly with Senator HATCH.

Second, I point out to my colleagues on the floor there is a bipartisan opportunity in the days ahead to address many of these issues. It is embodied very eloquently by Senator MURKOWSKI, who says: If we are going to be serious about promoting the widest possible debate in this country and treating everyone fairly, we do it in accord with that even-steven principle.

For those reasons, I object at this time to the unanimous consent request.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. FLAKE. If I could, I want to respond to a few of the Senator's items.

The Senator is correct, it falls under the Finance Committee's jurisdiction. That is part of the reason why I bring this forward. The Finance Committee is undergoing an investigation that is not yet complete, so I think it would be prudent to forestall the implementation of new rules by the IRS while the Finance Committee investigation is ongoing. I think we all agree we shouldn't move forward on imprecise or incomplete information. That is why we are simply saying we are not proposing a rule, we are saying simply delay the new rule until investigations can be completed.

Also, with regard to the issue of fairness, I should note that this applies to 501(c)(4) organizations, nonprofit organizations. There are other organizations that are also nonprofit but are not included in this proposed rulemaking—for example, labor unions. They offer, under a nonprofit status as well, a 501(c)(5). They are not included here.

The Senator correctly says we should be concerned about fairness for all groups that are under this kind of nonprofit umbrella. That is concerning to a lot of people as well, because those organized under 501(c)(4) status are targeted here when those organized under (c)(5) status are not, when they have some of the same restrictions on what they can do. So we would be imposing new rulemaking and new rules on some organizations and not others. That is one concern and another reason to forestall new rulemaking until we have more complete information about what is going on at the IRS.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. MURRAY. I come to the floor this afternoon to take some time to talk about a law this Chamber passed in 2009. I wish to talk a little bit about what it means to serve in this body, what our responsibilities are, and why our constituents sent us here in the first place.

I have served in the Senate for more than 20 years and I have seen my share of controversial legislation. I have seen Democratic bills that Republicans couldn't stand; I have seen Democratic bills that Democrats wouldn't vote for; and I have seen bills that pretty much everybody opposed. But what I have seen in the last 4 years since the Affordable Care Act was passed by Congress and signed by the President is something new altogether.

Since the day that law passed, I have seen some of my Republican colleagues set reason, and some of their basic duties as public officials, completely aside, all in opposition of a law that means millions of Americans have access to affordable, quality health insurance they couldn't get before. It is a law that means millions of young people, many of them fresh out of college, are able to stay on their families' insurance plans. It is a law that says it is illegal for insurance companies to charge women more money just because they are women. It is a law that has provided millions of Americans with access to free preventive screenings and health care such as colonoscopies, mammograms, and flu shots. It is a law that says if you are an American and you have a preexisting condition, it is illegal for an insurance company to turn you away.

Since 2009, I have seen some of my colleagues simply refuse to acknowledge those facts about the law. I have watched them time and time again not listen to or hear stories of people in their own States whose lives have been changed by the Affordable Care Act and others who simply need access to get the benefits that are theirs. Some of my colleagues have even passed laws that make it harder to get covered under the Affordable Care Act.

One of our responsibilities as Senators, as public servants, is to help our

constituents access the Federal benefits that are available to them, particularly when it comes to health care. That might mean, perhaps, putting someone in touch with a navigator to help make sure they are getting the most affordable health insurance plan. It may be helping them become aware of an enrollment event in their State where they can learn how to get covered.

But our responsibilities don't end there. We also have to have an open, honest discussion about what the Affordable Care Act means for our constituents and talk about ways to improve it.

Instead, what we have seen is some of our colleagues who have spent the better part of 4 years try to turn this law into a bogeyman and trying to score cheap political points on an issue that can literally mean the difference between life and death.

I can understand why some of our colleagues disagree with parts of this law, and I have heard from some people who had challenges, honestly. We have to look and say can we fix this in a way that makes it work better for you. But what I can't understand is why anyone elected to Congress would decide to simply ignore real-life stories of their own constituents whose lives were changed the day this law took effect.

I can't understand why anyone would ignore an opportunity to make this law better, because that is not why we were sent here. We were sent here to listen to our constituents and fight to make sure our laws work for them.

I want to give some examples from my home State of Washington about people whose lives have been changed by the Affordable Care Act, people whose stories have been pretty much ignored in Washington, DC. I know later this afternoon several of my colleagues will be doing the same thing, so I hope everybody can turn off Fox News for a little while, not listen to Rush Limbaugh, and listen to some real stories of real live Americans who have been impacted by this law. I encourage them to go home and listen to some of the men and women in their own States, because the stories I am going to share are not unique.

I will start with the story of Susan Wellman from Bellingham, WA. She is self-employed and has had to pay for individual health insurance. Every year she has watched her health care costs rise higher and higher. It reached the point where she was paying $300 monthly premiums with an $8,000 deductible. All were what she described as ''paying for nothing.'' So as soon as she could, Susan got access to health care through our Washington State exchange, and she was so happy to have that chance. She spoke on the phone with a real-live person, and she was able to sign up for an affordable plan in just a few minutes. Now Susan is on a plan that costs her $125 a month instead of $300—$125 instead of $300—and it is a plan that has a $2,000 deductible, not an $8,000 deductible, and she says it actually pays for things.

Guess what. She can now afford to go to a doctor not just in the case of an emergency but for a physical or a mammogram that could save her life, not to mention thousands of dollars in health care costs. That kind of preventive care is good for Susan, and it is good for her family. It is also good for this country because when more people have access to preventive care, it makes health care cheaper for every single one of us.

Another person I have heard from whose life was changed by the affordable health care act is a man named Don Davis. He is 59 years old, and he actually goes by ''Reverend Don.'' He is a pastor in Seattle, and he is also a volunteer at the Boys and Girls Club. As the pastor of his church, he doesn't get any health care through his job. He doesn't even have a salary. That meant for a long time that Reverend Don didn't have health insurance. So when he was hospitalized back in 2008 for severe headaches, he was only able to receive an MRI through charity care. That MRI showed that Reverend Don had several brain tumors, but when the doctors wanted to do more testing and provide more care, he didn't have the insurance to pay for that. This is a man who has asked for nothing in life, who woke up every day willing to give to others, but he couldn't get the basic care he needed when he got sick.

Reverend Don is healthy today. He is serving his community. Because of the Affordable Care Act, he now also has health insurance. He signed up with a navigator at the local YWCA. Now, if he gets a headache, he can afford to go to the doctor. So because of the Affordable Care Act, Reverend Don can afford to dedicate his life to people in his community and he doesn't need to worry that the cost of the health care he needs might be denied him.

Finally, I want to talk about a couple in Bellingham, WA, named Rod Burton and Sarah Hill. Rod is one of millions of Americans who have had the utterly maddening experience of being denied insurance because of a preexisting condition. In Rod's case his preexisting condition was a congenital heart defect. Under our old system Rod was deemed uninsurable by most insurance plans from the moment he was born. So for a long time Rod found himself forced into purely catastrophic insurance with a very high premium that wouldn't cover much of anything. That changed for him with the Affordable Care Act.

Despite his heart defect, Rod was able to get a plan that covers him and his wife, and they found out they were eligible for tax credits to help pay for it. So today both Rod and Sarah are covered through a silver plan with lower premiums than the plan that only covered Rod if the worst happened.

I know we have a number of other colleagues who are here to speak, and I note some of them are here to tell stories from their own States, but I would like to note that I only told three stories today of people who are benefiting from the Affordable Care Act. These are only 3 people among the 400,000 others in my home State of Washington who have now signed up for care through the exchange, Washington Healthplanfinder, and they are only 3 people among the 4 million people who have signed up across the country. For the most part, their stories are not unique. Millions of other Americans face the same kind of health care problems they do. It is time that we stop ignoring that reality. It is time that we do our job and help our constituents get the health care coverage they deserve and can now get under this law.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

IRS 501(C)(4) REGULATIONS

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I understand Senator SCHUMER wants to speak in a little while, so I will try to hurry my remarks as quickly as I can.

I rise today to speak once again on the proposed IRS regulations targeting grassroots 501(c)(4) organizations. I have already come to the floor to discuss this issue, and I expect I will be here several more times in the coming months as these proposed rules continue to move through the regulatory pipeline at the IRS.

The public comment period for these proposed regulations ends today. As of this morning, the IRS had received over 100,000 comments on this proposal, the vast majority of them negative. This is an all-time record. In fact, the number is more than five times greater than the previous record for comments on a proposed IRS regulation. By contrast, the Keystone XL Pipeline—another item of enormous public interest—received just over 7,000 comments.

With all this public attention, the obvious question is, Why? Why has this proposal generated so much criticism from the American people? I think the answer is quite simple: The American people see this proposal for what it is—an attempt to silence this administration's critics and keep them on the sidelines of the democratic process.

I would like to take a few minutes to describe in detail just what this regulation does.

Under the Internal Revenue Code, a 501(c)(4) organization is a nonprofit organization, the exempt purpose of which is the ''promotion of social welfare.'' The phrase ''promotion of social welfare'' has long been defined as ''promoting in some way the common good and general welfare of the people of the community'' or ''bringing about civic betterments and social improvements.''

Such organizations may engage in political activity for or against candidates for public office so long as their primary activity falls under the category of promoting social welfare.

Under current regulations, activities such as voter registration or ''get out

the vote'' drives are correctly treated as promoting social welfare, just like the distribution of voter guidelines outlining candidates' positions on issues that are, in the view of the organization, important to the public.

The proposed regulations would recategorize these types of candidate-neutral activities as not consistent with the exempt purpose of promoting social welfare. This is important because over the past few days, in an effort to justify these regulations, the administration has communicated to Members of Congress that they are not banning these types of activities; they are just putting them in different categories. But lost in their justifications are some important distinctions. It is easy to get lost in the weeds, which is probably what the administration is hoping for. So let's break this down.

Traditionally speaking, in order to keep their tax exemption, 501(c)(4) organizations have had to limit their involvement in ''political activities'' to around 49 percent or less of their overall activities. In other words, they can be directly involved in the political process so long as the majority of their activities are devoted to social welfare.

What this proposed regulation would do is redefine the parameters of what is considered political activity, moving a number of activities from the social welfare category to the political category. As I said, under this regulation, simply stating where candidates for public office stand on issues important to a specific 501(c)(4) organization would be considered political activity. In fact, even mentioning a candidate's name in a communication within a specified period before an election—even if the communication does not say whether the organization supports or opposes the candidate—would be considered political activity. As I mentioned, the same could be said for voter registration drives or ''get out the vote'' initiatives even if the efforts are obviously and legitimately nonpartisan.

Basically, this proposed regulation would instantly categorize so much run-of-the-mill behavior as partisan political activity that many existing 501(c)(4) grassroots organizations would have to stop promoting their causes altogether. And that is precisely what the administration wants. They do not want 501(c)(4)s educating the public on the issues of the day or telling voters where candidates stand on political issues. Sure, they are fine with these groups promoting social welfare so long as that promotion does not include criticism of this administration or its policies that are harmful to the general welfare of their communities.

It would be one thing if the IRS was an agency with clean hands when it came to dealing with critics of this administration. But, as we have seen, that is simply not the case. Indeed, over the last few years we have seen a record of harassment and intimidation of conservative groups applying to the IRS for tax-exempt status. The agency is under investigation in three separate congressional committees for its actions in the run up to the 2010 and 2012 elections.

Put simply, the credibility and the political independence of the IRS are very much in question. A reasonable person would think that, rather than further damaging the IRS's reputation, the administration would instead focus on rebuilding it in the aftermath of the targeting scandal. Sadly, there don't appear to be too many reasonable people working in the Obama administration, at least not when it comes to this set of issues.

We need to call this what it is: an affront to free speech and the right of all American citizens to participate in the democratic process. This is an attempt by the administration to marginalize its critics and silence them altogether.

Republicans have been very vocal in our opposition to this proposed regulation. We have spoken out in a variety of venues. But make no mistake, it is not just Republicans and conservatives who oppose this new rule. A number of left-leaning organizations have spoken out against it as well. The ACLU, for example, submitted a scathing comment letter to the IRS arguing that the proposed regulation would ''produce the same structural issues at the IRS that led to the use of inappropriate criteria in the selection of various charitable and social welfare groups for unfair scrutiny.'' The ACLU argued further that social welfare groups should be free to participate in the political process because that kind of participation ''is at the heart of our representative democracy. To the extent it influences voters, it does so by promoting an informed citizenry.'' We have seen similar comments from groups such as the Sierra Club. Leaders of labor unions have also publicly weighed in about the overly broad nature of the proposed regulation.

Put simply, when you have a proposal that is drawing unanimous opposition from Republicans in Congress and is being criticized by the ACLU and Big Labor, there is a pretty decent chance it is not good policy. Quite frankly, that characterization is probably too charitable for this particular proposal.

This proposed regulation needs to be stopped in its tracks. Yesterday the House of Representatives passed legislation that would do just that. If enacted, the House bill would delay the implementation of the proposal for one year. I am an original cosponsor of the Senate companion bill to this legislation, which was introduced by Senators FLAKE and ROBERTS.

Sadly, I think I know where my colleagues on the other side of the aisle stand on this issue, and I expect those of us here in the Senate who support the right of all Americans to participate in the political process are likely to be disappointed with regard to this particular legislative effort. Still, even if this legislation dies here in the Senate, that will not be the end of the line.

Earlier this month, when I came to the floor to talk about this issue, I called on IRS Commissioner Koskinen to use his authority to block these regulations. I expect him to do so. When questioned about this proposal, he has consistently deferred, usually saying he was not the Commissioner when it was drafted and published. Fine. But he is the Commissioner now, and now that he is the Commissioner, he is in a position to stop the proposed regulation from going final and acquiring the force of law. This proposal cannot take effect unless Commissioner Koskinen personally approves and signs the final regulation clearance package. That being the case, I call on him today to do the right thing—to not sign it when it reaches his desk. In fact, he ought to decry it for what it is.

In an ideal world, the administration would simply withdraw this proposal and leave this issue alone. However, we are not living in such a world. That being the case, if the administration continues its effort to push through this proposed rule, the IRS Commissioner can and should use his authority to stop it from taking effect. After all, that is one reason Congress gives the IRS Commissioner a 5-year term. The Commissioner is supposed to be free from political pressure when making decisions and implementing our Nation's tax laws.

In light of that fact, I want to implore Commissioner Koskinen to use the power he has been granted to restore the IRS's credibility and make it clear to the American people that his agency, the IRS, will no longer be used as simply another political arm of this or any future administration. I hope he will do so because it is the right thing to do, and I am calling on him to do it.

I have faith in Commissioner Koskinen. I believe he is an honest man. I don't think he has any other choice but to stop these obnoxious regulations which people from the left to the right consider to be breaches of free speech and are wrong.

I yield the floor.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, over the next several months the Affordable Care Act is going to become less important as a Republican campaign issue because more and more Americans—from young adults all the way through seniors—are going to realize the benefits it has to offer. It is happening already.

Every day there are more positive stories about people getting cheaper coverage, better coverage or coverage for the first time. Let me say, in my State of New York the initial rollout of ACA has been a big success. We didn't have the problems of a Web site because we did our own, and because we have a lot of competition, as was intended on the exchanges, people are getting very good offers and a large number of people are getting their costs reduced.

I will tell one story. A friend of mine goes to a hairdresser in a conservative neighborhood in New York. The person who owns the beauty shop is very conservative, and when the ACA first rolled out she was very upset. She said: Look. I have looked at that Web site. I am a nice person. I pay for health care for my eight employees. It is going to cost me hundreds of dollars more for each employee. I don't even know if I can afford to stay in business. That person talked to all of her friends, I think she blogged on her Web site, and talked all about it.

I spoke to my friend a few weeks ago. Guess what. This same person actually got health care on the New York Web site which reduced the cost of health care for employees by a couple of hundred dollars each. She was very happy. Of course, I asked my friend to make sure she puts that on her Web site and tells all of her conservative friends about that.

But this story is going to be repeated over and over. There are going to be millions of seniors who realize they can get a free checkup and keep their health good. There are going to be millions of young people who realize they can continue their health care and stay on their parents' health insurance from age 21 to 26. Millions of people are going to find out that either, God forbid, someone in their family or someone in a family they know has a preexisting condition, and now they can get health care. Millions of businesses are going to see the cost of health care is actually going up at a much smaller rate than they are used to. So all these good things will start mounting and the positives about ACA will grow in the public's mind and eventually I believe it will catch up in the Senate and the House. Then something else too will happen and that is this: Lots of people who are not affected directly by ACA have had fear put into their souls. They listen to the rightwing talk radio and they hear: Oh, they may lose all their health care or their costs will go way up. But what they are finding is it is not happening.

I met a firefighter who works for New York City—not a volunteer firefighter—a few months ago. He said: I know ObamaCare is going to kill me. It is going to greatly reduce the health care I am getting as a New York City firefighter.

They get very good health care and they should. They are risking their lives for us. He said: It is going to happen, I hear, in the new year, January 1, 2014.

I saw the firefighter a few weeks ago, and he said to me: Hey, I still have my health care and nothing changed. Well, of course nothing changed. All the horror stories which have been launched by so many on the rightwing talk radio and those who just hate ObamaCare, whether it works or not, are starting to fade.

So we are seeing two things happen at once: We are seeing the positives increase and the negatives decrease and we are seeing it particularly with senior citizens. Because the doughnut hole is filled, millions of our senior citizens are spending much less on prescription drugs than they had to. It is a huge benefit to them. Since ACA was enacted, more than 7 million seniors and people with disabilities have saved $9 billion. That is a huge amount of money. To seniors, many of whom are on fixed incomes, that is dramatic savings for them.

Something else is happening to our seniors. They are getting free checkups. That does two things. First, it saves money out of their own pockets but, second, it reduces our health care costs because we all know an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Free checkups are that prevention we need. It will not only save the seniors but save our system billions and billions of dollars in the years and decades to come. Somebody who finds a growth on their skin and gets it removed before it becomes cancerous, somebody who might get a colonoscopy, a mammogram or a prostate exam and is saved from prostate cancer—all that is going to happen.

So the bottom line is very simple: People are learning the positives of ACA. The Web site is being improved. More people are signing up. In my State of New York alone, more than 250,000 people with Medicare saved $246 million on prescription drugs. The numbers are higher when we count up to today because that was only the first 10 months, through November 1 of 2013. The benefits are all over the place.

One other thing. This is not our subject of the week, but I think we have to keep mentioning it. We are reducing the budget deficit through the ACA. I know our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are very careful about the budget deficit. Good. They should be. Health care costs are declining and declining significantly. Some is due to the recession, but almost every expert says much is due to the ACA.

National health care expenditures, for instance, in 2012 grew by 3.7 percent, meaning that the growth from 2009 to 2012 was the slowest since government collected this information in the 1960s. The percentage of health care spending for the first time actually shrunk from 17.3 to 17.2. At the same time, the solvency of Medicare's hospital insurance fund increased and costs declined. So this is great news.

The bottom line: I know our colleagues on the other side of the aisle think they hit political goals when they attack the ACA and call for its repeal, but the American people don't want repeal. Secondly, as we move on in time the positives of ACA will become more apparent, the negatives people perceive of ACA will decline, and I believe by November this issue will not be the political gold mine our colleagues think it is.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I thank Senator SCHUMER for his great leadership on this issue and his strong words.

I am pleased to join with my colleagues on the floor to speak about the positive impacts of the Affordable Care Act and the impact it is having on our Nation's health and particularly the health of our seniors.

We have all heard about the benefits of the Affordable Care Act in terms of increasing coverage: Over 4 million people have already signed up for the affordable private health insurance through the State and Federal exchanges, millions more have signed up for Medicaid coverage, and millions more young people are now able to stay on their parents' insurance policies until they are 26—and the numbers are growing.

But as important as these figures are, the Affordable Care Act isn't just about expanding coverage for the uninsured. It is also about improving the quality of care and the quality of coverage for all Americans, including our seniors.

Seniors in this country rely on the Medicare Program—and they should rely on the Medicare Program—because Medicare respects a promise that we made as a country to ensure that people who contribute to the program during their working years will have their health care needs taken care of after the age of 65. We have a duty to keep that promise, and we need to build on that promise.

To keep the promise of Medicare, we have to make sure the program stays afloat. The Affordable Care Act does this by improving the quality of care, by coordinating care, and by better delivering under Medicare so we reduce waste in the program and we use Medicare dollars in a way that improves health outcomes for our seniors.

The Republicans have a very different approach to Medicare solvency. They want to reduce benefits, they want to increase premiums and copays so it is harder for seniors to afford to go to a doctor, and they even want to end Medicare's guaranteed benefits entirely by turning it into a voucher system. Think about that: lower benefits, charge more, and end Medicare as we know it.

These approaches are wrong. They do not reflect our values, and they also don't reflect good policy because cutting Medicare benefits will not stop seniors from having heart attacks, it will not stop seniors from getting sick. It will just push them into emergency rooms and private insurance systems—which is more expensive and less efficient than Medicare—or, worse, it will prevent them entirely from getting the medical care they need.

Fortunately, the Republican vision is not the law of the land. The Affordable Care Act is the law of the land, and it is already showing progress in improving the solvency of Medicare and the quality of care for our seniors.

We can already see how the accountable care organizations created under the Affordable Care Act are saving money. The pioneer accountable care organizations—five of which are now operating in Massachusetts—have already saved Medicare nearly $147 million while continuing to deliver high-quality care. New standards for hospital reimbursements have reduced the number of people who need to be readmitted, meaning that for seniors 130,000 fewer Medicare beneficiaries had to check back into a hospital last year.

Thanks to these and other changes, the Medicare trust fund will be solvent for nearly 10 years longer than was projected before we passed the Affordable Care Act. The results are clear. When it comes to our seniors, the Affordable Care Act is saving money and saving lives.

But the Affordable Care Act does more. It builds on the promise of Medicare by improving prevention coverage and reducing actual out-of-pockets for our seniors. Last year over 70 percent of seniors—25.4 million people in Medicare—visited their doctor and received a preventive service, such as a critical colonoscopy or a lifesaving mammogram. They received it for free because of the Affordable Care Act. Despite high drug prices, the average senior in America saved an average of $1,200 on their prescription drugs in 2013 because of the Affordable Care Act closing the doughnut hole in Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage. The Affordable Care Act has made these changes—reducing the cost for seniors, expanding benefits and reducing wasteful spending at the same time that we have improved the solvency of Medicare.

When I hear Republicans talk about repealing the Affordable Care Act, I wonder what alternative universe they are living in. In this real world there should be no confusion about what repealing the Affordable Care Act would actually mean for our seniors: higher costs for prescription drugs, higher costs for preventive services, reduced benefits, and a Medicare program that would go bankrupt nearly 10 years sooner.

The Affordable Care Act is working to help seniors with their expenses and to keep the costs of health care down. We need to improve and build on the progress the law has made and not argue over tearing it down. This should not be about politics. This should be about keeping the promise we made to our seniors. It is about building on that promise, and I will continue to fight for that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I appreciate my colleagues—Senator WARREN, Senator SCHUMER, and Senator MURRAY—joining us on the floor today. I think we will be joined by Senator STABENOW in a few moments. I also appreciate that they were at an event we did yesterday in which we were kicking off the Affordable Care Works Campaign. The campaign is designed to tell what has been untold for much of the last 6 months, which is the increasing good news about the millions of Americans for which the Affordable Care Act is working and, indeed for many of them, changing their lives.

An announcement was made this week that 4 million Americans have now signed up for the private health care exchanges. There are now over 10 million Americans all across the country who now have insurance today that didn't have it prior to the passage of the law either because of these private exchanges or increased eligibility of Medicaid or the law's provision that young men and women under the age of 26 can stay on their parents' insurance. Over 10 million people all across the country now have access to insurance that they didn't have before we passed this law.

As Senator SCHUMER said, there is even more good news because we now know that the second promise of the act, that it was going to reduce the deficit, is true as well. CBO tells us that from the 10-year period covering the enactment of the law to a decade later, we are going to save about $1.2 trillion beyond what we initially estimated.

At current trajectories, we are going to be $250 billion under CBO's initial estimate for Federal health care expenditures on an annual basis. That is a big savings to the American taxpayers. When you combine that with the millions of Americans who have coverage, you can see how the Affordable Care Act is working.

There is still work to do. There will be debates on the floor of the Senate about ways in which we can change and fix the Affordable Care Act. Because we are reordering one-sixth of the American economy, there is no doubt there will be bumps along the road, and no doubt there will be places where we can find bipartisan agreements on how we can fix the act to make it work even better.

The answer from our Republican colleagues has been pretty simple so far. It has been to simply repeal the law. They say they want to repeal and replace it, but we have yet to see any evidence of that replacement. I think when the Presiding Officer and I served together in the House of Representatives, we probably witnessed about 30 or 40 different votes to repeal all or part of the Affordable Care Act, and never once was there a vote to replace that act.

The American people don't want this bill repealed so we can go back to the days when the insurance companies ran our health care. They don't want to go back to the days when the 10 million Americans who have insurance are uninsured. They want this act to be implemented. They want it to be perfected. They want us to work to make it better. But they are understanding day by day that the Affordable Care Act is working.

Specifically for seniors there are some pretty unique benefits, many of which have been glossed over. At the outset of the implementation of this act, some pretty important things happened—sometimes while people weren't even looking.

First, the doughnut hole was cut in half almost overnight. The first year anybody who was in the doughnut hole got a $250 rebate check. The second year, their drugs—when they were in the doughnut hole—got cut by 50 percent. By the end of this decade, the doughnut hole will be completely eliminated.

The average savings for a senior, as Senator STABENOW will talk about, has been $1,200. People often don't know that is because of the Affordable Care Act. When you go in and your drugs all of a sudden cost 50 percent less than they did, there is no stamp on that bill that says courtesy of the Affordable Care Act.

The fact is that without the Affordable Care Act, seniors—over the course of the last 3 years—would have spent $9 billion more on drugs than they have. The number is so big that it is kind of hard to fathom. The Affordable Care Act has saved seniors $9 billion, an average of $1,200 per senior.

On top of that, when seniors go in to get their annual checkup or for a cancer screening or tobacco cessation program, those preventive health care visits are now free. Twenty-five million seniors have access to those programs all across the country.

In my State of Connecticut, 76,000 people with Medicare have taken advantage of free annual wellness visits under the health care law. So we are seeing tremendous benefits for seniors all across the country. This is not just about the doughnut hole or preventive health care.

In 2012, the Medicare Part B deductible dropped by $22 to $140. That is the first time in the history of Medicare that the Medicare Part B deductible has actually been reduced thanks to the efficiencies that are being garnered in the Medicare Part B program by the health care law.

Second, Medicare Advantage plans now can't charge more than Medicaid for things like chemotherapy, skilled nursing, and other specialized services, which results in saving thousands of dollars for seniors.

In the first 3 years of the Affordable Care Act, Medicare recovered $15 billion in fraudulent payments under Medicare because of new tools designed to root out fraud and waste and abuse in the Affordable Care Act. Older Americans who have not yet reached Medicare age are saving money because the act reduced the amount of discrimination in premiums against older Americans by saying that insurance companies can't charge older workers more than three times what they charged younger workers.

For seniors, in particular, we are trying to make it clear that some of the

unnoticed benefits, such as the fact that nobody is asking you for a copay when you go in for a Medicare checkup and that you are saving money every time you go into the pharmacy—that didn't happen magically. That didn't happen because of Republican health care policies. It happened because of the Affordable Care Act.

Finally, before I turn it over to my colleague Senator STABENOW, I want to address some of the mythology we have been hearing on the floor of the Senate in the past few days about Medicare Advantage.

There is no doubt that there were reductions in the payment from the Federal Government to the Medicare Advantage plans in the Affordable Care Act. Why? Because we were overcompensating private health care companies for running the Medicare Advantage plan. We were giving them 13 percent more than it cost Medicare itself to run the Medicare program. That just doesn't make a lot of sense.

Private companies were telling us they could do things for the same price or less than the Federal Government. In this case we were paying Medicare private insurers a lot more than it costs Medicare to run the program. So we decided to eliminate that subsidy.

Guess what. The news has been pretty remarkable. In fact, 30 percent more seniors are on Medicare Advantage plans today than when we passed the law, and premiums under Medicare Advantage have come down by 10 percent during that time. More people are on Medicare Advantage plans, there are less costs in premiums, and the average Medicare participant has 18 different plans to choose from.

All of this apocalyptic talk about what was going to happen when we passed the Affordable Care Act with respect to Medicare Advantage and all this new apocalyptic talk about what will happen when the subsidies get further reduced has not come true. We now have cheaper Medicare Advantage plans, more seniors on them, and plenty of across-the-board availability.

I am really pleased to have been joined here by about a half dozen of our colleagues to tell the story about what the ACA has meant for seniors.

We are going to come to the floor every week. We are going to stand with patients and consumers every week to talk about the benefits for seniors, cancer patients, women, and taxpayers all in an effort to try to prove to the American people what millions of Americans are finding out, and that is that the Affordable Care Act works.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first I thank the Senator from Connecticut for his advocacy for seniors, children, families, and small businesses to have access to affordable and quality health insurance. He has been a powerful voice on this issue.

I also congratulate his State of Connecticut and the Governor of Connecticut for all of their hard work. I know they are doing a great job on their insurance pool—the health care exchange which is providing more affordable health insurance for the citizens in Connecticut.

I thank the Senator for his leadership.

I also rise today to talk about the fact that millions of American families today have access to more affordable health care. Seniors, children, small businesses, and others are getting the opportunity to have the health care they are paying for and know they can get the health care they need even if they have a preexisting condition because of the Affordable Care Act.

I will take a few moments to talk about what this means for our senior citizens—for people on Medicare. Obviously, Medicare is a great American success story and something that I strongly support, as do my colleagues who are speaking today.

As part of health care reform, we wanted to strengthen Medicare for the future. We protect the guaranteed benefits under Medicare. We have shored up the program so that the trust fund is now solvent until 2026 and will be so going forward as other savings occur over the long run. It is working because of some very tangible work we have done to put more money in the pockets of our senior citizens and to create the opportunity for them to have access to affordable health care.

I often think about the letters and emails I have received from people in Michigan prior to our passing health care reform and the kinds of stories that people told me all the time before we strengthened Medicare.

I will read one letter from a senior citizen from Warren, MI, who wrote to me a letter prior to health care reform talking about the gap in coverage in prescription drugs. Under Medicare Part-D, you are covered to a certain point, and then there is a gap and you get no help. Then if your prescription drug costs are very high, it kicks in again. Some people call that the doughnut hole. It is a gap in coverage.

A senior from Warren told me this:

> I cannot afford all of my costly drugs so I have to stop taking one of them (the least risky one) and have to scrounge free samples from my doctor's office for another while paying high retail prices for the other two.

That was before we passed health reform. Now on average in our country, seniors have $1,200 more in their pocket since we passed health care reform which helps them with their prescription drug costs. Why? Because we are closing that gap. That gap is going to go away. There is going to be no more cliff, no more doughnut hole, and no more gap in coverage. Right now seniors across the country are saving, on average, $1,200, which is more money back in their pocket.

When we think about it in big terms, there are more than 7.3 million seniors and people with disabilities who are on Medicare who found themselves in that gap in coverage, and the health care reform law—in the big picture—has saved them about $9 billion—on average $1,200 for an individual, but all total so far about $9 billion. That is $9 billion more available to seniors, which puts money back in their pocket—to do what? Well, to pay the rent, to pay the electric bill. In a State such as Michigan, to pay the high heating bills because of the winter we have been having; to put gas in the car. Maybe it is to do something fun with the grandkids and pay for that birthday present. Maybe it is doing something else that is needed. Whatever it is, the idea is the average person who is retired and on Medicare has over $1,000 back in their pocket now because of health reform and what we have been able to do to strengthen Medicare. It is a great thing.

The problem is that is what Republicans want to take away. That is what they want to take away. That is what will be taken away if it is repealed; if one of the over 40 different repeal votes were actually to happen, and what the House of Representatives has already done.

Let me share another letter from Mary Ann from Rockford who wrote last fall to say she is sick of the efforts to repeal health care reform. She says:

> The Affordable Care Act has already helped millions of seniors like myself. From free preventive services to lower-cost prescription drugs, we're saving money.

We are saving money.

Let me talk about another area where seniors are saving money, and that is the annual checkup. We always want folks to have the annual checkup. That checkup used to have copays and deductibles. Today, under Medicare, because of health reform, when a senior walks into a doctor's office, how much are they paying for that annual checkup? Zero. Zero, because of health reform. We don't want any seniors to feel they can't get that checkup, they can't get the mammogram they need, they can't get that lovely colonoscopy we all look forward to getting. We don't want our seniors to feel they can't get any other kinds of preventive care or cancer screens or flu shots, or whatever it is, because of the copays or deductibles. Today the cost of that checkup for preventive services is zero. If health reform is repealed, that is repealed. That is what folks who want repeal are doing; it is what they want to take away.

So I join with my colleagues who feel strongly that we need to make sure we are keeping in place those positives that are making a real difference in the lives of senior citizens, of children, of families. If there are areas going forward that need to be fixed, we need to fix them, and we will. But we certainly do not want to go back to the days when seniors are spending $1,200 more out of their pocket for their medicine, on average, or when they are paying for the cost of an annual checkup that is absolutely critical they get for their

life going forward. I am proud to stand with colleagues saying let's talk together about how we make sure things work going forward, but let's not go back to the time when all of these important services and protections were not in place.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

FREE SPEECH

Mr. ROBERTS. Thank you, Mr. President. I come to the floor today to also speak about ObamaCare. But before I do so, I feel the need to address some comments made on the floor of the Senate yesterday that, sadly, I find to be extremely distasteful.

Yesterday, two prominent citizens were called unpatriotic merely because they have engaged—legally, I must say—in their First Amendment right to participate in the political process. I was saddened, I was dismayed, and I was discouraged to see the floor of the Senate used as a venue for such campaign-related attacks.

In order to further their own agenda, it has become commonplace for my colleagues—especially across the aisle—to suppress the free speech and rights of certain people and organizations. These are simply people with whom they do not agree and who have had the audacity to hold views different from this administration.

Make no mistake, this is all part of a coordinated plan. I call it shaping the battlefield to tamp down—maybe that is not the right word; make that suppress—political opponents in the runup to the general election as of this fall.

We have seen repeatedly since the Citizens United decision of 2010 Members of this body trying to rein in conservative groups' ability to participate in the political process. This campaign is a direct attack, I believe, on the rights of these organizations. This campaign created an environment in which the Internal Revenue Service found it necessary and possible to single out conservative organizations for extra scrutiny. And this has made it impossible for conservative groups to participate in the last two elections, and now they are at it again in 2014. There is a short phrase which describes this, and I think it is ''abuse of power.''

This is all troubling and shocking enough, but now we have a very direct personal attack against a Kansas company whose political views some find very objectionable. What I find even more offensive is declaring on the floor the opposing views make them ''liars.'' Our Constitution grants every American the fundamental right to engage in the political process, and these folks have done so, fully within the bounds of the law.

Nothing Charles and David Koch have done or are doing is illegal. Their participation, their statements, their work is very far from un-American. Quite the opposite. It is the essence of what it means to be an American. Nothing is more fundamental to our Constitution, our way of governing, than the freedom of speech.

We should be focused on our role and responsibility of governing to make things better for the American people and not using the Senate floor to further any political agenda by making personal attacks on private citizens.

That brings me to what I came here to discuss today.

(The remarks of Mr. ROBERTS pertaining to the introduction of S. 2064 are printed in today's RECORD under ''Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you, Mr. President. It is good to see my long-time friend from Massachusetts in the Presiding Officer's chair.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

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

VETERANS BENEFITS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, President Kennedy, from the Presiding Officer's home State said, if I could paraphrase a bit: A nation reveals itself not only by the men and women it produces but also by the men and women it honors, the men and women it remembers.

It is our duty to take care of those who served in uniform. Today, this Nation has revealed itself, and the image is shameful. This body failed to consider the important veterans legislation of this Congress—the most important veterans legislation of this Congress: the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014.

I sit on the Senate Veterans Affairs' Committee. I am the first Senator from my State ever to sit on that committee for a full term. I consider that an honor. I consider it a privilege to serve those who served us in this Nation.

I have worked alongside Republicans and Democrats, as has Chairman SANDERS and Ranking Member BURR. We have produced good legislation here. Next to the post-9/11 GI bill, which Senator Webb worked on 4 or 5 years ago, it is the most important advancement in veterans legislation and assistance to our Nation's veterans at my time in the Senate. That is the good news.

The bad news is this debate has been about politics, not about veterans. Again, people in Washington want to score political points by filibuster, by obstruction, by blocking good bipartisan legislation, supported by a whole panoply of veterans organizations and community groups.

There are those who have concerns who want to add to this bill, concerns that are not related to veterans. To hold up this bill with something unrelated to veterans is unconscionable.

Whether you are in Marblehead, MA, or Mansfield, OH, we all have heard our constituents say: Why do they attach these unrelated things to legislation instead of voting them up or down on their merits? That is what people want to do here. Those who want to filibuster this bill are the people who want to add things to the bill that have nothing to do with serving our veterans.

This legislation by itself improves vital programs to honor our commitment to those who served in uniform and for those who care for our veterans. Whether it is a community-based outpatient clinic in Zanesville or Chillicothe or Springfield, whether it is a VA center in Dayton or Chillicothe or Cleveland, we care about those who care for our veterans, many of whom are veterans themselves, and we take care of those veterans.

This corrects errors in programs and benefits and, as I said, has widespread support in the veterans community. The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America all support this legislation.

I will not go through a lot of the details we have discussed before that Senator SANDERS brought to the floor, but I want to talk about a couple.

This bill renews our VOW to Hire Heroes Act by reauthorizing provisions such as the VRAP, the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program. This program retrains unemployed veterans for high-demand occupations.

I traveled across Ohio throughout 2012 spreading the word about VRAP, encouraging our veterans to apply. Ohio veterans applied in larger numbers than our State's population would suggest because of the outreach of so many in encouraging people to sign up for VRAP.

I met veterans such as Everett Chambers in Cleveland, who used VRAP funds to get retrained as an electrical engineering technician at Cuyahoga Community College, or Tri-C.

I remember meeting a veteran in Youngstown who went back to school because of VRAP and got the opportunity to work at a health care center in information technology.

We know VRAP works. It helps our veterans get back to work. It lowers the unacceptably high unemployment rate for recently separated servicemembers who have so much to offer employers.

This program is aimed for those veterans who are a little bit older who are no longer eligible for the GI bill and those veterans who have been out of the service for a while. But it does not stop there. It adds other important improvements in education benefits, in reproductive health, in the delivery of care and benefits to veterans who experienced sexual trauma while serving in the military.

Too many Members in this body will say they support the programs in this bill but that finding the money to do so is not possible. So they are for the bill,

they say, until they are not. Well, there is a disconnect between what they say and what they do. Those same elected leaders—those same elected leaders who say: I am for this bill, but we can't pay for it, so we can't pass it—those same people want to give tax breaks to companies that take jobs and factories overseas when we say we cannot find the money to provide a caregiver the support he needs to care for his wife, a veteran. We fight a decade-long war in Afghanistan that goes unpaid for and we cannot find the resources to ensure the very people who fought that war will be cared for.

It would be a little more simple than that. When a company closes down in Springfield, or Springfield, MA, and moves to Wuhan, China, or Shihan, China, they can deduct the cost of the plant shutdown in one of the Springfields and they can deduct the cost of building the new plant in Wuhan, China. That is a loophole we could close. It would mean more companies would stay in Springfield, OH, or Springfield, MA, helping our communities, helping our tax base, and it would mean those companies would not be deducting that move and that money could then be used for these veterans programs. But no, they say: We can't find the money.

It is important to end this filibuster and pass this bill.

BUYING GOVERNMENT

Mr. President, I heard my friend from Kansas talk about what he calls the personal attacks on two I believe he said great Americans, but Americans nonetheless, which they are, and prominent businesspeople in Kansas and around the country.

These two Americans—and this is not personal to me—these two Americans have spent millions of dollars trying to defeat me, as they have tried to defeat a number of people in this Chamber who think government has a role in preserving Medicare and government should provide funds for Head Start and government should give tax breaks to low-income people, not just rich people, and government should play a role, as the Presiding Officer has, in a cleaner environment and deal with climate change. But I disagree with these two Americans. I do not personally dislike them or personally know them. But I do know they have spent millions of dollars in ads, millions of dollars in an unprecedented way—they and a small number of people—to try to hijack our political system.

People are sick and tired, first, of the TV ads; second, of the lies in the TV ads; and, third, that there are people—a few billionaires—who are trying to buy elections in this country, billionaires who are looking for tax breaks for themselves, billionaires who are looking for the opportunity to weaken environmental laws, billionaires who want to kill the union movement in this country.

I want to read from one editorial that was printed in, I believe, Roll Call or The Hill newspaper talking about some of these ads. Here is what this editorial said:

> Were this an ad for Stainmaster carpet, a Koch product— Koch, this is the family, the brothers—
>
> 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.'' 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.

That tells you a lot. I rest my case in just those terms. It is never personal. It should never be. It is whom you fight for in this body and what you fight against. But there are people in this country who think they can buy our government. We have seen that throughout our history. We have seen the oil companies try to do everything they can to at least if not buy government take a long-term lease. We saw the robber barons 100 years ago, including one from my State, Mark Hanna, who used to try to control the legislature. They used to say that he wore President McKinley like a watchfob when he was Governor of Ohio.

So we have seen this in the past. We have never seen it in such an incredibly big way as we have seen it in the last few election cycles.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. President, I want to speak about the minimum wage, something this Chamber, frankly, needs to do. The Presiding Officer in his time in the House saw, as I did, a number of Members of Congress who would vote to raise their own pay but then vote against a minimum-wage increase, which I find morally inconsistent or worse. But let me make a couple comments about that.

In 1991, the average price of gas was $1.15 a gallon, a loaf of bread around 70 cents, a dozen eggs about $1. The tipped minimum wage—that is the minimum wage for people who work in a diner who get tips, people who push a wheelchair in an airport who rely on tips, a valet, someone who does nail manicures, people who work in jobs where they are receiving tips—the minimum wage in 1991 for those workers at the local diner or the local airport was $2.13 an hour—in 1991.

Today, the average price of gas is $3.30 a gallon; a loaf of bread costs $1.35, more or less; eggs are about $2. The tipped minimum wage is still $2.13. Its value has fallen by 36 percent in real terms. Think about that—$2.13 an hour.

Americans who work hard and take responsibility should be able to take care of their families. That is why I support the Fair Minimum Wage Act, which would raise the minimum wage to $10.10 an hour in three 95-cent increments and then provide annual cost-of-living increases linked to changes in the cost of living. The bill would also gradually raise the Federal minimum wage for tipped workers at the diner, the valet, the person doing the manicure from $2.13 an hour to 70 percent of the regular minimum wage.

In 1980 the minimum wage for tipped workers was 60 percent of the regular minimum wage. It is now less than 30 percent of the regular minimum wage. In Canada the minimum wage in Ontario is $11; the tipped minimum wage is $8.90. The United States is the only industrialized nation in the world—except for Canada—where a large number of workers must depend on tips for a large share of their income. So in Canada the tipped minimum wage is only slightly less than the minimum wage. In the United States it is less than 30 percent of the minimum wage. In the rest of the world it is 100 percent of the minimum wage.

Interestingly, servers in the United States, people who work at diners or restaurants in the United States—when a European comes across the ocean and eats at a restaurant in Cleveland or in Cincinnati, the European will usually leave a really small tip because they are not used to tipping. The American worker relies on those tips for any kind of a decent wage.

Ohio's current tipped minimum wage is a little higher; it is $3.98. That is still not enough. These are men and women who have bills to pay and families to support.

Most tipped workers do not work at fine dining establishments where the average bill is $50, $60, or $70, so someone is making pretty good money on tips. A server in a high-class restaurant, an expensive restaurant, can make hundreds of dollars in a night. But for a server who works in a diner where four people come in, get coffee, spend an hour there, and have a bill of $6, the tip might be $1. That person has worked for an hour. They are not getting to the minimum wage with the tipped wage, and, often, neither is the valet or the person at the airport who is getting someone off the plane and pushing their wheelchair to their connecting flight. They often do not even receive tips because so often the person in the wheelchair never thinks about it, does not know that these are tipped workers, that they are only making $2, $3, or $4 an hour. They are working hard.

We work hard for the money we make. We are very well paid here. It is a privilege to serve in the Senate. But when you think about those workers who are working very hard, their minimum wage is $2.13 an hour. There is something not right about that.

One more point. The Center for American Progress completed an analysis of 20 years' worth of minimum wage increases in States across the country. They conclude that there is no clear evidence that the minimum wage leads to further job loss during periods of high unemployment.

The opponents of raising the minimum wage say that it is going to

cause price increases and that there are going to be layoffs. But what is interesting is that every time there is a minimum wage bill we are debating, the opponents say: You know, these businesses are going to have to raise their prices or lay people off to pay the minimum wage. But when an executive gets a $1 million bonus, when a CEO gets paid $12 million and gets a raise to $16 million the next year, I never hear them say: Boy, they are going to have to lay people off to pay those executive salaries. It is only when it is low-wage workers that my friends on that side of the aisle stand and say: This is going to hurt business. This is going to hurt commerce. This is going to hurt employment.

Their arguments are weak. Their arguments are, in many cases, a bit hardhearted. I wish my colleagues would do what Pope Francis said. Recently, Pope Francis exhorted his parish priests to go out and smell like the flock; go out among your parishioners and listen to them and try to understand their lives and try to live like them.

Well, a lot of those parishioners are minimum wage workers or slightly above minimum wage. Smelling like the flock might help some of my colleagues come to the conclusion that raising the minimum wage is important to do, is humane, is right for our country.

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

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

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

THE UKRAINE

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I take this time to share with my colleagues the tragic events that unfolded these past few weeks in the Ukraine. Ukraine is an incredibly important country. The recent events are tragic, the result of a corrupt government and loss of life.

I remember the Orange Revolution that took place in Ukraine, starting in November 2004, ending in January 2005. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians took to that protest to protest the corrupt election. They did it in a peaceful way.

They not only got the attention of the people of Ukraine but the attention of the world. As a result of that peaceful revolution, the government stood for new elections, free and fair elections. Democratic leadership was elected, and all of us thought the future for Ukraine was very positive.

I was in Kiev not long after that Orange Revolution. I had a chance to talk to people who were involved, and I talked to the new leaders. I saw that sense of hope that Ukraine at long last would be an independent country without the domination of any other country and that the proud people would have a country that would respect their rights, that would transition into full membership in Europe and provide the greatest hope for future generations.

They started moving in that direction. As the Presiding Officer knows, there were agreements with Europe on immigration. They have been involved in military operations in close conjunction with NATO. Ukraine was and is an important partner of the United States and for Europe.

Then Victor Yanukovych came into power for a second time. Mr. Yanukovych took the country in a different direction. He was a corrupt leader. He had a close involvement with Russia.

Today there is some hope. The Parliament has brought in a new interim government. Presidential elections are now scheduled for May 25. But there are certain matters that are still very much in doubt. In the Crimea, which is a part of the Ukraine which has a large Russian population, it is unclear as to what is happening there. Pro-Russian sympathizers have taken over government buildings. It is not clear of Russia's involvement.

It is critically important that the international community have access to what is happening in the Crimea and make it clear that Russia must allow the Ukraine to control its own destiny. It is time for the international community to mobilize its resources to assist Ukraine's transition to a democratic, secure, and prosperous country.

The people of Ukraine have had an incredibly difficult history and over the last century have been subjected to two World Wars, 70 years of Soviet domination, including Stalin's genocidal famine.

Our assistance at this time will be a concrete manifestation that we do indeed stand by the people of Ukraine as they manifest their historic choice for freedom and democracy. Moreover, we need to help Ukraine succeed to realize the vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace.

That is our desire and that is the desire of the people of Ukraine. They are moving on the right path. They critically need our help and that of the international community to make sure Russia does not try to dominate this country; that its desire to become part of Europe is realized; that free and fair elections can take place, and the rights of their people can be respected by their government.

Yesterday I heard from Swiss President and OSCE Chair-in-Office Burkhalter and welcomed his engagement and the important role the OSCE can play in Ukraine.

As a member of the Commission, I had the honor of chairing the Helsinki Commission, which is our implementing arm to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. A Foreign Minister from one of the member states usually acts as our Chair-in-Office, and this year Mr. Burkhalter is not only the Foreign Minister of Switzerland, he is also the President of Switzerland. He is the person responsible for the direction of the organization. We had a hearing with him and Ukraine took a good part of our discussions.

The guiding principles of the OSCE is if they are going to have a prosperous country, if they are going to have a secure country, they have to have a country that respects the rights of its citizens. Respecting the rights of its citizens means they are entitled to good governance. They are entitled to a country that does not depend upon corruption in order to finance its way of life. Those are the principles of the OSCE. A country with good governance, respect for human rights, that takes on corruption, is a country in which there will be economic prosperity and a country which will enjoy security. That has been our chief function, to try to help other countries.

The meeting yesterday underscored the importance OSCE can play in the future of Ukraine, and we hope they will utilize those resources so Ukraine can come out of this crisis as a strong, democratic, and independent country.

There has to be accountability. There has to be accountability for those who are responsible for the deaths in Kiev. I mention that because, yes, there is a moral reason for that. Those who commit amoral atrocities should be held accountable. That is just a matter of basic rights. But there is also the situation when they don't bring closure here, it offers little hope that these circumstances will not be repeated in the future. If future government leaders believe they could do whatever they want and there will be no consequences for their actions, they are more likely to take the irresponsible actions we saw on Ukraine.

So, yes, it is important we restore a democratic government in Ukraine. It is important that government be independent and able to become a full member of Europe. It is important that government respect the human rights of its citizens, but it is also important they hold those responsible for these atrocities accountable for their actions.

The Obama administration took some action this past week. They did deny visas to certain members who were responsible for the Government of Ukraine, and they did freeze bank accounts of those who were involved in the corrupt practices in Ukraine. That was a good first step and I applaud their actions.

I remind my colleagues we passed the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act as part of the Russia PNTR legislation. I was proud to be the sponsor of the Sergei Magnitsky Rule

of Law Accountability Act. What it does—and it says it was amended to apply only to Russia—those who are involved in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights will be denied the privilege of being able to come to America, to get a visa and we will deny them the opportunity to use our banking system.

Why is that important? Because we found those corrupt officials want to keep their properties outside of their host country. They want to visit America. They want to use our banking system. They want their corrupt ways to be in dollars, not in rubles. Denying them that opportunity is an effective remedy for making sure they can't profit from all of their corruption.

That legislation was limited to Russia not by our design. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Finance Committee approved the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act as a global act applying beyond Russia.

Sergei Magnitsky was a young lawyer who discovered corruption in Russia. He did what he should have done—told the authorities about it. As a result, he was arrested, tortured, and killed because he did the right thing.

We took action to make sure those responsible could not benefit from that corruption. That was the Sergei Magnitsky bill. We felt, though, it should be a tool available universally. We had to compromise on that, and it was limited to Russia.

It is time to change that. Along with Senator MCCAIN, I have introduced the Global Human Rights Accountability Act, S. 1933. It has several bipartisan sponsors. It would apply globally. So, yes, it would apply to Ukraine. It would have congressional sanctions to the use of tools for denying visa applications and our banking privileges to those who are responsible for these atrocities. I believe our colleagues understand how important that is for us to do.

It is interesting that today the State Department issued its Human Rights Practices for 2013. This is a required report that we request. It gives the status of human rights records throughout the world, talking about problems.

I am sure my colleagues recognize that human rights problems are not limited to solely Russia or Ukraine, from Bahrain to China, to Bangladesh, from Belarus to Ethiopia, to Venezuela, from the Sudan to South Sudan, Syria, the list goes on and on and on.

The report lists all of the gross violations of human rights that have occurred. Unfortunately, this list is too long. I can name another dozen countries that are spelled out in this report. Human rights are universal, and it is our responsibility to act and show international leadership.

It takes time to pass good laws, as it should, which is why we must act with urgency now. The measures contemplated in my legislation have great corrective power, but they are strongest when deployed in a timely manner, preferably before the outbreak of violence.

The year 2013 was a particularly challenging year for human rights and we cannot afford to be silent. The Global Human Rights Accountability Act serves as an encouragement for champions of democracy, promoters of civil rights, and advocates of free speech across the globe.

As the great human rights defender Nelson Mandela once said: ''There are times when a leader must move ahead of the flock, go off in a new direction, confident that he is leading his people the right way.''

In this great body, the Senate, we have a responsibility to lead the way in accountability for human rights. We have done that in the past. We have shown through our own example and we have shown through our interest in all corners of the world that this country will stand for the protection of basic human rights for all the people. We now have a chance to act by the passage of the global Magnitsky law. I hope my colleagues will join me in helping enact this new chapter and the next chapter in America's commitment to international human rights.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, yesterday, while relaying to the Senate some anecdotes he believed proved the success of ObamaCare, the majority leader stated this:

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

Well, that statement, quite frankly, shocked me, and I am sure it would have shocked millions of Americans, if they had heard it, who are feeling the detrimental effects of this very unpopular law, the Affordable Care Act.

I have heard directly from countless Kansans about the devastating effects ObamaCare has had on them and their families. Most of the Kansans I speak with are concerned primarily about what the future will hold for their children and grandchildren. What type of life will we as parents and grandparents be passing on to future generations?

I can assure the majority leader that Kansans are salt-of-the-earth people. They are, most assuredly, not liars. They do not deserve to be called liars by any Member of this body.

Take Philip and his wife from Lenexa who are in their midfifties. Philip has been self-employed for the last 20 years but had maintained coverage through his wife's employer for most of that time. She now works for a much smaller company which can only pay a fraction of the cost of their insurance, so it was much cheaper for him to purchase insurance in the individual market starting in 2013. Finding affordable coverage now, in 2014, has been a much greater challenge. He writes:

> With the changes in health insurance due to implementation of the ACA for the next year, we shopped the Kansas exchange for 2014 plans. What we found was shocking.

They found that for the same level of coverage, they would now have to pay a premium more than double what they paid in 2013. On top of the higher premium, they would be faced with double the deductible and nearly double the out-of-pocket maximum.

In his letter Philip says:

> Frankly, we anticipate a decline in income for the next two years, but still won't qualify for subsidies; this simply makes the ''Affordable Health Care'' unaffordable for us.

He continues:

> The icing on the cake—my wife's employer has told her they expect to drop their health care coverage for their employees altogether in 2015 because of the added expenses of the ACA! I honestly don't know what we will do; we are not wealthy by any means and have not been able to fund our retirement plan for a couple of years now. We do not have sufficient money to retire at any time soon and ACA will take everything we could afford to save. We hope Congress can come up with a logical and truly affordable option to the ACA soon!

This is common criticism I have heard many times, and I can assure the majority leader that Philip's story is true.

I have also heard from members of the Kansas Disabled American Veterans service organization who have shared the difficulty and struggle of veterans having to relinquish their preferred health care plans due to cost increases caused by ObamaCare. They are now pursuing care through the VA, which presents a whole other host of new obstacles to receiving the care they deserve. So we have veterans who are unable to afford health care under the Affordable Care Act now coming to the veterans system and being unable to, anytime soon, enroll. In fact, their biggest concern is they will now have to wait 3 months to 6 months to get their first appointment.

The bottom line is that veterans will either pay more for their health benefits through ObamaCare and lose their preferred doctors or be forced to join the backlog of veterans seeking care. Neither is a good option for our veterans. Veterans in Kansas and across the Nation are feeling the burdens of ObamaCare. They have sacrificed so much for our country, and I can assure the majority leader that they are telling the truth.

Another example of how ObamaCare is hurting Kansans is from Salina, a town in the middle of our State. The nonprofit YMCA in Salina will be capping the schedules of part-time employees at 25 hours per week to avoid having to provide them health insurance benefits as part of ObamaCare. The administrator says:

It is unfortunate. We have a lot of good people who you'd love to have working more hours that we're going to have to make the cut. This is hitting nonprofits hard. A for-profit company, this cuts into their profits, but we don't have profits to cut into.

This YMCA is not alone in their efforts to trim costs. Numerous companies and organizations across Kansas are having to cut back the hours of part-time employees because of ObamaCare. And I can tell the majority leader once again that those people and those organizations are telling the truth.

Yesterday afternoon the majority leader came to the floor once again and read an opinion column from The Hill newspaper. This article, authored by Mark Mellman, supported the majority leaders' efforts to discredit the stories being told of Americans who are having very real struggles and those who have lost their health care coverage as a result of ObamaCare. The majority leader read this column on the Senate floor literally word for word; however, he stopped just short of the end of the column, and I wanted to finish reading the footnote of the column which he chose not to read. It was about the author.

Mellman is president of The Mellman Group and has worked for Democratic candidates and causes since 1982. Current clients include the Majority Leader of the Senate and the Democrat whip in the House.

I just wanted to complete the record, that the majority leader is reading an article by a Democratic consultant, employed by the majority leader, to furnish evidence that what he is saying about the untruths of people who are complaining about ObamaCare is based upon fact. Mark Mellman really is not the person to be quoting as to whether the Affordable Care Act is working.

I would also point out that ObamaCare has been heavily debated for years now. For 5 years we have been talking about the Affordable Care Act. During this time there have been so many broken promises, so many falsehoods, and so many direct lies. We heard them all.

''ObamaCare will lower all of our health care costs.''

''ObamaCare won't cut Medicare.''

''ObamaCare will create jobs.''

And who can forget ''If you like your doctor or health plan, you can keep them.''

These were lies. These were untruths. They were promises made and summarily broken. This is why so many Americans are outraged. It is time for Washington to stop dismissing their concerns and start listening to them.

Another disturbing moment—in fact, I think perhaps the most disturbing part of what the majority leader said—after he read the column from The Hill, he said this:

It is time the American people spoke out against this terrible dishonesty and about those two brothers who are about as un-American as anyone I can imagine.

This really bothers me. Accusations about who is un-American are deeply troubling, and to me that is an unfortunate comment when we refer to anyone. From the earliest days of our Republic, it has been a tactic exerted by those in power to humiliate and discredit those who come from different backgrounds or have a different point of view that challenges the people in power, and it is part of a strategy to convince ordinary Americans that sinister forces are working to undermine our country and our institutions. Ironically, by charging some person or group with being un-American or disloyal, the effort to stifle an exchange of ideas erodes the very foundation of our democratic government.

These accusations have been leveled during times of war, but they are just as prevalent during times of peace. We know of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1797, the Know-Nothing Party taking aim at immigrants in the 1800s, and the Red Scare after the First World War.

In the process leading up to women's suffrage, critics of giving women the vote belittled them. One even suggested that women were too emotionally delicate to take on the task of voting. Thankfully, these ridiculous assertions could not derail the passage of the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote.

Yet perhaps the most famous example is a Senator using his position to charge people as diverse as Hollywood actors and Army generals and Secretary of State George C. Marshall of political views which differed with the Senator's. In fact, the Senator believed their views were traitorous. He referred to such people as ''enemies from within.'' Why would a Senator reach such a conclusion? Because those political views disagreed with his own. Maybe it was also for the headlines and attention he craved or perhaps he was just paranoid, in search of a bogeyman. For more than 5 years this Senator leveled the charges of ''disloyalty'' without any real evidence. Because of his flippant claims, he did untold damage to so many lives, with very little consequence to himself. Not until enough of his colleagues had enough and put an end to his campaign against other citizens did this unfortunate episode in our Nation's history come to an end. This tactic didn't end in 1950 and, indeed, it continues today.

I am disappointed by those who impugn President Obama, questioning his legitimacy and sincerity as he seeks to do what he believes is his best for the country. Yet it is undoubtedly a two-way street. The President dismissed those who opposed his candidacy in 2008 as people who ''cling to guns or religion'' or have ''antipathy toward people who are not like them.''

When I served in the House of Representatives in 2009, Speaker NANCY PELOSI said in the town hall meeting in August of that year that those with concerns about ObamaCare were ''un-American.''

No one has the right to determine whose beliefs are American or un-American—certainly no one in the House of Representatives or the Senate.

It is troubling that there is a reflexive reaction in Congress to label political critics as un-American or disloyal. Recognizing disagreement is part of the decisionmaking process of our democracy, and a respectful dialogue between all Americans is critical to a well-functioning Republic. Certainly anything short of that is not worthy of the Senate floor.

I'm weary of repeated attempts to distract the American people from the rollout and poor performance of ObamaCare.

This week a New York Times/CBS poll found that only 6 percent of Americans believe that ObamaCare is ''working well and should be kept in place as is.'' I ask the majority leader: Does that mean that the other 94 percent of Americans surveyed are liars?

In fact, ObamaCare is a disaster to our Nation's health care system, and it is a disaster to our country's economy. The American people have made their opinions known, and rather than remedy the situation and address their concerns, the majority leader and others are trying to change the conversation and attack the very Americans who have real, life-impacting concerns about their access to health care.

My friends on the other side of the aisle act as though the majority of Americans support ObamaCare. They do not. They never have. We didn't listen to them when ObamaCare was passed. We have not listened to them since. In fact, the same New York Times/CBS poll found that Americans ''feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track'' by a margin of nearly 2 to 1. This poll was comprised of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, of which 63 percent feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track.

I agree that we are headed in the wrong direction, and I fear—like most Americans—that instead of righting the course, we have a Senate majority leader who will want to distract the hard-working Americans busy with their families, struggling, and living their lives.

Speaking of dysfunction, the majority leader is speaking about dysfunction in the Senate that he alone has the ability to control. The pilot of the plane cannot and should not blame the passengers for the turbulence.

I'm glad the majority leader mentioned the Senate feels like ''Groundhog Day'' or groundhog year. He is absolutely right. Over and over, how many times has the majority leader obstructed the Senate debate and votes on amendments? Over and over we see the same strategy from the majority leader to run the Senate according to his rules and his alone. He controls the Senate operations. He controls the ability to move past ''Groundhog Day,'' and he controls whether or not his colleagues can advocate for amendments and have votes.

Republican Senators are not alone in this thinking—although I'm sure the majority leader wishes that it was just the Republicans complaining. Many Senate Democrats also feel the same way. They too have legislation. They too have amendments they would like to see in front of the Senate that would see the light of day.

One such amendment that the majority leader is using in his blame game is a bipartisan amendment offered by Senators Menendez and Kirk, a Republican and Democrat, with 59 Senate cosponsors. There is an overwhelming amount of Senate support for this amendment. So why can't we get the issue of Iran's nuclear capabilities to the Senate floor? Why does the Senate majority leader continue to obstruct the Senate process rather than return to regular order and allow the Senate to operate the way it was intended?

The dysfunction of the Senate ultimately hurts the American people, and the majority leader has the ability to change that. My hope is that we move beyond this time in the Senate's history, that we move beyond the same old, same old, and that we have the opportunity to chart a new path forward to restore the Senate to function as it should.

I have no interest in serving in a Senate that doesn't do its work. Neither the majority leader nor any other Member of this body has the ability to represent individual Americans' interest at any given moment.

We each represent people from our respective States who have different points of view. I understand that people have a different point of view depending upon where they live, their background, their experience, and their philosophy. This diversity of opinion is what makes this country and, by extension, the Senate such a force for good in the world.

These opposing viewpoints are by their very definition American. The diversity and disagreement among ourselves is actually American, not un-American. Whether it is the Kansas small business owner who fears losing health insurance or the brave participants of the Seneca Falls Convention, Americans have the right to be heard and the right to play a part in the American political process. No one has the right to call those people un-American.

The litmus test for what is or is not American behavior cannot be administered or measured in partisan terms. Yet the bulk of the comments made by the majority leader attempted to do just that.

I am disappointed that it is even necessary for me to be on the Senate floor to talk about these disparaging comments, but the American people deserve an accountable legislature.

Whether you agree or disagree with the direction of our country—if you disagree with the direction it is heading in or you think we are doing OK, you are still an American, and you have the right to voice that opinion without having your allegiance to the United States called into question.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations on today's Executive Calendar: Nos. 568, 569, 565, and 571.

I further ask unanimous consent that the nominations be confirmed en bloc, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that any related statements be printed in the RECORD; that President Obama be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, Senator GRASSLEY, the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, is unable to be on the floor at this time, and on his behalf I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I will read into the RECORD—maybe tonight, but if not, I will do it Monday—statements made in the past by the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee where he talked in detail about how foolish it would be to have cloture on nominations for judges—his exact words.

I am disappointed that there has been an objection, but as I indicated yesterday, we are in groundhog year. Why would this next week be any different than the rest of this year?

They have objected and obstructed—they meaning the Republicans in the Senate—everything. Look at what we just finished—and I mean finished. We just finished a bill that had been worked on for a long time by the junior Senator from Vermont, the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

This is a bill that would help veterans. No one disputes the bill would help veterans. All 26 veterans organizations, including the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, supported that legislation—plus 24 other veterans organizations. So what happens over here with the Republicans? They figured out a way to say no. They always do that. But the way they say no is to obstruct, and that is what they did on this veterans bill.

I hope every veteran in America understands the fact that we had something that would improve the lives of the fighting men and women who came back from Iraq and Afghanistan, and those Asian veterans from Vietnam and some from Korea and some from World War II who are still with us. Because of the continual obstruction over here to do anything they can to slow down the Obama administration, they are even willing to hurt veterans.

This was a bill that didn't take a single penny. It was paid for with leftover war money. We agreed to have amendments, but that is just all hot air from the Republicans. We would be willing to do these bills if they would allow us to have amendments, and they figured out a way to say no again.

So we have to invoke cloture on district court judges that my friend, the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, has said time and time again should not happen.

Either tonight or Monday I will read verbatim into the RECORD what he has said in the past.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF DEBO P. ADEGBILE TO BE AN ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL

Mr. REID. I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 659.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Debo P. Adegbile, of New York, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there is 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.

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 the nomination of Debo P. Adegbile, of New York, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

Harry Reid, Patrick J. Leahy, Richard J. Durbin, Patty Murray, Barbara Boxer, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jack Reed, Carl Levin, Debbie Stabenow, Tom Udall, Martin Heinrich, Christopher Murphy, Michael F. Bennet, Maria Cantwell, Amy Klobuchar, Richard Blumenthal, Tom Harkin.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum required under rule XXII be waived for the cloture motion with respect to Calendar No. 659.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF PEDRO A. DELGADO HERNANDEZ TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO

Mr. REID. I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 568.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Pedro A. Delgado Hernandez, of Puerto Rico, to be United States District Judge for the District of Puerto Rico.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there is a cloture motion at the desk and I ask it be reported.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill 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 the nomination of Pedro A. Delgado Hernandez, of Puerto Rico, to be United States District Judge for the District of Puerto Rico.

Harry Reid, Patrick J. Leahy, Benjamin L. Cardin, Mark L. Pryor, Mark Begich, Tom Harkin, Amy Klobuchar, Christopher Murphy, Patty Murray, Jon Tester, Richard J. Durbin, Barbara Boxer, Angus S. King, Jr., Claire McCaskill, Richard Blumenthal, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jack Reed.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum under rule XXII be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. I now move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF PAMELA L. REEVES TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE

Mr. REID. I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 569.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Pamela L. Reeves, of Tennessee, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. There is 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 bill 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 the nomination of Pamela L. Reeves, of Tennessee, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee.

Harry Reid, Patrick J. Leahy, Mark L. Pryor, Mark Begich, Robert Menendez, Benjamin L. Cardin, Tom Harkin, Amy Klobuchar, Christopher Murphy, Patty Murray, Jon Tester, Richard J. Durbin, Barbara Boxer, Angus S. King, Jr., Claire McCaskill, Richard Blumenthal, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jack Reed.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum under rule XXII be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF TIMOTHY L. BROOKS TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF ARKANSAS

Mr. REID. I now move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 565.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Timothy L. Brooks, of Arkansas, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Arkansas.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to report the motion.

The bill 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 the nomination of Timothy L. Brooks, of Arkansas, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Arkansas.

Harry Reid, Patrick J. Leahy, Mark L. Pryor, Mark Begich, Robert Menendez, Benjamin L. Cardin, Tom Harkin, Amy Klobuchar, Christopher Murphy, Patty Murray, Jon Tester, Richard J. Durbin, Barbara Boxer, Angus S. King, Jr., Claire McCaskill, Richard Blumenthal, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jack Reed.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum under rule XXII be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. I now move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF VINCE GIRDHARI CHHABRIA TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 571.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Vince Girdhari Chhabria, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. I ask the clerk to report the cloture motion, which is 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 bill 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 the nomination of Vince Girdhari Chhabria, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of California.

Harry Reid, Patrick J. Leahy, Benjamin L. Cardin, Ron Wyden, Christopher A. Coons, Martin Heinrich, Jack Reed, Robert Menendez, Tom Harkin, Sheldon Whitehouse, Patty Murray, Dianne Feinstein, Richard J. Durbin, Barbara Boxer, Carl Levin, Jeff Merkley, Amy Klobuchar.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum under rule XXII be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF ROSE EILENE GOTTEMOELLER TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ARMS CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 636.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Rose Eilene Gottemoeller, of Virginia, to be Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill 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 the nomination of Rose Eilene Gottemoeller, of Virginia, to be Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

Harry Reid, Robert Menendez, Benjamin L. Cardin, Ron Wyden, Christopher A. Coons, Patrick J. Leahy, Martin Heinrich, Jack Reed, Tom Harkin, Sheldon Whitehouse, Patty Murray, Dianne Feinstein, Richard J. Durbin, Barbara Boxer, Carl Levin, Jeff Merkley, Amy Klobuchar.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum under rule XXII be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

Mr. REID. Mr. President, is the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 309, S. 1086, now pending?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. It is pending.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, 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 bill 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 the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 309, S. 1086, the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act.

Harry Reid, Tom Harkin, Barbara A. Mikulski, Benjamin L. Cardin, Christopher A. Coons, Patrick J. Leahy, Jack Reed, Robert Menendez, Sheldon Whitehouse, Patty Murray, Jeff Merkley, Ron Wyden, Martin Heinrich, Dianne Feinstein, Richard J. Durbin, Barbara Boxer, Carl Levin, Amy Klobuchar.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum under rule XXII be waived.

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

Mr. REID. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

JUDICIAL NOMINEES

Mr. REID. Madam President, I filed cloture on the childcare block grant. I have every assurance from my Republican colleagues that this vote will not be necessary. I hope that is the case. It would be great if we could vitiate that and move and start legislating.

I believe that will be the case. Sometimes it is a long time from today to next Wednesday, when a vote would occur. I really do believe it will not be necessary. I hope that is the case.

I indicated that I would say a few words about the man that does all of the objecting, or a lot of the objecting around here. We had the Senator from Kansas, the junior Senator from Kansas come and say he objected to these judges being approved because the senior Senator from Iowa, the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, asked him to do so.

In recent days Senator GRASSLEY has criticized my management of the Senate floor regarding nominations. The ranking member of the Judiciary Committee has said that I am responsible for the gridlock because of filibuster reform over the overuse of cloture. The past statements and recent actions of my friend, the senior Senator from Iowa, reveal his obvious either misunderstanding of what he said in the past or—I will leave it at that. There are a lot of terms that I could use, but I will not use them.

These are things that he has said in the past that obviously he did not mean at the time or he has forgotten what he said. He once stood on the floor and said he was strongly in favor of up-or-down votes on all nominations. He even said, ''Filibustering the nominee into oblivion is misguided warfare and the wrong way for a minority party to leverage influence in the Senate.''

That is what the man who is doing all of the objecting said before. He also said:

It is just plain hogwash to say that moving to make sure the rule is to give judicial nominees an up-or-down vote will hurt our ability to reestablish fairness in the judicial nominating process. It is not going to hurt minority rights.

These are direct quotes from him:

It establishes what we call regular order and as it has been for 214 years. It will be fair both to Republicans and Democrats alike. All the majority leader wants to do is have a chance to vote on those nominees up or down.

He could be easily talking about me. Maybe in the past he was talking about Senator Frist or Senator Lott. But it does not matter who has this job. That is what he is talking about:

All the majority leader wants is to have a chance to vote these nominees up or down. If these individuals do not have 51 votes, they should be rejected. But if these individuals do have 51 votes, then they should be confirmed. That is according to the Constitution.

That is what he said. He said it here in May a few years ago, May 23. He also said—this is another quote.

Let's debate the nominees and give our advice and consent. It's a simple yea or nay when called to the altar to vote. Filibustering a nominee into oblivion is misguided warfare and the wrong way for a minority party to leverage and influence the Senate. Threatening to grind the legislative activity to a standstill if they don't get their way is like being a bully in the schoolyard playground.

He said that. The senior Senator from Iowa said that. He further said:

Let's do our jobs. Nothing is nuclear about asking the full Senate to take an up-or-down vote on judicial nominees.

I'm not making this up. This is what he said, the man who has the audacity to come here to the floor and object, saying what a terrible thing it is that we are having up-or-down votes on these judges.

He went on to say:

It is the way the Senate has operated for years. The reality is that Democrats are the ones who are turning Senate tradition on its head by installing a filibuster against the President's judicial nominees.

That is what he said. He slows down Senate business even on nominees he supports. How do you like that? This week alone, the senior Senator from Iowa repeatedly voted against cloture on nominations he then supported moments later: Beth Freeman, Northern District of California; James Donato, Northern District of California; James Moody, Eastern District of Arkansas; Jeffrey Meyer, Connecticut.

He voted to invoke the filibuster rule and then turns right around and votes for those judges. His obstruction, though, I am sorry to say, is not limited to nominations. When the Senate considered S. 744, the comprehensive immigration bill, Senator GRASSLEY objected to consideration or adoption of Republican or bipartisan amendments on at least four occasions.

When challenged, Senator GRASSLEY admitted to violation of Senatorial courtesy. Here is what Senator LEAHY said:

Is it not a fact that the first amendment that was brought up here was a bipartisan amendment of mine and Senator Hatch? Shortly thereafter, the Senator from Iowa came with an amendment. Following normal courtesy, I allowed mine to be set aside so he could bring up his. So isn't it a fact that we asked if he might set it aside for some noncontroversial amendments on either side? He told me he could not. The Senator is correct.

You cannot talk out of both sides of your mouth unless somebody understands they are listening to what you say both times. The ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, the senior Senator from Iowa, he is talking out of both sides of his mouth. The people of Iowa should check this out and see what he said and what he does.

So he can come and criticize all he wants—criticize me. But it should be based upon facts, not standing his own statements on their head. He can't have it both ways.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we proceed to a period of morning business with Senators allowed to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

ABLE ACT

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I wish to discuss the ABLE Act, which is a piece of legislation that has been the subject of enormous and substantial bipartisan support both in the Senate and in the House.

We know that a lot of families have relied upon and have really benefited from the so-called 529 plans—a section of the IRS Code that allows families to save tax-free for education. What we are trying to do with the ABLE Act is to replicate that opportunity so that families who have a loved one with a disability—it may be one disability or it may be more than one, but every family who has a loved one with a disability should have the opportunity to save just as they might for education in a tax-free manner, in a tax-advantaged way.

We have been working on this legislation for a number of years. Senator RICHARD BURR, the senior Senator from North Carolina, and I have led this effort in the Senate. As I said, it would build upon that 529 model for education.

The ABLE Act enjoys the support of 63 Senators, 63 cosponsors. In the House, it is up to 335 Members. That is why we mentioned that over 400 Members of Congress agree. That is why the hashtag #passtheABLEact! is important to highlight.

There are few measures which come before the Senate or the House which enjoy that kind of bipartisan support. In the Senate there are no more than 5 bills that enjoy the support of 63 or more Senators. We are pleased about that, but we are not done yet. We still have a long way to go to get this legislation done.

So as important as it is to highlight the numbers, it is also important to highlight the people who did the hard work to get us there. I want to commend Members of the House and Senate, but the ones who are worthy of even more substantial commendation would be a lot of individuals, some of whom are here in Washington this week: The National Down Syndrome Society. I was just with folks from the National Down Syndrome Society this morning over on the House side. They allow a Senator to go across to the House side. Our current Presiding Officer knows this, as she served there. Once in a while we get to go over there, and they were kind enough to invite us over there this morning. They have done remarkable work on this legislation and are continuing their advocacy today, even as we speak. We are grateful for their work.

Autism Speaks is another great organization that has done enormous work to bring us to where we are today, and the Arc as well. So many Americans know a lot about the Arc, the National Down Syndrome Society, as well as Autism Speaks. So we are grateful for that support, but we still have a ways to go.

One of the best ways to ensure this legislation will get over the goal line—I don't want to use too many football analogies here—but if we are getting close, even if we are in the so-called red zone, we are not in the end zone yet. We have a ways to go. But one of the best ways to make sure that happens is to talk about the real people that legislation like this would affect.

I mentioned the number of supporters we have, but I didn't mention the full name of the bill: Achieving a Better Life Experience. That is what the acronym ABLE stands for. But I like to think about it in this way as well.

I have a constituent, Sara Wolff, who is with us here today. She knows the rules don't allow me to indicate where she is today, but she is very close by, and she is with us today. I am grateful Sara is with us because she is a great example of someone who has a disability but is very able. She has a disability, but on a regular basis—hour after hour, day after day—she finds a way to overcome her disability or to manage it as best she can. She is a remarkable speaker. She gives as many speeches in a week as I give, and I am an elected official. She is well-known in northeastern Pennsylvania where we live. We live in the same county, but I live in Scranton and she lives in Moscow. She works for the O'Malley & Langan Law Offices. She is a law clerk there.

But as smart as she is on the law and these issues, probably the most significant part of her whole personality is the dynamism she brings to issues. She is a dynamic person. She does something few of us do well—even people who work here as elected officials—because she knows how to engage with people. She knows how to deliver a message. She knows how to be candid and direct but to do it in a way that is engaging and warm and friendly. So once in a while I will take instruction from Sara Wolff. But even more than that, I take inspiration from her.

Sara is someone who is very able and talented and committed, but she is among the many Americans—Pennsylvanians in my case—asking us to pass this legislation so that if a family such as hers wants to begin to save to help pay for a whole range of services for an individual with a disability, they can do so in a tax-advantaged environment in order to save over time, and do it in a manner that doesn't put them at a disadvantage from a tax standpoint down the road.

So Sara is a great example of why the ABLE Act should pass, and she is doing more than her share to make sure that it does pass. So I am grateful to Sara Wolff for doing that, and I am especially grateful to people like Sara, who like a lot of us at some point in our lives have to overcome a tragedy. Sara lost her mother Connie not too long ago to a sudden and rapid illness. But she has been able to deal with that tragedy and still help us day in and day out to get the ABLE Act passed.

I will highlight one more story and then I will conclude. Angie Cain is a 28-year-old who lives in Indianapolis, IN, and like Sara Wolff she lives with Down syndrome. Angie has five different jobs and works 5 days a week. She works paid positions at Kohl's on Mondays and at the YMCA on Fridays. On Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays she volunteers for several organizations, including a hospital, a Down syndrome office in Indiana, and the Alzheimer's unit of an assisted living facility.

Unfortunately, like so many Americans with disabilities, Angie is unable to save enough to cover her future needs—the same problem I just highlighted—if we don't change the law with the ABLE Act. Under current law, she must have less than $2,000 in assets in order to be eligible for Supplemental Security Income. That doesn't make a lot of sense, and that is one of the reasons we have to change the law. Angie is, therefore, forced to limit the amount of money she earns and work multiple paid and volunteer positions in order to benefit from the steady benefits that SSI provides.

Angie would like to live independently and, at the same time, she knows that she has limitations in that regard because without adequate savings and income, because of the current state of the law, she is forced to live with her family. She would like to be independent. That is something we all yearn for at some point in our lives. Angie's family is worried about her living and financial situation, especially down the line, years from now, when

her family may not be with her any longer.

Stories such as Angie Cain's story, the story of Sara Wolff, and individuals across the country like Sara and Angie are the reason we have to pass the ABLE Act. They don't need a lot of help. They need just a tool, one tool in their toolbox, to be able to reach down and have the opportunity to have their families save in a way that will help them down the road.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 19 percent of Americans live with one or more disabilities, 12 percent live with severe disabilities, and many of them are unsure about their ability to cover their basic expenses in the future because they are unable to build adequate savings.

We talk a lot about how folks should save. We encourage people to save for college. We encourage families to do that, and we encourage people to save for all kinds of things. Just the principle itself—to save and to conserve—is a good one to espouse and to advocate. But we have to give, in this instance, families an opportunity to save for a loved one with a disability or, in some cases, more than one disability. So whether it is Sara Wolff or Angie or others, we have to give them an opportunity to do that and give their families that opportunity.

When you see that number of Members of Congress—400—coming together, I believe it is not simply a question of whether this will pass but only a question of when the ABLE Act will pass. I hope that will take place in the next couple of months and that we can get every single Member of the Senate and House to join us.

This is one major thing we could do this year to show the American people we get it when it comes to one challenge that a lot of families face.

TRIBUTE TO BETSY SCHMID

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, 13 months ago, I inherited an awesome responsibility. In the blink of an eye, I had become Chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, a position long held by Senator Daniel Inouye.

It was daunting to step into the shoes of a member of the ''greatest generation,'' a Medal of Honor recipient, and one of the most respected advocates for the men and women who serve our country in uniform. It was my good luck that the gavel I inherited came with Betsy Schmid, the staff director of the subcommittee.

Betsy first came to the Senate in February 2002, on detail to the Defense Subcommittee as a Presidential management intern. While it was only a temporary assignment, I believe Betsy would be the first to tell you that she would have done anything to return.

Return she did, joining the Defense Subcommittee as professional staff in March 2003. Over the next 8 years, Betsy served as a budget analyst focusing on some of the largest, most complex, and politically sensitive programs in the Department of Defense.

After years as an outstanding budget analyst, Chairman Inouye appointed Betsy to serve as the staff director of the Subcommittee on Defense in February 2011. It is a daunting job. The subcommittee oversees more than half of the Nation's discretionary budget, plus tens of billions more for the costs of overseas conflicts.

As staff director, Betsy has done an outstanding job of serving me this year, and Senator Inouye before me. But more importantly, her time here was in service to the Senate, the Nation, and our Armed Forces.

During her service, she had been handed the unenviable task of reducing the defense budget by scores of billions of dollars.

Many said that the cuts could not be made without sacrificing major critical military capabilities, but Betsy and her staff proved them wrong. Betsy made the numbers work, and there is no doubt in my mind that our Nation is more secure today because we got many of these budgetary decisions right.

This is Betsy Schmid's last week with the Subcommittee on Defense. She has been given an offer that she simply could not refuse. I wish her well and know she will contribute in important ways, but we will miss her.

During her service in the Senate, she has continued the tradition of bipartisanship and putting the men and women of the Armed Forces and Intelligence Community first. No one has worked harder to achieve these goals, working late nights, weekends, and more than a few holidays to serve her country to the utmost of her considerable abilities.

So with this distinguished record of public service, I would like to provide my sincere thanks and congratulations to Elizabeth Lynne Schmid. I wish her the very best in her future endeavors.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I rise today in recognition of Black History Month.

First established in 1976 as part of the U.S. Bicentennial, President Gerald Ford marked the inaugural Black History Month with a call to ''honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.''

The State of Illinois has played a significant role in this ongoing struggle for justice. President Abraham Lincoln led our Nation through its bloodiest war to save the Union, abolish slavery, and begin the work we continue to this day to end discrimination.

It was Illinois Senator Paul Douglas who raised the Illinois standard and joined in lending support for Hubert Humphrey's call for civil rights at the 1948 Democratic Convention. Douglas was a stalwart on civil rights as a Senator, defying filibusters and the wrath of his colleagues to make this principled stand in the 1950s and 1960s.

It was Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen who worked with Members of both parties to help pass the historic Civil Rights Act of 1964 50 years ago this July. That Dirksen Senate seat would later be filled by three of the nine African-American Senators who have served in this body—more than any other State in the Nation.

In 1992, Carol Moseley Braun became the first and only African-American woman to serve in the Senate. In 2004, I was joined here in the Senate by Barack Obama, who would of course go on to become the first African-American President in American history. Roland Burris assumed his seat when President Obama moved into the White House.

The Senate has since welcomed Senators TIM SCOTT of South Carolina, Mo Cowan of Massachusetts, and CORY BOOKER of New Jersey. This 113th Congress marks the first time that two African-American Senators served concurrently.

The Senate is changing to better reflect the diversity of this Nation, but the pace of that change is painfully slow. Our challenge is to shape a nation where America's leaders look like America and where the talents of all people are welcomed.

We proudly celebrate the tremendous work of the courageous men and women who have come before us to make this country a better place. During this month, as we do throughout the year, America continues to fight so that we may all live in a fairer and more equal nation.

SENATE EMPLOYEES' CHILD CARE CENTER

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I wish to recognize the 30th anniversary of a special place in our Senate community—the Senate employees' childcare center. The teachers and administrators at the center are some of the unsung heroes of the Senate, and it is a privilege to be able to pay tribute to them today.

The Senate employees' childcare center opened its doors on February 27, 1984, as the result of a small group of Senate employees who came together as parents to create a childcare program for their children that would best meet the unique needs of Senate employees. Although operating out of different buildings, the center has been in continuous operation since its opening day. In 1989, the center became the first childcare center in Washington, DC, to receive accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children—a hallmark of quality in the child care world—and it has remained accredited ever since.

Over the years the center has grown in size and has moved locations several times, but one thing that has never

changed is the center's commitment to excellence. Through the dedicated efforts of its administrators and faculty, the center provides an exceptional level of care and a top-notch early childhood education program. While adhering to rigorous standards, the center also remains a warm and close-knit community. It is now a separate nonprofit governed by a parent board of directors, and all of the parents regularly donate their time and their energy—from organizing the center's library to washing crib sheets and blankets—to ensure that the center runs smoothly. It is a place where everyone knows every child's name and where children rush in the doors in the morning with smiles on their faces because they know they are going to a place where they will be welcomed, where they will learn, and where they will be loved.

That loving environment is provided by the people who are truly the heart of the Senate childcare center—its teachers. Childcare workers perform some of the most difficult and most important jobs in our society. Their job is far more than feeding, diapering, and keeping children safe. They help develop young minds in the earliest, most critical developmental years. Childcare workers don't do their jobs for the money, and they often don't get the respect they deserve. They do their jobs because they love children and they love being a part of watching them grow.

The center is blessed with a particularly exceptional faculty—many of the teachers have been there for decades. They have watched the children they have cared for grow up, go to college, get married, and have children of their own, and they are still there with open arms and loving hearts for the next generation of children that walk through the door. Though they are not technically public employees, there is no doubt that they are dedicated public servants who make an invaluable contribution to the Senate community.

I want to particularly recognize a few of the most longstanding faculty members at the center. Phyllis Green, the lead teacher in the center's toddler room, has been with the center all 30 years of its operation. Parents describe her as a warm, steady, and nurturing presence, who has helped countless children discover the world and gain new skills and new independence. Anyone who can spend 30 years with toddlers is truly a remarkable individual, and I applaud ''Ms. Phyllis'' for her years of service. Other teachers with longstanding service include the center's beloved assistant director, Bridgette Waters, who is marking her 20th year this year, teachers Janet Green-Tucker, Joan Middleton, Michelle Buckner, and Rosa Woodard, each of whom has served, or will soon serve, 20 years or more with the center, and teachers Pia Corona, Tangela Cassell-Johnson, Andrea Henriques, Kellie Salley, and Mishele Torbati, each of whom has served, or will soon have served, 10 years or more.

I would also like to recognize the 9 years of service provided by the center's departing director, Christine Schoppe Wauls, who will leave our community at the end of the month to enjoy her well-deserved retirement. Christine, thank you for your years of service to the Senate community. Indeed, the entire faculty and staff of the center deserve our respect and gratitude for the important work that they do each day.

I have often said that when a staffer signs up to work for the Senate, their whole family really signs up for public service. Senate families make many sacrifices so that a parent—or sometimes both parents—can serve the Senate. For the parents who send their children to the Senate childcare center, the difficult balancing act of work and family is made just a little bit easier.

It is a great comfort to Senate staffers to know that their children are in such wonderful care. It is a great comfort to us as Senators to know that our staff can do their jobs well without worrying about their children's safety and well-being. We would be a better country if every working American could have the same kind of security and peace of mind when they go to work each day.

So on this, the 30th anniversary of the Senate employees' childcare center, I offer my congratulations to the center for achieving this important milestone and my very best wishes for many more years of service.

TRIBUTE TO SETH HARRIS

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to the former Deputy Secretary of Labor, Seth Harris, who recently left the Department after nearly 5 years of service. In his time serving as both Deputy Secretary and Acting Secretary, Seth was an invaluable asset to the Department. He brought to these positions a deep knowledge of both the agency and labor law, and he made significant contributions to the Department both as a manager and as a policy expert. Perhaps most important, he brought to these positions the lifelong passion for helping working families succeed that has been the hallmark of his impressive career.

Indeed, this was not Seth's first stint at the Department of Labor. He served for 7 years at the Department during the Clinton Administration, under both Secretaries Robert Reich and Alexis Herman. During this time, he served as counselor to the Secretary of Labor and as Acting Assistant Secretary for Policy, among other roles. He then moved to the academy, where he served as a professor of law at the New York Law School and director of its Labor & Employment Law Programs. While teaching at the New York Law School, his scholarship often focused on a law that is particularly close to my heart—the Americans with Disabilities Act. While teaching, Seth was also a Senior Fellow at the Life Without Limits Project of the United Cerebral Palsy Association, and was a member of the National Advisory Commission on Workplace Flexibility. When President Obama took office, Seth again answered the call to serve his country, and was confirmed as the eleventh United States Deputy Secretary of Labor in May of 2009.

I can understand why he wanted to return to the Department. As I have said on more than one occasion, of all the executive agencies, it may be the Department of Labor that touches the lives of ordinary working Americans the most on a day-to-day basis. The Department of Labor ensures that every American receives a fair day's pay for a hard day's work, and can come home from work safely each night. It helps ensure that a working mother can stay home to bond with her newborn child and still have a job to return to. It helps workers who have been laid off, veterans returning from military service, young people with disabilities entering the workforce and those who develop disabilities and are trying to reenter the workforce—it helps all of these workers to build new skills and aspire to better opportunities for the future. In addition, the Department helps guarantee that hard-working people who have saved all their lives for retirement can enjoy their golden years with security and peace of mind.

Yet, despite this important mission, it is safe to say that when Seth and the current leadership team arrived at the Department, it was an agency suffering from significant neglect. Enforcement activity was down. Vital regulations to protect workers had been weakened or repealed. The agency faced significant management challenges. Not surprisingly, the morale of the agency's career staff was low.

It has been heartening to see this critical agency revitalized under the Obama administration. Enforcement statistics are improving. More workers are getting better training so they can find better jobs. Employee morale at the agency is improving. In short, the Department of Labor is doing what it is supposed to be doing, and doing it well. As Deputy Secretary—the official responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Department—Seth Harris played a key role in helping the Department meet these challenges.

In a message to Department staff upon his departure, Seth shared some of the agency's accomplishments over the last 5 years. I wanted to include this list in the RECORD, because it is an impressive array of achievements. To quote his message:

Last year, we achieved the lowest workplace fatality rate for miners, the fewest number of miners dying in workplace accidents, and the fewest workplace injuries in

mines, ever. Over the last five years, we have twice achieved the lowest rate of fatalities in general industry, ever, including last year. And over the last five years, we achieved the lowest fatality rate in the construction industry, ever.

Last year, we conducted the largest number of whistleblower investigations, ever. Last year, we helped more miners who suffered retaliation from their employers for raising health and safety concerns than were helped in the entire second term of the Bush Administration or the entire second term of the Clinton Administration. Black lung that cripples and kills miners will become much, much rarer under a new rule we proposed. Hundreds of deaths and thousands of morbid illnesses will be prevented each year under a new rule we proposed to protect workers from exposure to silica.

Over the past 5 years, we have returned more than $1.1 billion in wages to the workers from whom they had been stolen. We conducted the largest number of directed Davis-Bacon investigations, ever. And we did the best job, ever, of targeting our wage and hour investigations to the workplaces that had violations, even when the workers felt too threatened and too disempowered to complain. We expanded minimum wage and overtime protections to nearly 2 million home health aides. The people who care for us when we need them most will now get the most basic of worker protections.

Last year, we conducted the largest number of pension and health plan investigations over the past five years. During that same period, we recovered more than $1.3 billion in pension and health plan benefits for more than 710,000 participants and beneficiaries through informal resolutions. We also promulgated almost two dozen rules with our colleagues at Treasury and HHS to implement the President's historic health care law.

Last year, we assured that the largest percentage of workers exiting Labor Department job training programs got industry-recognized credentials. We also helped hundreds of community colleges work with employers to give tens of thousands of workers skills that employers need right now and will need for years to come. We expanded eligibility for the Trade Adjustment Assistance and unemployment insurance under the President's Recovery Act. And we nursed all 53 jurisdictions administering UI programs through the worst unemployment crisis in seven decades.

Last year, we did the best job, ever, of targeting the very small number of union officers and staff who embezzle funds or engage in fraud. We also achieved near record efficiency in concluding investigations of union elections despite the fewest resources available ever.

Over the past five years, we have stripped away a mountain of bureaucratic and legal barriers that kept our civil rights agency from finding and remedying discrimination. And we are finding and fixing pay discrimination, in particular, at an accelerating rate. We changed the law so that hundreds of thousands more people with disabilities and veterans will get jobs with federal contractors every year.

Last year, we helped the highest percentage of federal employees with disabilities on workers compensation to return to work since we started keeping records on this activity. We also processed workers compensation claims for longshore workers and energy employees at the fastest clip, ever.

We have done the best job, ever, of managing the taxpayers' money entrusted to the Labor Department's care. We have had five consecutive years of clean financial audits, and these last two years, we had no material deficiencies in our financial audit. We replaced a 25-year-old financial management system that put us out of compliance with just about every law with a new cloud-based financial management system that helps us comply with every law, and balance our books, and spend the taxpayers' money responsibly.

Last year, we did the best job, ever, of paying our bills on time, and we paid the smallest amount of interest for late payments, ever. We paid our small business contractors faster than ever. And the percentage of contracting we are doing with small businesses is the highest, ever.

We accomplished all of this by taking seriously President Obama's direction to engage in evidence-based, data-driven management.

The Government Accountability Office recently conducted a survey of all managers in 24 executive branch departments and agencies at the GS–13 level and higher. GAO asked these federal managers a long list of questions that amounted to, ''does your agency or department use evidence-based, data-driven decision making?'' The Labor Department beat all 24 federal agencies that were part of the survey. We lead the federal government in Obama-style evidence-based, data-driven management.

This impressive list of accomplishments reflects an agency that is back on track. It is a testament to the hard work of Secretary Solis, Secretary Perez, Seth Harris, the DOL leadership team, and the dedicated career staff that work for the agency across the country.

While he has moved on to new challenges in his professional life, our Nation owes a great debt of gratitude to Seth Harris for his leadership and for his passionate dedication to helping working families. I know Seth's work on these issues is far from done, and I look forward to continuing to work with him in his new roles in the years to come.

TRIBUTE TO JEAN MANNING

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, Jean Manning is synonymous with the Office of the Senate Chief Counsel for Employment. Since establishing the Office in 1993 at the direction of the Joint Leadership, Ms. Manning has provided invaluable counsel to Senate offices to ensure their compliance with applicable employment laws, including the Equal Pay Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act and numerous other laws Congress applied to itself when it passed the Government Employee Rights Act of 1991 and the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995. Now, after decades of service to the Senate, Jean is retiring. While her retirement is much deserved after a long career, her wise counsel will be missed throughout this great institution.

Ms. Manning, who originally hails from Chicago, began her career as she now ends her career—with public service. After receiving a B.A. in 1972 from the University of Illinois, she took on the important role of educating junior high school students. Ms. Manning left teaching to further her education, obtaining an M.B.A. and a J.D. from the University of Illinois. While pursuing her law degree, Ms. Manning was a member and Articles Editor of the University of Illinois Law Review, in which she published an article about using multiple regression analysis to assess and remedy salary inequity between men and women, a subject about which she has always been passionate. Also while in law school, Ms. Manning was awarded the Rickert Award for Excellence in Legal Writing, an honor that anyone who has reviewed Ms. Manning's exceptional legal writing will know was well deserved.

Following her graduation from law school in 1983, Ms. Manning began her legal career in the great State of California, where she honed her legal skills as a labor and employment law litigator at several prestigious national law firms. Although she eventually moved to the East Coast in 1992, Ms. Manning still considers California her home. She returns to California several times each year to visit friends and family. In retirement, she plans to live in northern California during part of each year.

In the early 1990s, Congress as a workplace underwent a sea change when all major employment laws became applicable to Congress. The Joint Leadership selected Jean Manning as the Senate's first Chief Counsel for Employment to establish and to manage the Office of the Senate Chief Counsel for Employment. Ms. Manning's goal was to create a nonpartisan, legal defense office in the Senate that would provide top-tier legal advice and representation to all Senators and Senate offices in the area of labor and employment law. Ms. Manning has far exceeded her goal. The office she established has a stellar reputation throughout the Senate. On a daily basis, the Office of the Senate Chief Counsel for Employment advises and trains all Senate offices of their obligations under employment laws. Every year, the Office presents over 70 legal seminars within the Senate to ensure that Senate managers understand and adhere to all employment laws when managing their offices.

Ms. Manning also has tirelessly represented Senate employing offices at all levels of the Federal court system, including arguing before the United States Supreme Court. It is a testament to the high standards she set for herself and her entire office that, since its inception 21 years ago, the Office of the Senate Chief Counsel for Employment has never lost a case.

Throughout her Senate career, Ms. Manning has provided Senators, officers and Senate employing offices with unfailingly sound legal advice—even at times when she knew her advice might be unpopular. We thank her for her exceptional service to the Senate. The Senate is losing a great legal advocate, educator and source of institutional knowledge. The Senate is a better place for Ms. Manning's outstanding service, and she will be missed.

TRIBUTE TO VIRGINIA RENEE SIMPSON

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, I rise today to recognize the dedicated career and service to the Congress and the Nation of Renee Simpson, who is retiring at the end of this month after over 30 years of service in both the Executive and Legislative branches of our government. She has dedicated her life to public service helping keep our Nation and its citizens secure, and we honor her for her longstanding dedication.

Renee is leaving the Senate as a staff member for Audits and Oversight of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. During her 3 years on the Committee, Renee has been integral to the committee's oversight of the 16 intelligence agencies. She led reviews of the intelligence community's information technology modernization and classification processes, and served as a committee liaison with the inspectors general of the intelligence community. Her knowledge and insight helped both identify items of concern and proposals for improvement.

In addition to her service with the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, Renee has served as a Legislative Affairs Officer in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and as the Special Senate Liaison for the United States Marine Corps Office of Legislative Affairs. But perhaps her most significant assignments and accomplishments came during her 24 years of service with the U.S. Naval Reserves.

Ms. Simpson's distinguished military career began as an Operations and Readiness Officer for Desert Shield/Desert Storm and her unwavering commitment to service led her to posts around the world, including to NATO's Allied Forces Southern Headquarters Command, the U.S. Embassy in Rome, Italy, the Joint Task Force in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, U.S. Joint Forces Command, and the Office of the Director of Naval Intelligence in Washington, DC.

Renee has received numerous awards for her military service including the Defense Superior Service Medal as well as many Navy and Marine Corps Commendation and Achievement Medals.

Renee is especially close to her family and her priorities and heart lie with them in Sanford, NC. Her father, Lester Ray Simpson, is a proud Navy veteran of the Korean War who has an appreciation of fine attire with just the right bow tie. Her mom, Vivian, remains Renee's unending inspiration and role model. And according to Renee, her sister, Jane Rae Fawcett, is ''a superstar and the smartest, funniest person I know.'' Finally, her family simply would not be complete without her anchor of a brother-in-law, Deputy Sheriff Ed Fawcett. Renee lives, breathes and loves her family above all else.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to publicly thank Renee and to note my appreciation for her dedicated and dignified efforts. We will miss your insight and experience, and your commitment to pursuing the right policies to protect our Nation.

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Subcommittee assignments.

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

UNITED STATES, SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION & FORESTRY

113th Congress, Subcommittee Assignments, February 27, 2014

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMODITIES, MARKETS, TRADE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Sen. Donnelly, Chair, Sen. Heitkamp, Sen. Harkin, Sen. Brown, Sen. Gillibrand, Sen. Walsh, Sen. Chambliss, Ranking, Sen. Roberts, Sen. Boozman, Sen. Hoeven, Sen. Johanns.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON JOBS, RURAL ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENERGY INNOVATION

Sen. Heitkamp, Chair, Sen. Brown, Sen. Klobuchar, Sen. Bennet, Sen. Donnelly, Sen. Casey, Sen. Johanns, Ranking, Sen. Hoeven, Sen. Grassley, Sen. Thune, Sen. Boozman.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, FORESTRY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Sen. Bennet, Chair, Sen. Harkin, Sen. Klobuchar, Sen. Leahy, Sen. Heitkamp, Sen. Walsh, Sen. Boozman, Ranking, Sen. McConnell, Sen. Chambliss, Sen. Thune, Sen. Roberts.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NUTRITION, SPECIALTY CROPS, FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Sen. Casey, Chair, Sen. Leahy, Sen. Harkin, Sen. Brown, Sen. Gillibrand, Sen. Bennet, Sen. Hoeven, Ranking, Sen. McConnell, Sen. Chambliss, Sen. Grassley, Sen. Thune.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LIVESTOCK, DAIRY, POULTRY, MARKETING AND AGRICULTURE SECURITY

Sen. Gillibrand, Chair, Sen. Leahy, Sen. Klobuchar, Sen. Donnelly, Sen. Casey, Sen. Walsh, Sen. Roberts, Ranking, Sen. McConnell, Sen. Boozman, Sen. Johanns, Sen. Grassley.

*Senator Stabenow and Senator Cochran serve as ex officio members of all subcommittees.

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN FROM GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, no family should be forced to endure the loss of a child. In his memoir, President Dwight Eisenhower wrote that the loss of his 3-year-old son in early 1921 was ''the greatest disappointment and disaster in my life, the one that I have never been able to forget completely.'' That is why one of the fundamental expectations that Americans have of their government is also one of the most simple: to protect America's children; to ensure that our communities, our streets, and our families are safe.

But sadly, Congress has done little to combat the gun violence that continues to devastate American children and families. Many have characterized horrific shootings affecting children in our Nation, such as the one which occurred in Newtown, CT, as somehow separate from mainstream American society. But recent studies have shown that such incidents cannot be viewed in a vacuum. Instead, as a recent Yale University study has established, they are part of a wider, disturbing trend of gun violence wounding and killing American children. This study found that every day in the United States, around 20 children sustain firearm injuries serious enough to require hospitalization. In 6 percent of those cases, the wounds prove to be fatal. Three quarters of child hospitalizations examined by the study were the result of unintentional or accidental injuries, often cases of children playing with an unsecured firearm.

The study's rigorous clinical framework, combined with the reality that it is discussing children, makes for jarring reading. The researchers found, for example, that the most common firearm-inflicted injuries on children are open wounds, fractures, and internal injuries to the thorax, abdomen, or pelvis. Injuries to the nerves or spinal cord are also frequent. Traumatic brain injury resulting from gun violence is most often found in children younger than 5. These are not statistics of soldiers on a battlefield who volunteered to face danger. These are innocent children, in our communities, right here at home.

This cycle of violence touches families around our Nation. Like in Detroit, where a recent Detroit News investigation showed that nearly 500 Detroit children have died in homicides since 2000, mostly as the result of gun violence. That investigation cited, as an example, the story of 12-year-old Kenis Green Jr. Last August, he was shot and killed on his front porch during his uncle's birthday party. In Texas, last October a 5-year-old boy shot himself with a .40 caliber pistol that his babysitter left unattended when she went to take a nap. In South Carolina, last December a 15-year-old boy accidentally shot and killed a 12-year-old while loading a magazine into a firearm.

If almost anything in the world was responsible for sending 20 American children to the hospital every day, or was frequently involved in teenage suicides, or was inflicting traumatic brain injuries on toddlers, Congress would spring into action to address what can only be described as a public health crisis. We would enact comprehensive safety standards to stop the bloodshed. But when firearms are responsible for these horrific effects, inexplicably, we do nothing.

I urge my colleagues to recognize this crisis and to act to protect our children from gun violence. I urge my colleagues to take up and pass gun safety measures already pending in this Congress to keep firearms out of

the wrong hands and to make our society safer. We owe our children nothing less.

BROWN UNIVERSITY

Mr. REED. Madam President, today I want to recognize an extraordinary university, deeply rooted in the history of Rhode Island, Brown University. Brown is celebrating its 250th anniversary. Brown University's founding in 1764 makes it the seventh oldest institution of higher education in the United States, predating even the American Revolution. The university originally began as a small school located in Warren, RI, known as the College of Rhode Island. As Brown grew, it moved to College Hill in Providence in 1770, where it has thrived to this day and was renamed a few years later to acknowledge a $5,000 gift from Nicholas Brown, a member of the class of 1786.

Since its founding, Brown University has played an important role in Rhode Island and our Nation's history. Indeed, it was the first Ivy League institution to admit students of all religions. Brown remains committed to diversity and access. Over 20 years ago, Brown established the Leadership Alliance, a national academic consortium of leading research universities and minority-serving institutions with the mission to develop underrepresented students into outstanding leaders and role models in academia, business, and the public sector. Brown stands out for its willingness to openly delve into its past while staying focused on the future, and it has made a vital commitment to college access through its need-blind admissions policy, ensuring that no student admitted to Brown will be turned away for financial reasons.

Brown established a truly student-driven curriculum—the Brown Curriculum—in 1970 to allow students to personalize their course of study. In an effort to continue its edge in innovation, Brown launched its Plan for Academic Enrichment in 2002 to help transform the fields of research, education, and public leadership. Fiscal year 2013 saw the University conduct more than $170 million in sponsored research, helping the Rhode Island economy and making new discoveries that can improve lives.

The commitment of Brown's alumni to public service is also particularly noteworthy and admirable. According to a 2013 article by Washington Monthly, Brown ranks fifth among national universities and first in the Ivy League for the number of alumni working in public service. Some of the Brown alumni currently playing important roles in the public sphere include Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen, U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez, and World Bank President Dr. Jim Yong Kim. Through this commitment to service, members of the Brown community continue to find ways to improve the quality of life for people across Rhode Island, the Nation, and the world.

I am proud of the talented men and women who have contributed to the success of Brown University over these past 250 years. I congratulate Christina Paxson, Brown's 19th president, the students, the Brown Corporation, and the entire Brown community on this significant milestone.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO JEFF TEAGUE

• Mr. PRYOR. Madam President, I wish to recognize Jeff Teague, president of Teague Auto Group in El Dorado, AR, who was named the 2014 Time Magazine Dealer of the Year.

Awarded annually, the Time Magazine Dealer of the Year Award recognizes the auto dealer who demonstrates exceptional business performance and distinguished community service. Jeff was recognized for the positive impact he is making on the El Dorado community.

In 1981, Jeff and his father opened their first dealership as partners, a Chevrolet-Oldsmobile dealership, in Walnut Ridge, AR. He opened his current dealership in El Dorado in 1990, and through hard work and determination, Jeff built his dealership into a thriving business. His story is an Arkansas success story which I am proud to acknowledge.

In addition to his business success, Jeff has been a licensed pilot for 26 years and frequently uses this skill to serve his community, including flying church members to charitable initiatives and serving as a standby pilot for a local liver transplant patient. He is a member of Rotary International, the El Dorado Chamber of Commerce, the El Dorado Economic Development Board, the Batesville Chamber of Commerce, and since 2007, has served as chairman of the South Arkansas Regional Airport Commission. Jeff also currently serves on the board of directors for Citizens Bank of Batesville.

Jeff and his wife, Sarah, are well known for their community involvement in El Dorado. They both are actively involved with the Boys & Girls Clubs of El Dorado, the South Arkansas Arts Center, the South Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, MusicFest El Dorado, the Salvation Army, Union County 4–H, the South Arkansas Historical Foundation, and Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries.

I want to offer my congratulations to Jeff Teague on this well-deserved honor and thank him for his dedication and commitment to the community of El Dorado and to Arkansas.•

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.)

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:29 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, 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. 1944. An act to protect private property rights.

H.R. 3308. An act to require a Federal agency to include language in certain educational and advertising materials indicating that such materials are produced and disseminated at taxpayer expense.

H.R. 3865. An act to prohibit the Internal Revenue Service from modifying the standard for determining whether an organization is operated exclusively for the promotion of social welfare for purposes of section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

The message also announced that pursuant to 20 U.S.C. 4303, and the order of the House of January 3, 2013, the Speaker appoints the following Members of the House of Representatives to the Board of Trustees of Gallaudet University: Mr. YODER of Kansas and Mr. BUTTERFIELD of North Carolina.

The message further announced that pursuant to 22 U.S.C. 2761, and the order of the House of January 3, 2013, the Speaker appoints the following Member of the House of Representatives to the British-American Interparliamentary Group: Mr. ROE of Tennessee.

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

At 12:47 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker had signed the following enrolled bill:

H.R. 2431. An act to reauthorize the National Integrated Drought Information System.

The enrolled bill was subsequently signed by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bills were read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

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; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

H.R. 1944. An act to protect private property rights; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

H.R. 2530. An act to improve transparency and efficiency with respect to audits and communications between taxpayers and the Internal Revenue Service; to the Committee on Finance.

H.R. 2531. An act to prohibit the Internal Revenue Service from asking taxpayers questions regarding religious, political, or social beliefs; to the Committee on Finance.

H.R. 3308. An act to require a Federal agency to include language in certain educational and advertising materials indicating that such materials are produced and disseminated at taxpayer expense; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

MEASURES READ THE FIRST TIME

The following bills were read the first time:

H.R. 3865. An act to prohibit the Internal Revenue Service from modifying the standard for determining whether an organization is operated exclusively for the promotion of social welfare for purposes of section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

S. 2062. A bill to authorize Members of Congress to bring an action for declaratory and injunctive relief in response to a written statement by the President or any other official in the executive branch directing officials of the executive branch to not enforce a provision of law.

S. 2066. A bill to amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit the intentional discrimination of a person or organization by an employee of the Internal Revenue Service.

S. 2067. A bill to prohibit the Department of the Treasury from assigning tax statuses to organizations based on their political beliefs and activities.

EXECUTIVE REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following executive reports of nominations were submitted:

By Mr. LEVIN for the Committee on Armed Services.

Air Force nomination of Brig. Gen. Travis D. Balch, to be Major General.

Air Force nomination of Col. Nathaniel S. Reddicks, to be Brigadier General.

Air Force nomination of Brig. Gen. James C. Witham, to be Major General.

Army nomination of Brig. Gen. Michael E. Williamson, to be Lieutenant General.

Army nomination of Col. Thomas R. Tempel, Jr., to be Major General.

Army nomination of Maj. Gen. Kevin W. Mangum, to be Lieutenant General.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Brig. Gen. William T. Collins and ending with Brig. Gen. James S. Hartsell, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 30, 2014.

Marine Corps nomination of Lt. Gen. Robert E. Schmidle, Jr., to be Lieutenant General.

Navy nomination of Rear Adm. Jan E. Tighe, to be Vice Admiral.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, for the Committee on Armed Services I report favorably the following nomination lists which were printed in the RECORDs on the dates indicated, and ask unanimous consent, to save the expense of reprinting on the Executive Calendar that these nominations lie at the Secretary's desk for the information of Senators.

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

Air Force nominations beginning with Kathryn L. Aasen and ending with John K. Walton, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 9, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with David M. Berthe and ending with Paul A. Willingham, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 9, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Amy R. Astonlassiter and ending with Aimee N. Zakaluzny, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 9, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Elizabeth R. Andersondoze and ending with Aaron T. Yu, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 9, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Wesley M. Abadie and ending with Scott A. Zakaluzny, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 9, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with William E. Dickens, Jr. and ending with Richard R. Givens II, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 30, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Kyle William Blasch and ending with Andrew T. Maccabe, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 30, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Luan Tran Le and ending with David C. Schaefer, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 30, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Cynthia B. Camp and ending with Bryan M. Winter, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 30, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Laura I. Fernandez and ending with Albert C. Rees, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 30, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Diane M. Doty and ending with Edward D. Ronnebaum, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 30, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Richard L. Allen and ending with Sandra R. Volden, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 30, 2014.

Air Force nominations beginning with Connie L. Alge and ending with Kenneth E. Yee, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 30, 2014.

Army nomination of Sun Y. Kim, to be Lieutenant Colonel.

Army nomination of William T. Monacci, to be Colonel.

Army nomination of Glennie Z. Kertes, to be Major.

Army nomination of Charles A. Williams, to be Major.

Army nominations beginning with Roger J. Belbel and ending with Yves P. Leblanc, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 6, 2014.

Army nomination of Michael E. Cannon, to be Colonel.

Army nomination of Aizenhawar J. Marrogi, to be Colonel.

Army nominations beginning with Thomas E. Byrne and ending with James H. Chang, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Army nominations beginning with Christopher D. Coulson and ending with Michael Woodruff, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Army nominations beginning with Edward Ahn and ending with D012017, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Ernest P. Abelson II and ending with David D. Zyga, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on January 7, 2014.

Marine Corps nomination of Ryan M. Oleksy, to be Major.

Marine Corps nomination of Sean T. Hays, to be Major.

Marine Corps nomination of Lakendrick D. Wright, to be Major.

Marine Corps nomination of John E. Simpson III, to be Major.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Bill W. Brooks, Jr. and ending with Michael W. Costa, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nomination of James R. Keller, to be Lieutenant Colonel.

Marine Corps nomination of Clennon Roe III, to be Lieutenant Colonel.

Marine Corps nomination of Anthony Redman, to be Lieutenant Colonel.

Marine Corps nomination of Jeffrey P. Wooldridge, to be Lieutenant Colonel.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Billy A. Dubose and ending with John P. Mullery, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Christopher S. Eichner and ending with James Smiley, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Randall E. Davis and ending with Wade E. Wallace, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Damon L. Andersen and ending with Richardo A. Spann, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Paulo T. Alves and ending with Patrick J. Toal, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Christian D. Galbraith and ending with Mark J. Lehman, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Timothy J. Aldrich and ending with Chris A. Storey, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Kenneth L. Aikey and ending with Scott B. Roland, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Marine Corps nominations beginning with Terry H. Choi and ending with Freddie D. Taylor, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

Navy nomination of Leon M. Leflore, to be Lieutenant Commander.

Navy nomination of Gregory D. Sutton, to be Commander.

Navy nomination of Chad C. Schumacher, to be Lieutenant Commander.

Navy nominations beginning with Jack D. Hagan and ending with Richard S. Montgomery, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 6, 2014.

Navy nominations beginning with Reinel Castro and ending with Dustin R. Ward, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 6, 2014.

Navy nomination of Megan M. Donnelly, to be Lieutenant Commander.

Navy nomination of Danielle L. Leiby, to be Lieutenant Commander.

Navy nominations beginning with Michael R. Cathey and ending with Andrew J. Young, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on February 10, 2014.

By Mr. HARKIN for the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

*Portia Y. Wu, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Labor.

*Massie Ritsch, of the District of Columbia, to be Assistant Secretary for Communications and Outreach, Department of Education.

*Vivek Hallegere Murthy, of Massachusetts, to be Medical Director in the Regular Corps of the Public Health Service, subject to qualifications therefor as provided by law and regulations, and to be Surgeon General of the Public Health Service for a term of four years.

*Heather L. MacDougall, of Florida, to be a Member of the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission for a term expiring April 27, 2017.

*Christopher P. Lu, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of Labor.

By Mr. LEAHY for the Committee on the Judiciary.

Steven Paul Logan, of Arizona, to be United States District Judge for the District of Arizona.

John Joseph Tuchi, of Arizona, to be United States District Judge for the District of Arizona.

Diane J. Humetewa, of Arizona, to be United States District Judge for the District of Arizona.

Rosemary Marquez, of Arizona, to be United States District Judge for the District of Arizona.

Douglas L. Rayes, of Arizona, to be United States District Judge for the District of Arizona.

James Alan Soto, of Arizona, to be United States District Judge for the District of Arizona.

*Nomination was reported with recommendation that it be confirmed subject to the nominee's commitment to respond to requests to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of the Senate.

(Nominations without an asterisk were reported with the recommendation that they be confirmed.)

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. KIRK:

S. 2050. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to increase the national limitation amount for qualified highway or surface freight transfer facility bonds; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. KIRK (for himself and Mr. WARNER):

S. 2051. A bill to provide States with greater flexibility in innovative highway financing; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. COONS (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. REED, and Mrs. SHAHEEN):

S. 2052. A bill to reauthorize the weatherization and State energy programs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Ms. WARREN (for herself, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Ms. AYOTTE, Mr. RUBIO, and Mr. MARKEY):

S. 2053. A bill to direct the Architect of the Capitol to place a chair honoring American Prisoners of War/Missing in Action on the Capitol Grounds; to the Committee on Rules and Administration.

By Mr. MURPHY (for himself and Mr. HARKIN):

S. 2054. A bill to require certain standards and enforcement provisions to prevent child abuse and neglect in residential programs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. BOOZMAN (for himself, Mr. BLUNT, Mrs. MCCASKILL, and Mr. PRYOR):

S. 2055. A bill to allow for the collection of certain user fees by non-Federal entities; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mrs. GILLIBRAND:

S. 2056. A bill to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 13127 Broadway Street in Alden, New York, as the ''Sergeant Brett E. Gornewicz Memorial Post Office''; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mrs. GILLIBRAND:

S. 2057. A bill to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 198 Baker Street in Corning, New York, as the ''Specialist Ryan P. Jayne Post Office Building''; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. BEGICH:

S. 2058. A bill to establish a loan guarantee program for natural gas distribution grids to be installed in areas with extremely high energy costs; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

By Mr. BEGICH:

S. 2059. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a credit for the purchase of heating and cooling equipment which meets the Energy Star program requirements and is used in certain high-cost energy communities, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Ms. WARREN (for herself and Mr. HATCH):

S. 2060. A bill to direct the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board to develop accessibility guidelines for electronic instructional materials and related information technologies in institutions of higher education, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. TESTER (for himself, Mrs. MCCASKILL, and Mr. BEGICH):

S. 2061. A bill to prevent conflicts of interest relating to contractors providing background investigation fieldwork services and investigative support services; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. PAUL:

S. 2062. A bill to authorize Members of Congress to bring an action for declaratory and injunctive relief in response to a written statement by the President or any other official in the executive branch directing officials of the executive branch to not enforce a provision of law; read the first time.

By Mrs. SHAHEEN:

S. 2063. A bill to direct the Secretary of Transportation to assist States to rehabilitate or replace certain bridges, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. ROBERTS:

S. 2064. A bill to provide for the repeal of certain provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that have the effect of rationing health care; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. INHOFE (for himself and Mr. LEVIN):

S. 2065. A bill to create incentives for the development of alternative fuel vehicles; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. CRUZ (for himself and Mr. GRASSLEY):

S. 2066. A bill to amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit the intentional discrimination of a person or organization by an employee of the Internal Revenue Service; read the first time.

By Mr. CRUZ (for himself and Mr. GRASSLEY):

S. 2067. A bill to prohibit the Department of the Treasury from assigning tax statuses to organizations based on their political beliefs and activities; read the first time.

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself and Ms. WARREN):

S. 2068. A bill to provide for the development and use of technology for personalized handguns, to require that, within 3 years, all handguns manufactured or sold in, or imported into, the United States incorporate such technology, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. BEGICH (for himself, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. WARNER, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. WALSH, Ms. HIRONO, and Ms. LANDRIEU):

S. 2069. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to expand and modify the credit for employee health insurance expenses of small employers; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself and Mr. MERKLEY):

S. 2070. A bill to reduce the number of nuclear-armed submarines operated by the Navy, to prohibit the development of a new long-range penetrating bomber aircraft, to prohibit the procurement of new intercontinental ballistic missiles, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Mr. BEGICH:

S. 2071. A bill to establish outer Continental Shelf lease and permit processing coordination offices, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. CRUZ:

S. 2072. A bill to prohibit the Department of the Treasury from assigning tax statuses to organizations based on their political beliefs and activities; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. CRUZ:

S. 2073. A bill to amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit the intentional discrimination of a person or organization by an employee of the Internal Revenue Service; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself, Mr. PORTMAN, Ms. LANDRIEU, Mr. COONS, Mr. WARNER, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. MANCHIN, Ms. COLLINS, Ms. AYOTTE, Mr. WICKER, Mr. HOEVEN, and Mr. ISAKSON):

S. 2074. A bill to promote energy savings in residential buildings and industry, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

The following concurrent resolutions and Senate resolutions were read, and referred (or acted upon), as indicated:

By Mr. INHOFE (for himself, Mr. CORNYN, Mr. HATCH, Mr. BARRASSO, Mr.

BLUNT, Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. SESSIONS, Mr. BOOZMAN, Mr. CRAPO, Ms. COLLINS, and Mr. ENZI):

S. Res. 364. A resolution expressing support for the internal rebuilding, resettlement, and reconciliation within Sri Lanka that are necessary to ensure a lasting peace; to the Committee on Foreign Relations .

By Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. CRUZ, and Mr. NELSON):

S. Res. 365. A resolution deploring the violent repression of peaceful demonstrators in Venezuela, calling for full accountability for human rights violations taking place in Venezuela, and supporting the right of the Venezuelan people to the free and peaceful exercise of representative democracy; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mr. CASEY (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. JOHANNS, Mr. ISAKSON, and Mr. BROWN):

S. Res. 366. A resolution expressing support for the goals and ideals of Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week; considered and agreed to.

By Mr. REED (for himself and Ms. COLLINS):

S. Res. 367. A resolution designating March 3, 2014, as ''Read Across America Day''; considered and agreed to.

By Mr. BROWN (for himself, Mr. BARRASSO, Mr. WICKER, Mr. COONS, Mr. BENNET, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. PRYOR, and Ms. WARREN):

S. Res. 368. A resolution designating February 28, 2014, as ''Rare Disease Day''; considered and agreed to.

By Ms. STABENOW (for herself and Mr. COCHRAN):

S. Con. Res. 33. A concurrent resolution celebrating the 100th anniversary of the enactment of the Smith-Lever Act, which established the nationwide Cooperative Extension System; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 135

At the request of Mr. VITTER, the name of the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 135, a bill to amend title X of the Public Health Service Act to prohibit family planning grants from being awarded to any entity that performs abortions, and for other purposes.

S. 232

At the request of Mr. HATCH, the name of the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON) was added as a cosponsor of S. 232, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to repeal the excise tax on medical devices.

S. 313

At the request of Mr. CASEY, the name of the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI) was added as a cosponsor of S. 313, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide for the tax treatment of ABLE accounts established under State programs for the care of family members with disabilities, and for other purposes.

S. 370

At the request of Mr. COCHRAN, the name of the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. HEINRICH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 370, a bill to improve and expand geographic literacy among kindergarten through grade 12 students in the United States by improving professional development programs for kindergarten through grade 12 teachers offered through institutions of higher education.

S. 489

At the request of Mr. THUNE, the name of the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) was added as a cosponsor of S. 489, a bill to amend the Tariff Act of 1930 to increase and adjust for inflation the maximum value of articles that may be imported duty-free by one person on one day, and for other purposes.

S. 635

At the request of Mr. INHOFE, his name was added as a cosponsor of S. 635, a bill to amend the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act to provide an exception to the annual written privacy notice requirement.

At the request of Mr. BROWN, the name of the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 635, supra.

S. 1008

At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the name of the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1008, a bill to prohibit the Secretary of Homeland Security from implementing proposed policy changes that would permit passengers to carry small, non-locking knives on aircraft.

S. 1070

At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1070, a bill to make it unlawful to alter or remove the unique equipment identification number of a mobile device.

S. 1086

At the request of Ms. MIKULSKI, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Ms. AYOTTE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1086, a bill to reauthorize and improve the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990, and for other purposes.

S. 1174

At the request of Mr. BLUMENTHAL, the names of the Senator from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW) and the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) were added as cosponsors of S. 1174, a bill to award a Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment, known as the Borinqueneers.

S. 1187

At the request of Ms. STABENOW, the name of the Senator from Maine (Mr. KING) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1187, a bill to prevent homeowners from being forced to pay taxes on forgiven mortgage loan debt.

S. 1269

At the request of Mr. FRANKEN, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1269, a bill to amend the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to support community college and industry partnerships, and for other purposes.

S. 1322

At the request of Ms. KLOBUCHAR, the name of the Senator from Alaska (Mr. BEGICH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1322, a bill to amend the Controlled Substances Act relating to controlled substance analogues.

S. 1456

At the request of Ms. AYOTTE, the name of the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1456, a bill to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Shimon Peres.

S. 1495

At the request of Mr. CASEY, the name of the Senator from Nebraska (Mr. JOHANNS) was added as a cosponsor 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. 1531

At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the name of the Senator from Maine (Ms. COLLINS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1531, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to modify the types of wines taxed as hard cider.

S. 1562

At the request of Mr. SANDERS, the name of the Senator from Montana (Mr. TESTER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1562, a bill to reauthorize the Older Americans Act of 1965, and for other purposes.

S. 1657

At the request of Mr. UDALL of New Mexico, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. CASEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1657, a bill to reduce prescription drug misuse and abuse.

S. 1697

At the request of Mr. HARKIN, the name of the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. SCHATZ) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1697, a bill to support early learning.

S. 1737

At the request of Mr. HARKIN, the name of the Senator from North Carolina (Mrs. HAGAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1737, a bill to provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage and to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend increased expensing limitations and the treatment of certain real property as section 179 property.

S. 1738

At the request of Mr. CORNYN, the name of the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1738, a bill to provide justice for the victims of trafficking.

S. 1794

At the request of Mr. UDALL of Colorado, the name of the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1794, a bill to designate certain Federal land in Chaffee County, Colorado, as a national monument and as wilderness.

S. 1862

At the request of Mr. BLUNT, the name of the Senator from Delaware

(Mr. COONS) 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. 1923

At the request of Mr. INHOFE, his name was added as a cosponsor of S. 1923, a bill to amend the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 to exempt from registration brokers performing services in connection with the transfer of ownership of smaller privately held companies.

S. 1980

At the request of Mr. ROCKEFELLER, the name of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1980, a bill to amend titles XIX and XXI of the Social Security Act to provide for 12-month continuous enrollment under the Medicaid program and Children's Health Insurance Program and to promote quality care.

S. 2026

At the request of Mr. THUNE, the name of the Senator from Utah (Mr. HATCH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2026, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exclude from gross income any prizes or awards won in competition in the Olympic Games or the Paralympic Games.

S. 2037

At the request of Mr. ROBERTS, the name of the Senator from North Dakota (Ms. HEITKAMP) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2037, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to remove the 96-hour physician certification requirement for inpatient critical access hospital services.

S. CON. RES. 6

At the request of Mr. BARRASSO, the name of the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAPO) was added as a cosponsor of S. Con. Res. 6, a concurrent resolution supporting the Local Radio Freedom Act.

AMENDMENT NO. 2752

At the request of Mr. BURR, the names of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN) and the Senator from Maine (Ms. COLLINS) were added as cosponsors 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.

AMENDMENT NO. 2760

At the request of Mr. COBURN, the name of the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 2760 intended to be proposed to S. 1982, a bill to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 2762

At the request of Mr. COBURN, the name of the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 2762 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 Mr. ROBERTS:

S. 2064. A bill to provide for the repeal of certain provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that have the effect of rationing health care; to the Committee on Finance.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss ObamaCare provisions that should be keeping my colleagues and all Americans up at night. Obviously, my views are very different from my colleagues who have just propounded their views on the same subject.

Unfortunately, since the implementation of ObamaCare began, the stories and reports have only confirmed the many warnings that I and many of my colleagues made during the debate. Most of the stories Kansans tell me now involve many hundreds of dollars in increases in monthly premiums or people simply losing their coverage. These are real stories from real Kansans, and they are not lies.

Compounding the problem, this administration has made it a routine practice to do what we call a regulations dump on Friday. This is a deliberate posting of sometimes thousands of pages of regulations during the time when the American public and the press is least likely to be paying attention.

Most recent reports from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services—what we call CMS—are that millions of small businesses will face increased premium rates under ObamaCare. The President promised to make it easier for small businesses to offer coverage and, lo and behold, it may even become impossible for them to do so.

Then there are the cuts our seniors are about to face to their Medicare plans. We can't forget that the President pilfered—that is a good word, pilfered—$1 trillion from Medicare to pay for ObamaCare. These cuts have been delayed, but the most recent regulation on Part D and Medicare Advantage will be extremely detrimental to seniors' access to the availability of Medicare plans. And because of this, for once—for once—I wish to speak about a subject where we get ahead of the curve, get in front of the next disaster, and repeal specific provisions of this law that I think will be most harmful to patients.

I have talked before about how this law comes between patients and doctors, but I think we need to bring more attention to the specter of what I call rationing—yes, rationing. In the absence of complete repeal, I urge my colleagues that these provisions must be repealed.

During the health care reform debate, and many times since then, I have spoken at length about rationing. Specifically, I want people to know about what I refer to as the four rations that are included in ObamaCare. Yes, this is a very real threat. And, yes, they will ration care.

Let me start with something called the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Innovation Center. That is a pretty big, fancy government name. The Center has an enormous budget to match, aimed at finding innovative ways to reform payment and the delivery of health care. That sounds very good, but what this means is that the ''innovation center'' can now use taxpayer dollars to invest in ways to reduce patient access to care.

Let me say that again. The government can now use taxpayer dollars to invest in ways to reduce patient access to care. It gives the government new powers to cut payments to Medicare beneficiaries with the goal to reduce program expenditures. The reality is they are going to reduce patients' ability to access the care they want and need—all hidden under the cloak of innovation. And that isn't innovation at all. Even if they did give it a fancy title, folks, it is smoke and mirrors. This outfit is already pushing out all of the regulations to implement ObamaCare that are now hurting patients—all the regulations we hear about from our health care providers.

Let me move to the second ration. It grants new authorities to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force—that is another nice-sounding entity with a long title. This Preventive Services Task Force used to be a body that was scientific and academic, that reviewed treatment, testing, and prevention information, and made recommendations for primary doctors. Nothing is wrong with that. It used to be an academic body that made recommendations, not a body pushing through mandates and regulations. Many would argue that is still what they do today. However, the effect of their recommendations is they are significantly more costly and burdensome. Because of ObamaCare, the task force can now decide what should and, more importantly, should not be covered by health plans. That is not prevention, that is rationing. If the task force doesn't recommend it, then it won't be covered by health plans and patients bear the cost of the procedure. We are seeing this already with things such as prostate exams and mammograms for breast cancer which have been so helpful to so many people—saved their lives.

The third rationer is the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute. Yes, that is another mouthful. This is the outfit that was given millions and millions of dollars to do comparative effectiveness research. I am not opposed to research. I don't know anyone in this body who is opposed to research, especially when it is used to inform the conversation between doctors

and their patients. But there is a reason this was formerly called cost-effective research. There is a very fine line between providing information to doctors and patients to determine the best course of care and using that information to decide whether the care or treatment is worth paying for. I have long been concerned that instead this research will be abused to arbitrarily deny patients access to potentially lifesaving treatments or services. That simply should not happen. The research should only be used for the doctor and the patient to make the best health care decision.

Finally, the fourth rationer—my personal nemesis—the Independent Payment Advisory Board—IPAD. This is a board made up of 15 unelected bureaucrats who will decide what gets to stay and what gets to go in Medicare coverage. They will decide which treatments and services will be covered and which will not, with no accountability whatsoever.

When proposed, supporters of the health care law told me: We are too close to our constituents. It is too difficult to make the hard decisions.

Then they said: Let's have somebody else do it.

That was during the debate with regard to IPAD.

I couldn't believe it. I believe we are elected to make the hard decisions and take care of the hard votes, and I believe that is the way Kansans want it, and I think that is the way virtually everybody in every other State wants it. This board diminishes our constitutional responsibility.

Even worse is the fine print of the Independent Payment Advisory Board, or IPAD. If Kansans or any Americans determine they do not like the direction the board is taking and they call my office and, down the road, any other office of any other distinguished Senator to ask me to do something about it—which is what you get when you go back home on any regulation today: what are you going to do about it?—it will take 60 votes in the Senate to overturn their decision—60.

On the surface this sounds OK until you realize that the President doubtless will never support Congress overturning the recommendation of this board made up of his bureaucrats. So he will veto it, and overriding a veto, obviously, takes a two-thirds vote. That is 66 votes to overturn a decision by the payment board.

My colleagues have been changing the rules around here because they think 60 votes is too high a threshold. What are the chances of reaching 66? But wait. There is even more. If the Secretary appoints a board unable to make recommendations for cuts to Medicare—tough decisions, albeit—then she gets the authority to make the decision of what to cut, one person.

This President has already cut $½ trillion from Medicare to pay for ObamaCare and gave himself the ability to go after even more Medicare dollars and have no accountability. This, my friends, is frightening; it is ridiculous; it is irresponsible; but it is not new.

I have been talking about the four rationers for a long time and what it means to patients, especially senior patients.

What upsets me, scares me, as I watch all the other warnings and broken promises come true, is what is going to happen to Kansans and all the folks back home when the warnings about the four rationers come true.

We need to protect the all-important doctor-patient relationship, which the four rationers put at risk. That is why today I come to the floor to introduce the Four Rationers Repeal Act of 2014.

For once, look beyond the current troubles we are experiencing. We have to get ahead of the curve. This legislation repeals the Independent Payment Advisory Board; it repeals the euphemistically but misleadingly named Innovation Center; it repeals the changes made to the Preventive Services Task Force; and it makes sure any—any—comparative effectiveness research, called CER, is used by the doctor and patient, not coverage providers or CMS, to determine the best care for patients.

This legislation is relatively simple. It should be supported by all of my colleagues to address some of the egregious changes from ObamaCare that are about to happen just around the bend. It is time to get ahead of the curve this time, prevent it.

I really believe that in order to protect this all-important doctor-patient relationship, we need to repeal and, most importantly, replace ObamaCare with the real reforms that work for Kansans and all Americans.

However, in the meantime we can also start taking it down, piece by piece, which is what my Four Rationers Repeal Act does. I urge my colleagues to support this proposal. For once, let's get ahead of the curve.

By Mr. INHOFE (for himself and Mr. LEVIN):

S. 2065. A bill to create incentives for the development of alternative fuel vehicles; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, today I join with Senator INHOFE to introduce a bill to incentivize the production and use of alternative fuel vehicles, including natural gas vehicles, NGVs, and plug-in-electric hybrids. Encouraging the production of alternative fuel vehicles will help to diversify our fuel mix, while reducing our reliance on imported oil and also reducing carbon emissions. In the U.S. alone, NGVs offset the use of nearly 360 million gallons of gasoline in 2011. We hope our bill will help increase that number.

The moment is right to capitalize on the abundance of domestically sourced natural gas. Already, American manufacturers have benefited from the availability of domestically produced natural gas, reducing the cost of US-based production and contributing to the return of manufacturing to the United States. If we can expand the use of natural gas to fuel our vehicles, then American consumers can also benefit from this cleaner and cheaper domestic fuel.

Michigan has become a leading innovator in advanced alternative fuel vehicles and is revolutionizing our transportation sector. As automakers in Michigan and elsewhere manufacture NGVs they face the dilemma often encountered when introducing an alternative fueled vehicle: what will come first, the NGV infrastructure or the vehicle itself? This is the classic chicken and egg question. Ethanol, Diesel and electric vehicles all faced this challenge when first introduced. Our bill will allow Michigan to continue to innovate and harness the power and benefits that domestically sourced alternative fuels have to offer this country.

The benefits of expanding the number of natural gas and alternative fuel vehicles on our roads are numerous. Up to 90 percent of the natural gas used in the United States comes from the United States. We need to tap into this domestic resource for our transportation needs and take an aggressive approach to reducing our dependence on foreign oil. Consumers should also have more choice and flexibility when it comes to fueling their vehicles. This bill allows for that. At the moment natural gas is about half the price of gasoline. Consumers should be able to benefit from these reduced prices. Furthermore, vehicles running on natural gas have 20–30 percent less CO_2 tailpipe emissions than gasoline fueled vehicles. Because natural gas burns cleaner, it increases the life of the car. It has no lead or benzene or other chemicals that break down auto parts or dilute lubricants.

These are all desirable reasons to encourage more NGV production. The use of natural gas vehicles is expanding among private fleets used by airports and transit agencies where refueling infrastructure is available. However, the chicken and egg dilemma is slowing the adoption of both dedicated and bi-fuel natural gas vehicles among light-duty passenger vehicles.

Our legislation would incentivize both production and consumer demand for alternative fuel vehicles such as natural gas vehicles and plug-in electric hybrids by expanding regulatory incentives. It would also provide consumers with an added incentive to drive natural gas vehicles by giving them access to high occupancy vehicle, HOV, lanes. Giving consumers an additional benefit such as HOV access could help increase demand for these vehicles and the fueling stations that are necessary to support them.

The President outlined in his State of the Union his goal to achieve energy independence through the use of alternative fuels. He specifically mentioned natural gas as the bridge fuel that can

grow our economy, create jobs for the middle class, and reduce carbon pollution. I am pleased to introduce legislation today that takes a step toward meeting that goal.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 364—EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR THE INTERNAL REBUILDING, RESETTLEMENT, AND RECONCILIATION WITHIN SRI LANKA THAT ARE NECESSARY TO ENSURE A LASTING PEACE

Mr. INHOFE (for himself, Mr. CORNYN, Mr. HATCH, Mr. BARRASSO, Mr. BLUNT, Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. SESSIONS, Mr. BOOZMAN, Mr. CRAPO, Ms. COLLINS, and Mr. ENZI) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations :

S. RES. 364

Whereas May 19, 2014, marks the five-year anniversary of the end of the 26 year civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka;

Whereas the people of Sri Lanka suffered greatly as a result of this conflict, the impact and aftermath of which has been felt by all, especially by women, children, and families;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka established a ''Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission'' (LLRC) to report whether any person, group, or institution directly or indirectly bears responsibility for incidents that occurred between February 2002 and May 2009 and to recommend measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents in the future and promote further national unity and reconciliation among all communities;

Whereas the LLRC report was presented to the Sri Lankan Parliament on December 16, 2011, and officially translated into Sinhala and Tamil on August 16, 2012;

Whereas the LLRC report acknowledges important events and grievances that have contributed to decades of political violence and war in Sri Lanka and makes constructive recommendations on a wide range of issues, including the need to credibly investigate widespread allegations of extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; intentional targeting of civilians and noncombatants; demilitarizing the north and the country as a whole; reaching a political settlement with minority communities on the meaningful decentralization of power; and promoting and protecting the right to freedom of expression for all through the enactment of a right to information law and additional rule of law reforms;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka developed the National Plan of Action to implement the recommendations of the LLRC and has made significant progress within limited time in the implementation of the National Plan of Action, notably in the areas of demining, rehabilitation of ex-combatants, resettlement of displaced persons, improvements of infrastructure and social services in the North and East, as well as investigations into complaints regarding persons who have disappeared during the war;

Whereas there have been reports of attacks on places of worship and restrictions on the media in several places in Sri Lanka;

Whereas the Government of Sri Lanka expressed its commitment to address the needs of all ethnic groups and has recognized the necessity of a political settlement and reconciliation for a peaceful and just society, which is a long-term process that will need to be driven by the people of Sri Lanka themselves;

Whereas the September 21, 2013, elections in Sri Lanka for the Northern, Central, and North Western Provincial Councils were an important step in fulfilling this commitment;

Whereas these elections were made possible through a sustained effort by the Government of Sri Lanka to restore infrastructure in the North and put in place a system for the conduct of the elections;

Whereas the elections allowed the people of the North of Sri Lanka to exercise their political rights that had been withheld from them for more than 20 years by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and resulted in a clear victory for the provincial wing of the Tamil National Alliance;

Whereas Sri Lanka is enjoying rapid economic growth as an important hub for shipping transport, technology, and tourism in the South Asia region;

Whereas Sri Lanka is of great strategic importance to the United States, due to its location, deep-water ports, and proximity to the world's busiest shipping lanes, an importance noticed and pursued by other significant powers; and

Whereas Sri Lanka seeks to be a key United States partner in the fight against terrorism and Indian Ocean piracy: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) calls upon the President to develop a comprehensive and well balanced policy towards Sri Lanka that reflects United States interests, including respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, as well as economic and security interests;

(2) calls on the United States Government and the international community to assist the Government of Sri Lanka, with due regard to its sovereignty, stability, and security, in establishing domestic mechanisms to deal with any grievances arising from actions committed by both sides during and after the civil war in Sri Lanka;

(3) encourages the Government of Sri Lanka to put in place a truth and reconciliation commission similar to the one adopted by South Africa to help heal the wounds of war, taking into account the unique characteristics of the conflict and its aftermath; and

(4) urges the Government of Sri Lanka to improve religious and media freedoms and to bring to justice those responsible for attacks on journalists and newspaper offices as well as places of worship, regardless of religion.

SENATE RESOLUTION 365—DEPLORING THE VIOLENT REPRESSION OF PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATORS IN VENEZUELA, CALLING FOR FULL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS TAKING PLACE IN VENEZUELA, AND SUPPORTING THE RIGHT OF THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE TO THE FREE AND PEACEFUL EXERCISE OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. CRUZ, and Mr. NELSON) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations.:

S. RES. 365

Whereas the Government of Venezuela's chronic mismanagement of its economy has produced inflation that exceeds 50 percent annually, currency shortages, economic distortions, and the routine absence of basic goods and foodstuffs;

Whereas the Government of Venezuela's failure to guarantee minimal standards of public security for its citizens has led the country to become one of the most violent in the world, with the per capita homicide rate in the city of Caracas exceeding 115 per 100,000 people;

Whereas the Government of Venezuela has taken continued steps to remove checks and balances on the executive, politicize the judiciary, undermine the independence of the legislature through use of executive decree powers, persecute and prosecute its political opponents, curtail freedom of the press, and limit the free expression of its citizens;

Whereas, on January 23, 2014, National Representative Maria Corina Machado and Mr. Leopoldo López, leader of the political party ''Popular Will'', among others, called on the Venezuelan people to gather in street assemblies and debate a popular, democratic and constitutional ''way out'' of Venezuela's crisis of governability;

Whereas, since February 4, 2014, the people of Venezuela—responding to ongoing economic hardship, high levels of crime and violence, and the lack of basic political rights and individual freedoms—have turned out in demonstrations in Caracas and throughout the country to protest the Government of Venezuela's inability to ensure the political and economic well-being of its citizens;

Whereas the government of Nicolas Maduro responded to the mass demonstrations by ordering the arrest without evidence of senior opposition leaders, including Mr. Leopoldo Lopez, Carlos Vecchio, and Antonio Rivero, and by violently repressing peaceful demonstrators with the help of the Venezuelan National Guard and groups of armed, government-affiliated civilians, known as ''collectives'';

Whereas, on February 18, 2014, opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez turned himself in to authorities in Venezuela, was arrested, and charged unjustly with criminal incitement, conspiracy, arson, and intent to damage property;

Whereas the Maduro government has sought to censor information about the demonstrations and the government's violent crackdown by blocking online images and threatening the few remaining uncensored domestic media outlets;

Whereas President Maduro threatened to expel the United States news network CNN from Venezuela and has taken off the air the Colombian news channel NTN 24, which transmits in Venezuela, after news outlets reported on the nation-wide protests;

Whereas the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights released a statement on February 14, 2014, which ''expresses its concern over the serious incidents of violence that have taken place in the context of protest demonstrations in Venezuela, as well as other complaints concerning acts of censorship against media outlets, attacks on organizations that defend human rights, and acts of alleged political persecution''; and

Whereas, as of February 27, 2014, there have been 13 people killed, over 100 injured, and dozens have been unjustly detained due to pro-democracy demonstrations throughout Venezuela: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) reaffirms United States support for the people of Venezuela in their pursuit of the free exercise of representative democracy as guaranteed by the Venezuelan constitution

and defined under the Inter-American Democratic Charter of the Organization of American States;

(2) deplores the use of excessive and unlawful force against peaceful demonstrators in Venezuela and the inexcusable use of violence and politically-motivated criminal charges to intimidate the country's political opposition;

(3) calls on the Government of Venezuela to disarm and dismantle the system of ''colectivos'' or ''collectives'' and any other government-affiliated or supported militias or vigilante groups;

(4) calls on the Government of Venezuela to allow an impartial, third-party investigation into the excessive and unlawful force against peaceful demonstrations on multiple occasions since February 4th, 2014;

(5) urges the President to immediately impose targeted sanctions, including visa bans and asset freezes, against individuals planning, facilitating, or perpetrating gross human rights violations against peaceful demonstrators, journalists, and other members of civil society in Venezuela; and

(6) calls for the United States Government to work with other countries in the hemisphere to actively encourage a process of dialogue between the Government of Venezuela and the political opposition through the good offices of the Organization of American States so that the voices of all Venezuelans can be taken into account through their country's constitutional institutions as well as free and fair elections.

SENATE RESOLUTION 366—EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR THE GOALS AND IDEALS OF MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. CASEY (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. JOHANNS, Mr. ISAKSON, and Mr. BROWN) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 366

Whereas multiple sclerosis (MS) can impact people of all ages, races, and ethnicities;

Whereas MS is 2 to 3 times more common in women than in men;

Whereas while MS is not directly inherited, studies show there are genetic and, probably, environmental, ethnic, and geographic factors that make certain individuals more susceptible to the disease;

Whereas worldwide, there are approximately 2,300,000 people who have been diagnosed with MS;

Whereas MS is typically diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50, however, it is estimated that between 8,000 and 10,000 children and adolescents in the United States are living with MS;

Whereas MS is an unpredictable neurological disease that interrupts the flow of information within the brain and between the brain and the rest of the body;

Whereas symptoms of MS range from numbness and tingling in the extremities to blindness and paralysis, and the progress, severity, and specific symptoms of MS in any affected individual cannot yet be predicted;

Whereas there is no single laboratory test available that provides a definitive diagnosis for MS;

Whereas the exact cause of MS is still unknown, and there is no cure;

Whereas the Multiple Sclerosis Coalition, a national network of independent organizations dedicated to enhancing quality of life for all those affected by MS, recognizes and supports Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week during March of every year;

Whereas the mission of the Multiple Sclerosis Coalition is to enhance cooperation among organizations to provide greater benefits to individuals and families affected by MS;

Whereas the goals of Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week are to invite people to join the movement to end MS, encourage people to demonstrate their commitment to moving toward a world free from MS, and acknowledge those who have dedicated their time and talent to advancing MS research and programs; and

Whereas this year Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week is being recognized during the week of March 3, 2014, through March 9, 2014: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) supports the goals and ideals of Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week;

(2) supports promoting awareness of individuals who are affected by multiple sclerosis;

(3) encourages States, localities, and the territories and possessions of the United States to support the goals and ideals of Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week by issuing proclamations designating March 3, 2014, through March 9, 2014, as Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week;

(4) commends the efforts of States, localities, and the territories and possessions of the United States to support the goals and ideals of Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week;

(5) encourages media organizations to participate in Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week by educating the public about multiple sclerosis;

(6) recognizes and reaffirms the commitment of the United States to ending multiple sclerosis by supporting multiple sclerosis research and education programs;

(7) supports all individuals in the United States living with multiple sclerosis;

(8) expresses gratitude to the family and friends of individuals living with multiple sclerosis, who are a source of love and encouragement to those individuals; and

(9) salutes the health care professionals and medical researchers who—

(A) provide assistance to individuals affected by multiple sclerosis; and

(B) continue to work towards finding new ways to stop the progression of the disease, treat its symptoms, and end multiple sclerosis forever.

SENATE RESOLUTION 367—DESIGNATING MARCH 3, 2014, AS ''READ ACROSS AMERICA DAY''

Mr. REED (for himself and Ms. COLLINS) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 367

Whereas reading is a basic requirement for quality education and professional success, and is a source of pleasure throughout life;

Whereas the people of the United States must be able to read if the United States is to remain competitive in the global economy;

Whereas Congress has placed great emphasis on reading intervention and providing additional resources for reading assistance, including through the programs authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.) and through annual appropriations for library and literacy programs; and

Whereas more than 50 national organizations concerned about reading and education have joined with the National Education Association to designate March 3, the day after the anniversary of the birth of Theodor Geisel (also known as ''Dr. Seuss''), as a day to celebrate reading: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates March 3, 2014, as ''Read Across America Day'';

(2) honors Theodor Geisel (also known as ''Dr. Seuss'') for his success in encouraging children to discover the joy of reading;

(3) honors the 17th anniversary of Read Across America Day;

(4) encourages parents to read with their children for at least 30 minutes on Read Across America Day in honor of the commitment of the Senate to building a country of readers; and

(5) encourages the people of the United States to observe Read Across America Day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

SENATE RESOLUTION 368—DESIGNATING FEBRUARY 28, 2014, AS ''RARE DISEASE DAY''

Mr. BROWN (for himself, Mr. BARRASSO, Mr. WICKER, Mr. COONS, Mr. BENNET, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. PRYOR, and Ms. WARREN) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 368

Whereas a rare disease or disorder is one that affects a small number of patients – in the United States, typically less than 200,000 individuals annually;

Whereas as of the date of approval of this resolution, nearly 7,000 rare diseases affect approximately 30,000,000 people in the United States and their families;

Whereas children with rare genetic diseases account for more than half of the population affected by rare diseases in the United States;

Whereas many rare diseases are serious, life-threatening, and lack an effective treatment;

Whereas great strides have been made in research and treatment for rare diseases as a result of the Orphan Drug Act (Public Law 97-414);

Whereas the Food and Drug Administration has made great strides in involving the patient in the drug review process as part of its Patient-Focused Drug Development program, an initiative that originated in the Food and Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act (Public Law 112-144);

Whereas a third of all treatments approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2013 were orphan products intended to treat rare diseases;

Whereas lack of access to effective treatments and difficulty in obtaining reimbursement for life-altering, and even life-saving, treatments still exist and remain significant challenges for the rare disease community and their families;

Whereas rare diseases and conditions include epidermolysis bullosa, progeria, sickle cell anemia, spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD), Tay-Sachs, cystic fibrosis, pulmonary fibrosis, many childhood cancers, and fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva;

Whereas people with rare diseases experience challenges that include difficulty in obtaining accurate diagnoses, limited treatment options, and difficulty finding physicians or treatment centers with expertise in their diseases;

Whereas the rare disease community made great strides in 2013, including the passage of the National Pediatric Research Network Act (Public Law 113-55), which calls special

attention to rare diseases and directs the National Institutes of Health to facilitate greater collaboration among researchers;

Whereas both the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health have established special offices to advocate for rare disease research and treatments;

Whereas the National Organization for Rare Disorders, an organization established in 1983 to provide services to and advocate on behalf of patients with rare diseases, remains a critical public voice for people with rare diseases;

Whereas 2013 marked the 30th anniversary of the Orphan Drug Act and the National Organization for Rare Disorders;

Whereas the National Organization for Rare Disorders sponsors Rare Disease Day in the United States to increase public awareness of rare diseases;

Whereas Rare Disease Day is observed each year on the last day of February;

Whereas Rare Disease Day is a global event, first observed in the United States on February 28, 2009, and observed in 60 countries in 2013; and

Whereas Rare Disease Day is expected to be observed globally for years to come, providing hope and information for rare disease patients around the world: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates February 28, 2014, as ''Rare Disease Day'';

(2) recognizes the importance of improving awareness and encouraging accurate and early diagnosis of rare diseases and disorders; and

(3) supports a national and global commitment to improving access to, and developing new treatments, diagnostics, and cures for rare diseases and disorders.

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 33—CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENACTMENT OF THE SMITH-LEVER ACT, WHICH ESTABLISHED THE NATIONWIDE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM

Ms. STABENOW (for herself and Mr. COCHRAN) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry:

S. CON. RES. 33

Whereas May 8, 2014, marks the centennial of the enactment of the Smith-Lever Act (7 U.S.C. 341 et seq.), which established the Cooperative Extension System, the nationwide transformative education system operating through land-grant colleges and universities (as defined in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3103)) in partnership with Federal, State, and local governments;

Whereas Senator Michael Hoke Smith of Georgia and Representative Asbury Francis Lever of South Carolina authored the Smith-Lever Act (7 U.S.C. 341 et seq.) to bring the research-based knowledge of land-grant colleges and universities to individuals where the individuals live and work;

Whereas the first section of the Smith-Lever Act (7 U.S.C. 341) states that the purpose of the Act is ''to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture, uses of solar energy with respect to agriculture, home economics, and rural energy, and to encourage the application of the same'' through extension work carried out by the land-grant colleges and universities;

Whereas cooperative extension work is a critical component of the three-part mission of the land-grant colleges and universities to work collaboratively with research institutions, in particular the State agriculture experiment stations and 106 colleges and universities, in each State of the United States, the District of Columbia, and each territory or possession of the United States, including—

(1) part B institutions (as defined in section 322 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1061));

(2) 1994 Institutions (as defined in section 532 of the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 301 note; Public Law 103-382)); and

(3) Hispanic-serving institutions (as defined in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3103));

Whereas research-based education provided through the Cooperative Extension System to farmers and ranchers helped establish the United States as a leading agricultural-producing nation in the world;

Whereas, in 1924, the clover emblem was adopted by the Department of Agriculture to represent the 4–H Clubs through which the nationwide youth development program of the Cooperative Extension System is carried out;

Whereas, since 1924, 4–H Clubs have prepared millions of youth for responsible adulthood;

Whereas cooperative extension activities—

(1) prepare individuals for healthy, productive lives via sustained education, such as the nutrition education program established under section 1425 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3175);

(2) help to break the cycle of poverty; and

(3) reduce the expenditures of Federal and State assistance programs;

Whereas educational activities carried out under the Smith-Lever Act (7 U.S.C. 341 et seq.) provide rapid response to disasters and emergencies, such as through the Extension Disaster Education Network and other similar efforts, by providing real-time alerts and resources so that educators can respond to urgent needs resulting from hurricanes, floods, oil spills, fire, drought, pest outbreaks, and infectious diseases affecting humans, livestock, and crops;

Whereas cooperative extension activities translate science-based research for practical application through local and online learning networks in which educators are uniquely available to identify emerging research questions, connect with land-grant college or university faculty to find answers, and encourage the application of the findings of that research to improve economic and social conditions;

Whereas cooperative extension activities engage with rural and urban learners through practical, community-based, and online approaches resulting in the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and motivation necessary to strengthen the profitability of animal and plant production systems, protect natural resources, help individuals make healthy lifestyle choices, ensure a safe and abundant food supply, encourage community vitality, and grow the next generation of leaders; and

Whereas many States are celebrating the centennial of the enactment of the Smith-Lever Act (7 U.S.C. 341 et seq.) with resolutions and proclamations, and many land-grant colleges and universities are also commemorating the enactment of that historic Act: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), That Congress—

(1) recognizes the significance of the Smith-Lever Act (7 U.S.C. 341 et seq.) to the establishment of the Cooperative Extension System;

(2) encourages the people of the United States to observe and celebrate the centennial with a focus on launching an innovative and sustainable future for the Cooperative Extension System;

(3) honors the university faculty and local educators who dedicate careers to providing trusted educational programs to help people, families, youth, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future;

(4) thanks the volunteers who provide thousands of hours to promote excellence for 4–H Clubs, the Master Gardeners program, the Family and Consumer Sciences program, and other programs of the Cooperative Extension System in their communities;

(5) encourages continued collaboration and cooperation among Federal, State, and local governments to ensure the sustainability of the Cooperative Extension System as the premiere nonformal educational network in the United States; and

(6) celebrates millions of youth, adults, families, farmers, ranchers, community leaders, and others who engage in cooperative extension learning opportunities designed to extend knowledge and change lives.

AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 2780. Mr. CARDIN 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 2781. Mr. CARDIN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2782. Mr. CARDIN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2783. Mrs. MCCASKILL submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2784. Mrs. FEINSTEIN (for herself and Mrs. BOXER) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2785. Mr. REED (for himself and Mr. JOHANNS) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2786. Mr. WHITEHOUSE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2787. Mr. THUNE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2788. Mr. THUNE submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2789. Ms. KLOBUCHAR submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2790. Ms. KLOBUCHAR submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2791. Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Ms. AYOTTE) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2792. Mrs. SHAHEEN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her

to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2793. Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Ms. AYOTTE) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2794. Mrs. SHAHEEN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2795. Mrs. SHAHEEN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2796. Mr. BENNET (for himself and Mr. JOHANNS) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2797. Mr. BLUMENTHAL submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2798. Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself and Mr. MURPHY) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2799. Mr. BLUMENTHAL submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2800. Mr. BLUMENTHAL submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2801. Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself, Mr. UDALL of New Mexico, and Mrs. GILLIBRAND) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2802. Mr. BOOZMAN submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2803. Ms. WARREN (for herself, Mr. RUBIO, and Mr. MARKEY) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill S. 1982, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2804. Ms. LANDRIEU 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 2780. Mr. CARDIN 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 207, between lines 8 and 9, insert the following:

SEC. 446. PILOT PROGRAM ON TRAINING SMALL BUSINESS CONCERNS OWNED AND CONTROLLED BY VETERANS ON FEDERAL CONTRACTING.

(a) PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—Not later than 120 days 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 training to eligible small businesses on contracting with the Federal Government for the procurement of property or services.

(b) ELIGIBLE SMALL BUSINESS.—For purposes of this section, an eligible small business is a small business concern owned and controlled by veterans that—

(1) has operated for not fewer than two years;

(2) has not fewer than three full-time equivalent employees; and

(3) has experience providing a property or service to the Federal Government as a contractor or subcontractor.

(c) DURATION.—The pilot program required by subsection (a) shall be carried out during the five-year period beginning on the date of the commencement of the pilot program.

(d) GRANTS REQUIRED.—The Secretary shall carry out the pilot program required by subsection (a) through the award of one or more grants to one or more nonprofit organizations for the provision of instruction by professional service experts, government officials, and representatives of government agencies to eligible small businesses on contracting described in such subsection.

(e) MATCHING REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary may not make a grant to a nonprofit organization under this section unless the nonprofit organization agrees that, with respect to the costs to be incurred by the nonprofit organization in carrying out training for which the grant was awarded, the nonprofit organization will make available (directly or through donations from public or private entities) non-Federal contributions in an amount that is equal to or great than the amount of the grant awarded.

(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section $5,000,000 for fiscal year 2014 and each fiscal year thereafter through fiscal year 2018.

(g) SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN OWNED AND CONTROLLED BY VETERANS DEFINED.—In this section, the term ''small business concern owned and controlled by veterans'' has the meaning given such term in section 8127 of title 38, United States Code.

SA 2781. Mr. CARDIN 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—Disability Compensation Generally

SEC. 641. MAKING PERMANENT SPECIAL EFFECTIVE DATE FOR AWARDS OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION FOR VETERANS WHO SUBMIT APPLICATIONS FOR ORIGINAL CLAIMS THAT ARE FULLY-DEVELOPED.

Section 5110(b)(2)(C) is amended by striking ''and shall not apply with respect to claims filed after the date that is three years after the date of the enactment of such Act''.

SEC. 642. PROVISIONAL BENEFITS AWARDED FOR FULLY DEVELOPED CLAIMS PENDING FOR MORE THAN 180 DAYS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 53 is amended by adding at the end the following:

''§ 5319A. Provisional benefits awarded for fully developed claims pending for extended period

''(a) PROVISIONAL AWARDS REQUIRED.—For each application for disability compensation that is filed for an individual with the Secretary, that sets forth an original claim that is fully-developed (as determined by the Secretary) as of the date of submittal, and for which the Secretary has not made a decision, beginning on the date that is 180 days after the date on which such application is filed with the Secretary, the Secretary shall award the individual a provisional benefit under this section.

''(b) PROVISIONAL AWARDS ESTABLISHED.—A provisional benefit awarded pursuant to subsection (a) for a claim for disability compensation shall be for such monthly amount as the Secretary shall establish for each classification of disability claimed as the Secretary shall establish.

''(c) RECOVERY.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary may recover a payment of a provisional benefit awarded under this section for an application for disability compensation only—

''(1) in a case in which the Secretary awards the disability compensation for which the individual filed the application and the Secretary may only recover such provisional benefit by subtracting it from payments made for the disability compensation awarded; or

''(2) in a case in which the Secretary determines not to award the disability compensation for which the individual filed the application and the Secretary determines that the application was the subject of intentional fraud, misrepresentation, or bad faith on behalf of the individual.''.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 53 is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 5319 the following new item:

''5319A. Provisional benefits awarded for fully developed claims pending for extended period.''.

SA 2782. Mr. CARDIN 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. ONE-YEAR EXTENSION OF VETERANS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION.

Section 3692 is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) by inserting ''31,'' after ''30,''; and

(B) by striking ''and the Persian Gulf War'' and inserting ''the Persian Gulf War, and the post-9/11 operations in Iraq and Afghanistan'';

(2) in subsection (b), by inserting ''31,'' after ''30,''; and

(3) in subsection (c), by striking ''December 31, 2014'' and inserting ''December 31, 2015''.

SA 2783. Mrs. MCCASKILL 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 367, after line 14, add the following:

SEC. 918. TRAUMATIC SERVICEMEMBERS' GROUP LIFE INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR ADVERSE REACTIONS TO VACCINATIONS ADMINISTERED BY DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1980A(b)(3) is amended—

(1) by striking ''The Secretary'' and inserting ''(A) Except as provided in subparagraph (B), the Secretary''; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

''(B) The Secretary shall not exclude under subparagraph (A) a qualifying loss experienced by a member as a result of an adverse reaction to a vaccination administered by the Department of Defense, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, for the purposes of military accession, training, or deployment.''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall take effect as if included in the provisions of and amendments made by section 1032 of the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief, 2005 (Public Law 109–13; 119 Stat. 257).

SA 2784. Mrs. FEINSTEIN (for herself and Mrs. BOXER) 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 367, after line 14, add the following:

SEC. 918. AUTHORITY TO ENTER INTO ENHANCED-USE LEASES FOR CERTAIN BUILDINGS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AT THE WEST LOS ANGELES MEDICAL CENTER, CALIFORNIA.

(a) AUTHORITY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided by subsection (b), in accordance with subchapter V of chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may enter into an enhanced-use lease for a covered building for the provision of long-term therapeutic housing for covered veterans.

(2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—The authority provided by paragraph (1) is a specific authorization for purposes of section 8162(c) of such title.

(b) PROHIBITION ON DISPOSITION OF LEASED PROPERTY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In accordance with section 224(a) of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2008 (division I of Public Law 110–161; 121 Stat. 2272), section 8164 of title 38, United States Code, shall not apply to a covered building.

(2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this section shall be construed to affect the prohibition under such section 224(a) on the disposal of a covered building.

(c) QUINQUENNIAL REVIEW AND REPORT.—

(1) REVIEW REQUIRED.—Not less than once during each five-year period in which an enhanced-use lease is in effect under subsection (a), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a review of such lease, including by assessing each party that is entered into such lease and determining whether the terms of the lease are being upheld.

(2) REPORT REQUIRED.—During each five-year period in which an enhanced-use lease is in effect under subsection (a), the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the review conducted under paragraph (1) with respect to such lease.

(d) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) COVERED BUILDING.—The term ''covered building'' means any of the following buildings located at the West Los Angeles Medical Center, California:

(A) Building 205.

(B) Building 208.

(2) COVERED VETERAN.—The term ''covered veteran'' means a veteran who is—

(A) homeless; and

(B) with respect to housing, requires assisted living or other similar form of care.

(3) ENHANCED-USE LEASE.—The term ''enhanced-use lease'' has the meaning given that term in section 8161 of title 38, United States Code.

(4) LONG-TERM THERAPEUTIC HOUSING.—The term ''long-term therapeutic housing'' means supportive housing consisting of clinically supportive living facilities that provide housing to a homeless veteran for a period that is sufficient for the veteran to achieve stability and require a lower level of care than is provided at such facilities.

SA 2785. Mr. REED (for himself and Mr. JOHANNS) 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. PILOT PROGRAM TO REHABILITATE AND MODIFY HOMES OF DISABLED AND LOW-INCOME VETERANS.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) DISABLED.—The term ''disabled'' means an individual with a disability, as defined by section 12102 of title 42, United States Code.

(2) ELIGIBLE VETERAN.—The term ''eligible veteran'' means a disabled or low-income veteran.

(3) ENERGY EFFICIENT FEATURES OR EQUIPMENT.—The term ''energy efficient features or equipment'' means features of, or equipment in, a primary residence that help reduce the amount of electricity used to heat, cool, or ventilate such residence, including insulation, weatherstripping, air sealing, heating system repairs, duct sealing, or other measures.

(4) LOW-INCOME VETERAN.—The term ''low-income veteran'' means a veteran whose income does not exceed 80 percent of the median income for an area, as determined by the Secretary.

(5) NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION.—The term ''nonprofit organization'' means an organization that is—

(A) described in section 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986; and

(B) exempt from tax under section 501(a) of such Code.

(6) PRIMARY RESIDENCE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The term ''primary residence'' means a single family house, a duplex, or a unit within a multiple-dwelling structure that is the principal dwelling of an eligible veteran and is owned by such veteran or a family member of such veteran.

(B) FAMILY MEMBER DEFINED.—For purposes of this paragraph, the term ''family member'' includes—

(i) a spouse, child, grandchild, parent, or sibling;

(ii) a spouse of such a child, grandchild, parent, or sibling; or

(iii) any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with a veteran is the equivalent of a family relationship.

(7) QUALIFIED ORGANIZATION.—The term ''qualified organization'' means a nonprofit organization that provides nationwide or statewide programs that primarily serve veterans or low-income individuals.

(8) SECRETARY.—The term ''Secretary'' means the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

(9) VETERAN.—The term ''veteran'' has the meaning given the term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

(10) VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION.—The term ''veterans service organization'' means any organization recognized by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the representation of veterans under section 5902 of title 38, United States Code.

(b) ESTABLISHMENT OF A PILOT PROGRAM.—

(1) GRANT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish a pilot program to award grants to qualified organizations to rehabilitate and modify the primary residence of eligible veterans.

(B) COORDINATION.—The Secretary shall work in conjunction with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish and oversee the pilot program and to ensure that such program meets the needs of eligible veterans.

(C) MAXIMUM GRANT.—A grant award under the pilot program to any one qualified organization shall not exceed $1,000,000 in any one fiscal year, and such an award shall remain available until expended by such organization.

(2) APPLICATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Each qualified organization that desires a grant under the pilot program shall submit an application to the Secretary at such time, in such manner, and, in addition to the information required under subparagraph (B), accompanied by such information as the Secretary may reasonably require.

(B) CONTENTS.—Each application submitted under subparagraph (A) shall include—

(i) a plan of action detailing outreach initiatives;

(ii) the approximate number of veterans the qualified organization intends to serve using grant funds;

(iii) a description of the type of work that will be conducted, such as interior home modifications, energy efficiency improvements, and other similar categories of work; and

(iv) a plan for working with the Department of Veterans Affairs and veterans service organizations to identify veterans who are not eligible for programs under chapter 21 of title 38, United States Code, and meet their needs.

(C) PREFERENCES.—In awarding grants under the pilot program, the Secretary shall give preference to a qualified organization—

(i) with experience in providing housing rehabilitation and modification services for disabled veterans; or

(ii) that proposes to provide housing rehabilitation and modification services for eligible veterans who live in rural, including tribal, areas (the Secretary, through regulations, shall define the term ''rural areas'').

(3) CRITERIA.—In order to receive a grant award under the pilot program, a qualified organization shall meet the following criteria:

(A) Demonstrate expertise in providing housing rehabilitation and modification services for disabled or low-income individuals for the purpose of making the homes of such individuals accessible, functional, and safe for such individuals.

(B) Have established outreach initiatives that—

(i) would engage eligible veterans and veterans service organizations in projects utilizing grant funds under the pilot program;

(ii) ensure veterans who are disabled receive preference in selection for assistance under this program; and

(iii) identify eligible veterans and their families and enlist veterans involved in skilled trades, such as carpentry, roofing, plumbing, or HVAC work.

(C) Have an established nationwide or statewide network of affiliates that are—

(i) nonprofit organizations; and

(ii) able to provide housing rehabilitation and modification services for eligible veterans.

(D) Have experience in successfully carrying out the accountability and reporting requirements involved in the proper administration of grant funds, including funds provided by private entities or Federal, State, or local government entities.

(4) USE OF FUNDS.—A grant award under the pilot program shall be used—

(A) to modify and rehabilitate the primary residence of an eligible veteran, and may include—

(i) installing wheelchair ramps, widening exterior and interior doors, reconfigurating and re-equipping bathrooms (which includes installing new fixtures and grab bars), removing doorway thresholds, installing special lighting, adding additional electrical outlets and electrical service, and installing appropriate floor coverings to—

(I) accommodate the functional limitations that result from having a disability; or

(II) if such residence does not have modifications necessary to reduce the chances that an elderly, but not disabled person, will fall in their home, reduce the risks of such an elderly person from falling;

(ii) rehabilitating such residence that is in a state of interior or exterior disrepair; and

(iii) installing energy efficient features or equipment if—

(I) an eligible veteran's monthly utility costs for such residence is more than 5 percent of such veteran's monthly income; and

(II) an energy audit of such residence indicates that the installation of energy efficient features or equipment will reduce such costs by 10 percent or more; and

(B) in connection with modification and rehabilitation services provided under the pilot program, to provide technical, administrative, and training support to an affiliate of a qualified organization receiving a grant under such pilot program.

(5) OVERSIGHT.—The Secretary shall direct the oversight of the grant funds for the pilot program so that such funds are used efficiently until expended to fulfill the purpose of addressing the adaptive housing needs of eligible veterans.

(6) MATCHING FUNDS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A qualified organization receiving a grant under the pilot program shall contribute towards the housing modification and rehabilitation services provided to eligible veterans an amount equal to not less than 50 percent of the grant award received by such organization.

(B) IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS.—In order to meet the requirement under subparagraph (A), such organization may arrange for in-kind contributions.

(7) LIMITATION COST TO THE VETERANS.—A qualified organization receiving a grant under the pilot program shall modify or rehabilitate the primary residence of an eligible veteran at no cost to such veteran (including application fees) or at a cost such that such veteran pays no more than 30 percent of his or her income in housing costs during any month.

(8) REPORTS.—

(A) ANNUAL REPORT.—The Secretary shall submit to Congress, on an annual basis, a report that provides, with respect to the year for which such report is written—

(i) the number of eligible veterans provided assistance under the pilot program;

(ii) the socioeconomic characteristics of such veterans, including their gender, age, race, and ethnicity;

(iii) the total number, types, and locations of entities contracted under such program to administer the grant funding;

(iv) the amount of matching funds and in-kind contributions raised with each grant;

(v) a description of the housing rehabilitation and modification services provided, costs saved, and actions taken under such program;

(vi) a description of the outreach initiatives implemented by the Secretary to educate the general public and eligible entities about such program;

(vii) a description of the outreach initiatives instituted by grant recipients to engage eligible veterans and veteran service organizations in projects utilizing grant funds under such program;

(viii) a description of the outreach initiatives instituted by grant recipients to identify eligible veterans and their families; and

(ix) any other information that the Secretary considers relevant in assessing such program.

(B) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 6 months after the completion of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report that provides such information that the Secretary considers relevant in assessing the pilot program.

(C) INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT.—Not later than March 31, 2019, the Inspector General of the Department of Housing and Urban Development shall submit to the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Financial Services of the House of Representatives a report containing a review of—

(i) the use of appropriated funds by the Secretary and by grantees under the pilot program; and

(ii) oversight and accountability of grantees under the pilot program.

(9) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated for carrying out this section $4,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2015 through 2019.

SA 2786. Mr. WHITEHOUSE 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 310, strike line 21 and all that follows through page 311, line 13, and insert the following:

(b) MAKING PERMANENT EXTENDED PERIOD OF PROTECTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF UNIFORMED SERVICES RELATING TO MORTGAGES, MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE, AND EVICTION.—Section 710(d) of the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012 (Public Law 112–154; 126 Stat. 1208) is amended by striking paragraphs (1) and (3).

SA 2787. Mr. THUNE 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. COMPTROLLER GENERAL CERTIFICATION REQUIRED BEFORE CLOSURE OF MEDICAL CENTERS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may not close any medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs unless and until the Comptroller General of the United States makes the certification described in subsection (b) with respect to such medical center and submits such certification to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives.

(b) CERTIFICATION.—The certification described in this subsection is a certification that the Comptroller General has determined, pursuant to subsection (c), that the effect of the closure of the medical center described in subsection (a) on the provision of care to veterans in the catchment area of such medical center does not outweigh the budget savings to the Department resulting from such closure.

(c) DETERMINATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—With respect to a proposed closure of a medical center of the Department, the Comptroller General shall determine whether the effect of such closure on the provision of care to veterans in the catchment area of such medical center outweighs the budget savings to the Department resulting from such closure.

(2) CONSIDERATIONS.—In making the determination described in paragraph (1), the Comptroller General shall consider the potential effect of such closure on the following:

(A) The quality of care provided to veterans in the catchment area of such medical center.

(B) The access of such veterans to specialized health care services.

(C) The access of such veterans to residential rehabilitation treatment programs of the Department and other inpatient care.

(D) Distances required to be traveled by such veterans to receive inpatient and outpatient care.

(E) The access of such veterans that are members of Indian tribes (as that term is defined in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b)) to medical care.

SA 2788. Mr. THUNE 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 38, after line 22, add the following:

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—This section and the amendments made by this section shall take effect on the date that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs submits to Congress a certification that—

(1) during the 180-day period ending on the date on which the Secretary submits such certification to Congress, no individual who has filed a claim with the Secretary for compensation under chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code—

(A) is currently waiting for an adjudication of such claim; and

(B) has been waiting for an adjudication of such claim for a period of 125 days or more; and

(2) the Secretary has carried out the major medical facility leases described in section 381.

SA 2789. Ms. KLOBUCHAR 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 161, after line 25, insert the following:

SEC. 407. GRANTS FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES PERSONNEL TRAINING FOR VETERANS.

Section 330J(c) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 254c–15(c)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (7), by striking ''and'' at the end;

(2) in paragraph (8), by striking the period and inserting ''; or''; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

''(9) furnish coursework and training to veterans to enable such veterans to satisfy emergency medical services personnel certification requirements, as determined by the appropriate State regulatory entity, except that in providing such coursework and training, such entity shall take into account previous medical coursework and training received when such veterans were members of the Armed Forces on active duty.''.

SA 2790. Ms. KLOBUCHAR 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 76, between lines 8 and 9, insert the following:

SEC. 330. DESIGNATION OF MEDICAL FACILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AS HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE AREAS.

(a) DESIGNATION AS HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE AREA.—Section 332(a)(1) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 254e(a)(1)) is amended in the second sentence by inserting ''and medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs (including State homes, as defined in section 101(19) of title 38, United States Code)'' after ''(42 U.S.C. 1395x(aa)),''.

(b) CONCURRENT BENEFIT.—

(1) SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.—Section 338A(b) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 2541(b)) is amended—

(A) in paragraph (3), by striking ''and'';

(B) in paragraph (4), by striking the period and inserting ''; and''; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(5) not be participating in the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Professionals Educational Assistance Program under chapter 76 of title 38, United States Code.''.

(2) DEBT REDUCTION PROGRAM.—Section 338B(b) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 2541–1(b)) is amended—

(A) in paragraph (2), by striking ''and'';

(B) in paragraph (3), by striking the period and inserting ''; and''; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(4) not be participating in the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Professionals Educational Assistance Program under chapter 76 of title 38, United States Code.''.

(c) CONSULTATION.—In carrying out the National Health Service Corps Program under subpart II of part D of title III of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 254d et seq.), the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall consult with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs with respect to health professional shortage areas that are medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs (including State homes, as defined in section 101(19) of title 38, United States Code).

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on the date that is 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SA 2791. Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Ms. AYOTTE) 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 76, between lines 8 and 9, insert the following:

SEC. 329A. REPORT ON ABILITY OF VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION TO MEET PATIENT ACCESS STANDARDS FOR NORTHERN MARKET OF NEW ENGLAND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM.

Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans affairs shall submit to Congress a report on the findings of the Secretary with respect to the Secretary's review of the ability of the Veterans Health Administration to meet patient access standards for the northern market of the Department of Veterans Affairs New England Health Care System, particularly with respect to Coos County, New Hampshire.

SA 2792. Mrs. SHAHEEN 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:

SEC. 633. MINIMUM NUMBER OF DECISION REVIEW OFFICERS STATIONED AT REGIONAL OFFICES.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that at least two decision review officers of the Department of Veterans Affairs are stationed at each regional office of the Veterans Benefits Administration.

SEC. 634. EXPANSION OF PROGRAM OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR SUPPORT OF PROGRAMS THAT FURNISH LEGAL ASSISTANCE.

The Dire Emergency Supplemental Appropriations and Transfers for Relief From the Effects of Natural Disasters, for Other Urgent Needs, and for Incremental Cost of ''Operation Desert Shield/Dessert Storm'' Act of 1992 (Public Law 102–229) is amended under the heading ''SALARIES AND EXPENSES'' under the heading ''COURT OF VETERANS APPEALS'' under the heading ''INDEPENDENT AGENCIES'' by inserting ''or in connection with decisions to which section 7104 of such title may apply, or with other proceedings of the Board of Veterans' Appeals,'' after ''proceedings in the Court,''.

SEC. 635. REPORT ON INCREASING NUMBER OF DECISION REVIEW OFFICERS.

Not later than 90 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 increasing the number of decision review officers employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs to a number that is equal to or greater than the number that is 25 percent bigger than the number of decision review officers that were employed by the Department on the day before the date of the enactment of this Act. Such report shall include an assessment of the expected cost and effect of such increase on the processing of appeals of decisions of the Secretary with respect to claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary.

SEC. 636. REPORT ON INCREASING NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS.

Not later than 90 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 increasing the number of members of the Board of Veterans' Appeals to 75. Such report shall include an assessment of the expected cost and effect of such expansion on the processing of appeals of decisions of the Secretary with respect to claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary.

SA 2793. Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Ms. AYOTTE) 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 76, between lines 8 and 9, insert the following:

SEC. 330. AVAILABILITY OF FULL-SERVICE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTERS IN CERTAIN STATES OR PROVISION OF COMPARABLE SERVICES THROUGH CONTRACT WITH OTHER HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS IN THE STATE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 17 is amended by inserting after section 1706 the following new section:

''§ 1706A. Management of health care: access to full-service Department medical centers in certain States or comparable services through contract

''(a) REQUIREMENT.—With respect to each of the 48 contiguous States, the Secretary shall ensure that veterans in a State who are eligible for hospital care and medical services under section 1710 of this title have access—

''(1) to at least one full-service Department medical center in such State; or

''(2) to hospital care and medical services comparable to the services typically provided by full-service Department medical centers through contract with other health care providers in such State.

''(b) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in subsection (a) shall be construed to limit the ability of the Secretary to provide enhanced care to an eligible veteran who resides in one State in a Department medical center in another State.

''(c) LIMITATION ON REQUIREMENT.—Subsection (a) shall be effective in any fiscal year only to the extent and in the amount provided in advance in appropriations Acts.

''(d) FULL-SERVICE DEPARTMENT MEDICAL CENTER DEFINED.—In this section, the term 'full-service Department medical center' means a facility of the Department that provides medical services, including hospital care, emergency medical services, and surgical care rated by the Secretary as having a surgical complexity level of standard.''.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 1706 the following new item:

''1706A. Management of health care: access to full-service Department medical centers in certain States or comparable services through contract.''.

(c) REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION.—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 describing the extent to which the Secretary has complied with the requirement imposed by section 1706A of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), including the effect of compliance with such requirement on improving the quality and standards of care provided to veterans.

SA 2794. Mrs. SHAHEEN 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 of subtitle B of title IV, add the following:

SEC. 416. EMPLOYEE PAYROLL TAX HOLIDAY FOR NEWLY HIRED VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subsection (d) of section 3111 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended to read as follows:

''(d) SPECIAL EXEMPTION FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS HIRED DURING CERTAIN CALENDAR QUARTERS.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—Subsection (a) shall not apply to 50 percent of the wages paid by the employer with respect to employment during the holiday period of any eligible veteran for services performed—

''(A) in a trade or business of the employer, or

''(B) in the case of an employer exempt from tax under section 501(a), in furtherance of the activities related to the purpose or function constituting the basis of the employer's exemption under such section.

''(2) HOLIDAY PERIOD.—For purposes of this subsection, the term 'holiday period' means

the period of 4 consecutive calendar quarters beginning with the first day of the first calendar quarter beginning after the date of the enactment of the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 .

''(3) ELIGIBLE VETERAN.—For purposes of this subsection—

''(A) IN GENERAL.—The term 'eligible veteran' means a veteran who—

''(i) begins work for the employer during the holiday period,

''(ii) was discharged or released from the Armed Forces of the United States under conditions other than dishonorable, and

''(iii) is not an individual described in section 51(i)(1) (applied by substituting 'employer' for 'taxpayer' each place it appears).

''(B) VETERAN.—The term 'veteran' means any individual who—

''(i) has served on active duty (other than active duty for training) in the Armed Forces of the United States for a period of more than 180 days, or has been discharged or released from active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States for a service-connected disability (within the meaning of section 101 of title 38, United States Code),

''(ii) has not served on extended active duty (as such term is used in section 51(d)(3)(B)) in the Armed Forces of the United States on any day during the 60-day period ending on the hiring date, and

''(iii) provides to the employer a copy of the individual's DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, that includes the nature and type of discharge.

''(4) ELECTION.—An employer may elect not to have this subsection apply. Such election shall be made in such manner as the Secretary may require.

''(5) COORDINATION WITH WORK OPPORTUNITY CREDIT.—For coordination with the work opportunity credit, see section 51(3)(D).''.

(b) COORDINATION WITH WORK OPPORTUNITY CREDIT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Paragraph (3) of section 51 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

''(D) DENIAL OF CREDIT FOR VETERANS SUBJECT TO 50 PERCENT PAYROLL TAX HOLIDAY.—If section 3111(d)(1) (as amended by the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014) applies to any wages paid by an employer, the term 'qualified veteran' does not include any individual who begins work for the employer during the holiday period (as defined in section 3111(d)(2)) unless the employer makes an election not to have section 3111(d) apply.''.

(2) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Subsection (c) of section 51 of such Code is amended by striking paragraph (5).

At the end of subtitle E of title IV, add the following:

SEC. 446. PERMANENT SBA EXPRESS LOAN GUARANTY FEE WAIVER FOR VETERANS.

Section 7(a) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(a)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (18)(A), by striking ''With respect'' and inserting ''Except as provided in paragraph (31), with respect''; and

(2) in paragraph (31), adding at the end the following:

''(G) GUARANTEE FEE WAIVER FOR VETERANS.—The Administrator may not assess a guarantee fee under paragraph (18) in connection with a loan made under this paragraph to a veteran on or after October 1, 2014.''.

SEC. 447. REPORT ON FINANCIAL PLANNING AND COUNSELING FOR OWNERS OF SMALL BUSINESS CONCERNS IN THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the Small Business Administration shall submit to Congress a report assessing the feasibility of providing financial planning and counseling to owners of small business concerns who are members of a reserve component prior to deployment.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section—

(1) the term ''reserve component'' means a reserve component of the Armed Forces named in section 10101 of title 10, United States Code; and

(2) the term ''small business concern'' has the meaning given the term under section 3(a) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 632(a)).

SEC. 448. REPORT ON THE MILITARY RESERVISTS ECONOMIC INJURY DISASTER LOAN PROGRAM.

Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the Small Business Administration shall submit to Congress a report on the Military Reservists Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program (in this section referred to as the ''program'') authorized under section 7(b)(3) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b)(3)), which shall include—

(1) a discussion of the outreach efforts of the Small Business Administration to increase participation in the program;

(2) the number of loans made under the program;

(3) an analysis of the effectiveness of the program; and

(4) recommendations for improving the program.

SA 2795. Mrs. SHAHEEN 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 61, between lines 5 and 6, insert the following:

SEC. 314. SPECIAL CHANGE IN STATUS RULE FOR EMPLOYEES WHO BECOME ELIGIBLE FOR TRICARE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subsection (g) of section 125 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(5) CHANGE IN STATUS RELATING TO TRICARE ELIGIBILITY.—For purposes of this section, if a cafeteria plan permits an employee to revoke an election during a period of coverage and to make a new election based on a change in status event, an event that causes the employee to become eligible for coverage under the TRICARE program shall be treated as a change in status event.''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by this section shall apply to events occurring after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SA 2796. Mr. BENNET (for himself and Mr. JOHANNS) 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 subtitle A of title IV, add the following:

SEC. 407. AUTHORITY TO INCREASE AVAILABILITY OF PRIVATE SECTOR ON-JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS.

During the four-year period beginning on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out section 3677(b)(1)(A) of title 38, United States Code, by substituting ''75 per centum'' for ''85 per centum''.

SEC. 408. ON-JOB TRAINING AT FEDERAL DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES.

Beginning on the date that is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall enter into agreements with the heads of other Federal departments and agencies to operate programs of training on the job under section 3677 of title 38, United States Code, to train eligible veterans or persons to perform skills necessary for employment by the department or agency operating the program.

SA 2797. Mr. BLUMENTHAL 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, add the following:

SEC. 918. SENSE OF CONGRESS ON REVIEW OF DISCHARGE STATUS OF VIETNAM ERA VETERANS WITH POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER WHO WERE DISCHARGED UNDER CONDITIONS OTHER THAN HONORABLE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—It is the sense of Congress that individuals who served in the active military, naval, or air service during the Vietnam era, who have a service-connected post traumatic stress disorder, who were discharged or released from such service under conditions other than honorable, and who are now upstanding members in their communities, should have their less than honorable discharge or release reviewed by the applicable board for the correction of military records.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section, the terms ''active military, naval, or air service'', ''service-connected'', and ''Vietnam era'' have the meanings given such terms in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

SA 2798. Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself and Mr. MURPHY) 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. REPEAL OF TIME LIMITATIONS ON USE OF EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE UNDER ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3031 is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

''(i)(1) Notwithstanding subsections (a) through (g) and any other provision of law, the period during which a covered individual entitled to educational assistance under this chapter may use such covered individual's entitlement shall not end until the date that is 10 years after the date on which such covered individual begins using such benefit.

''(2) For purposes of this subsection, a covered individual is any individual—

''(A) whose basic pay was reduced under paragraph (1) of section 3011(b) of this title; or

''(B) with respect to whom an amount was collected under paragraph (2) of such section.''.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 3020(f) is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(4) Subsection (i) of section 3031 of this title shall not apply for purposes of this subsection.''.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Subsection (i) of section 3031, as added by subsection (a), and paragraph (4) of section 3020(f), as added by subsection (b), shall apply as if such subsection and such paragraph had been enacted immediately after the enactment of the Veterans' Educational Assistance Act of 1984 (Public Law 98–525; 98 Stat. 2553).

SEC. 208. VETERANS EDUCATION OUTREACH PROGRAM.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Chapter 36 is amended by adding at the end of subchapter II the following new section:

"§ 3697B. Veterans education outreach program

''(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall provide funding for offices of veterans affairs at institutions of higher learning (as defined in section 3452(f) of this title) in accordance with this section.

''(b) PAYMENTS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING.—(1)(A) The Secretary shall, subject to the availability of appropriations, make payments to any institution of higher learning, under and in accordance with this section, during any fiscal year if the number of persons eligible for services from offices assisted under this section at the institution is at least 50, determined in the same manner as the number of eligible veterans or eligible persons is determined under section 3684(c) of this title.

''(B) The persons who are eligible for services from the offices assisted under this section are persons receiving educational assistance administered by the Department, including assistance provided under chapter 1606 of title 10.

''(2) To be eligible for a payment under this section, an institution of higher learning or a consortium of institutions of higher learning, as described in paragraph (3), shall submit an application to the Secretary. The application shall—

''(A) set forth such policies, assurances, and procedures that will ensure that—

''(i) the funds received by the institution, or each institution in a consortium of institutions described in paragraph (3), under this section will be used solely to carry out this section;

''(ii) for enhancing the functions of its veterans education outreach program, the applicant will expend, during the academic year for which a payment is sought, an amount equal to at least the amount of the award under this section from sources other than this or any other Federal program; and

''(iii) the applicant will submit to the Secretary such reports as the Secretary may require or as are required by this section;

''(B) contain such other statement of policies, assurances, and procedures as the Secretary may require in order to protect the financial interests of the United States;

''(C) set forth such plans, policies, assurances, and procedures as will ensure that the applicant will maintain an office of veterans' affairs which has responsibility for—

''(i) veterans' certification, outreach, recruitment, and special education programs, including the provision of or referral to educational, vocational, and personal counseling for veterans; and

''(ii) providing information regarding other services provided veterans by the Department, including the readjustment counseling program authorized under section 1712A of this title and the programs carried out under chapters 41 and 42 of this title; and

''(D) be submitted at such time or times, in such manner, in such form, and contain such information as the Secretary determines necessary to carry out the functions of the Secretary under this section.

''(3) An institution of higher learning which is eligible for funding under this section and which the Secretary determines cannot feasibly carry out, by itself, any or all of the activities set forth in paragraph (2)(C), may carry out such program or programs through a consortium agreement with one or more other institutions of higher learning in the same community.

''(4) The Secretary shall not approve an application under this subsection unless the Secretary determines that the applicant will implement the requirements of paragraph (2)(C) within the first academic year during which it receives a payment under this section.

''(c) AMOUNT OF PAYMENTS.—(1)(A) Subject to subparagraph (B), the amount of the payment which any institution shall receive under this section for any fiscal year shall be $100 for each person who is described in subsection (b)(1)(B).

''(B) The maximum amount of payments to any institution of higher learning, or any branch thereof which is located in a community which is different from that in which the parent institution thereof is located, in any fiscal year is $150,000.

''(2)(A)(i) The Secretary shall pay to each institution of higher learning which has had an application approved under subsection (b) the amount which it is to receive under this section.

''(ii) If the amount appropriated for any fiscal year is not sufficient to pay the amounts which all such institutions are to receive, the Secretary shall ratably reduce such payments.

''(iii) If any amount becomes available to carry out this section for a fiscal year after such reductions have been imposed, such reduced payments shall be increased on the same basis as they were reduced.

''(B) In making payments under this section for any fiscal year, the Secretary shall apportion the appropriation for making such payments, from funds which become available as a result of the limitation on payments set forth in paragraph (1)(B), in an equitable manner.

''(d) COORDINATION AND PROVISION OF ASSISTANCE, TECHNICAL CONSULTATION, AND INFORMATION.—The Secretary, in carrying out the provisions of this section, shall seek to assure the coordination of programs assisted under this section with other programs carried out by the Department pursuant to this title, and the Secretary shall provide all assistance, technical consultation, and information otherwise authorized by law as necessary to promote the maximum effectiveness of the activities and programs assisted under this section.

''(e) BEST PRACTICES AND ADMINISTRATION.—(1) From the amounts made available for any fiscal year under subsection (f), the Secretary shall retain one percent or $20,000, whichever is less, for the purpose of collecting information about exemplary veterans educational outreach programs and disseminating that information to other institutions of higher learning having such programs on their campuses. Such collection and dissemination shall be done on an annual basis.

''(2) From the amounts made available under subsection (f), the Secretary may retain not more than two percent for the purpose of administering this section.

''(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section $6,000,000 for fiscal year 2014 and each fiscal year thereafter.''.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 36 is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 3697A the following new item:

''3697B. Veterans education outreach program.''.

SA 2799. Mr. BLUMENTHAL 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:

TITLE X—DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF MILITARY SERVICE

SEC. 1001. DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF MILITARY SERVICE.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) CIVIL RIGHTS DEFINITIONS.—The terms ''complaining party'', ''demonstrates'', ''employee'', ''employer'', ''employment agency'', ''labor organization'', ''person'', ''respondent'', and ''State'' have the meanings given the terms in section 701 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000e).

(2) MEMBER OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES.—The term ''member of the uniformed services'' means an individual who—

(A) is a member of—

(i) the uniformed services (as defined in section 101 of title 10, United States Code); or

(ii) the National Guard in State status under title 32, United States Code; or

(B) was discharged or released from service in the uniformed services (as so defined) or the National Guard in such status under conditions other than dishonorable.

(3) MILITARY SERVICE.—The term ''military service'' means status as a member of the uniformed services.

(b) EMPLOYER PRACTICES.—It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer—

(1) to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to the individual's compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's military service; or

(2) to limit, segregate, or classify the employer's employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect the individual's status as an employee, because of such individual's military service.

(c) EMPLOYMENT AGENCY PRACTICES.—It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employment agency to fail or refuse to refer for employment, or otherwise discriminate against, any individual because of the individual's military service, or to classify or refer for employment any individual on the basis of the individual's military service.

(d) LABOR ORGANIZATION PRACTICES.—It shall be an unlawful employment practice for a labor organization—

(1) to exclude or to expel from its membership, or otherwise to discriminate against, any individual because of the individual's military service;

(2) to limit, segregate, or classify its membership or applicants for membership, or to classify or fail or refuse to refer for employment any individual, in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities, or would limit such employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect the individual's status as an employee or as an applicant for employment, because of such individual's military service; or

(3) to cause or attempt to cause an employer to discriminate against an individual in violation of this section.

(e) TRAINING PROGRAMS.—It shall be an unlawful employment practice for any employer, labor organization, or joint labor-management committee controlling apprenticeship or other training or retraining, including on-the-job training programs, to discriminate against any individual because of the individual's military service in admission to, or employment in, any program established to provide apprenticeship or other training.

(f) BUSINESSES OR ENTERPRISES WITH PERSONNEL QUALIFIED ON BASIS OF MILITARY SERVICE.—Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, it shall not be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to hire and employ employees, for an employment agency to classify, or refer for employment any individual, for a labor organization to classify its membership or to classify or refer for employment any individual, or for an employer, labor organization, or joint labor-management committee controlling apprenticeship or other training or retraining programs to admit or employ any individual in any such program, on the basis of the individual's military service in those certain instances where military service is a bona fide occupational qualification reasonably necessary to the normal operation of that particular business or enterprise.

(g) NATIONAL SECURITY.—Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, it shall not be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to fail or refuse to hire and employ any individual for any position, for an employer to discharge any individual from any position, or for an employment agency to fail or refuse to refer any individual for employment in any position, or for a labor organization to fail or refuse to refer any individual for employment in any position, if—

(1) the occupancy of such position, or access to the premises in or upon which any part of the duties of such position is performed or is to be performed, is subject to any requirement imposed in the interest of the national security of the United States under any security program in effect pursuant to or administered under any statute of the United States or any Executive order of the President; and

(2) such individual has not fulfilled or has ceased to fulfill that requirement.

(h) SENIORITY OR MERIT SYSTEM; QUANTITY OR QUALITY OF PRODUCTION; ABILITY TESTS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, it shall not be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to apply different standards of compensation, or different terms, conditions, or privileges of employment pursuant to a bona fide seniority or merit system, or a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production or to employees who work in different locations, provided that such differences are not the result of an intention to discriminate because of military service, nor shall it be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to give and to act upon the results of any professionally developed ability test provided that such test, its administration, or action upon the results is not designed, intended, or used to discriminate because of military service.

(i) PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT NOT TO BE GRANTED ON ACCOUNT OF EXISTING NUMBER OR PERCENTAGE IMBALANCE.—Nothing contained in this section shall be interpreted to require any employer, employment agency, labor organization, or joint labor-management committee subject to this section to grant preferential treatment to any individual or to any group because of the military service of such individual or group on account of an imbalance which may exist with respect to the total number or percentage of persons with military service employed by any employer, referred or classified for employment by any employment agency or labor organization, admitted to membership or classified by any labor organization, or admitted to, or employed in, any apprenticeship or other training program, in comparison with the total number or percentage of persons with military service in any community, State, section, or other area, or in the available work force in any community, State, section, or other area.

(j) BURDEN OF PROOF IN DISPARATE IMPACT CASES.—

(1) DISPARATE IMPACT.—

(A) ESTABLISHMENT.—An unlawful employment practice based on disparate impact is established under this section only if—

(i) a complaining party demonstrates that a respondent uses a particular employment practice that causes a disparate impact on the basis of military service and the respondent fails to demonstrate that the challenged practice is job related for the position in question and consistent with business necessity; or

(ii) the complaining party makes the demonstration described in subparagraph (C) with respect to an alternative employment practice and the respondent refuses to adopt such alternative employment practice.

(B) DEMONSTRATION OF CAUSATION.—

(i) PARTICULAR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES.—With respect to demonstrating that a particular employment practice causes a disparate impact as described in subparagraph (A)(i), the complaining party shall demonstrate that each particular challenged employment practice causes a disparate impact, except that if the complaining party can demonstrate to the court that the elements of a respondent's decisionmaking process are not capable of separation for analysis, the decisionmaking process may be analyzed as one employment practice.

(ii) DEMONSTRATION OF NONCAUSATION.—If the respondent demonstrates that a specific employment practice does not cause the disparate impact, the respondent shall not be required to demonstrate that such practice is required by business necessity.

(C) ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE.—The demonstration referred to by subparagraph (A)(ii) shall be in accordance with the law as it existed on June 4, 1989, with respect to the concept of ''alternative employment practice''.

(2) BUSINESS NECESSITY NO DEFENSE TO INTENTIONAL DISCRIMINATION.—A demonstration that an employment practice is required by business necessity may not be used as a defense against a claim of intentional discrimination under this section.

(3) RULES CONCERNING CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES.—Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, a rule barring the employment of an individual who currently and knowingly uses or possesses a controlled substance, as defined in section 102(6) of the Controlled Substances Act (21 U.S.C. 802(6)) and included in schedule I or II of the schedules specified in that section, other than the use or possession of a drug taken under the supervision of a licensed health care professional, or any other use or possession authorized by the Controlled Substances Act (21 U.S.C. 801 et seq.) or any other provision of Federal law, shall be considered an unlawful employment practice under this section only if such rule is adopted or applied with an intent to discriminate because of military service.

(k) PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATORY USE OF TEST SCORES.—It shall be an unlawful employment practice for a respondent, in connection with the selection or referral of applicants or candidates for employment or promotion, to adjust the scores of, use different cutoff scores for, or otherwise alter the results of, employment related tests on the basis of military service.

(l) IMPERMISSIBLE CONSIDERATION OF MILITARY SERVICE IN EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES.—Except as otherwise provided in this section, an unlawful employment practice is established when the complaining party demonstrates that military service was a motivating factor for any employment practice, even though other factors also motivated the practice.

(m) RESOLUTION OF CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES IMPLEMENTING LITIGATED OR CONSENT JUDGMENTS OR ORDERS.—

(1) PRACTICES NOT CHALLENGEABLE.—

(A) PRACTICES TO IMPLEMENT A LITIGATED OR CONSENT JUDGMENT OR ORDER.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, and except as provided in paragraph (2), an employment practice that implements and is within the scope of a litigated or consent judgment or order that resolves a claim of employment discrimination under the Constitution or Federal civil rights laws may not be challenged under the circumstances described in subparagraph (B).

(B) CIRCUMSTANCES.—A practice described in subparagraph (A) may not be challenged in a claim under the Constitution or Federal civil rights laws—

(i) by a person who, prior to the entry of the judgment or order described in subparagraph (A), had—

(I) actual notice of the proposed judgment or order sufficient to apprise such person that such judgment or order might adversely affect the interests and legal rights of such person and that an opportunity was available to present objections to such judgment or order by a future date certain; and

(II) a reasonable opportunity to present objections to such judgment or order; or

(ii) by a person whose interests were adequately represented by another person who had previously challenged the judgment or order on the same legal grounds and with a similar factual situation, unless there has been an intervening change in law or fact.

(2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to—

(A) alter the standards for intervention under rule 24 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure or apply to the rights of parties who have successfully intervened pursuant to such rule in the proceeding in which the parties intervened;

(B) apply to the rights of parties to the action in which a litigated or consent judgment or order was entered, or of members of a class represented or sought to be represented in such action, or of members of a group on whose behalf relief was sought in such action by the Federal Government;

(C) prevent challenges to a litigated or consent judgment or order on the ground that such judgment or order was obtained through collusion or fraud, or is transparently invalid or was entered by a court lacking subject matter jurisdiction; or

(D) authorize or permit the denial to any person of the due process of law required by the Constitution.

(3) COURT FOR ACTIONS THAT ARE CHALLENGEABLE.—Any action not precluded under this subsection that challenges an employment consent judgment or order described in paragraph (1) shall be brought in the court, and if possible before the judge, that entered such judgment or order. Nothing in this subsection shall preclude a transfer of such action pursuant to section 1404 of title 28, United States Code.

(n) DISCRIMINATION FOR MAKING CHARGES, TESTIFYING, ASSISTING, OR PARTICIPATING IN ENFORCEMENT PROCEEDINGS.—It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to discriminate against any of the

employer's employees or applicants for employment, for an employment agency, or joint labor-management committee controlling apprenticeship or other training or retraining, including on-the-job training programs, to discriminate against any individual, or for a labor organization to discriminate against any member thereof or applicant for membership, because the employee, applicant, individuals, or member involved has opposed any practice made an unlawful employment practice by this section, or has made a charge, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing under this section.

(o) PRINTING OR PUBLICATION OF NOTICES OR ADVERTISEMENTS.—It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer, labor organization, employment agency, or joint labor-management committee controlling apprenticeship or other training or retraining, including on-the-job training programs, to print or publish or cause to be printed or published any notice or advertisement relating to employment by such an employer or membership in or any classification or referral for employment by such a labor organization, or relating to any classification or referral for employment by such an employment agency, or relating to admission to, or employment in, any program established to provide apprenticeship or other training by such a joint labor-management committee, indicating any preference, limitation, specification, or discrimination, based on military service, except that such a notice or advertisement may indicate a preference, limitation, specification, or discrimination based on military service when military service is a bona fide occupational qualification for employment.

(p) EXEMPTIONS.—

(1) INAPPLICABILITY OF TITLE TO CERTAIN ALIENS.—This section shall not apply to an employer with respect to the employment of aliens outside any State.

(2) COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTE AS VIOLATION OF FOREIGN LAW.—It shall not be unlawful under this section for an employer (or a corporation controlled by an employer), labor organization, employment agency, or joint labor-management committee controlling apprenticeship or other training or retraining (including on-the-job training programs) to take any action otherwise prohibited by such section, with respect to an employee in a workplace in a foreign country if compliance with such section would cause such employer (or such corporation), such organization, such agency, or such committee to violate the law of the foreign country in which such workplace is located.

(3) CONTROL OF CORPORATION INCORPORATED IN FOREIGN COUNTRY.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—If an employer controls a corporation whose place of incorporation is a foreign country, any practice prohibited by this section engaged in by such corporation shall be presumed to be engaged in by such employer.

(B) FOREIGN PERSON NOT CONTROLLED BY EMPLOYER.—This section shall not apply with respect to the foreign operations of an employer that is a foreign person not controlled by an American employer.

(C) CONTROL.—For purposes of this subsection, the determination of whether an employer controls a corporation shall be based on—

(i) the interrelation of operations;

(ii) the common management;

(iii) the centralized control of labor relations; and

(iv) the common ownership or financial control,

of the employer and the corporation.

(4) CLAIMS OF NO MILITARY SERVICE.—Nothing in this section shall provide the basis for a claim by an individual without military service that the individual was subject to discrimination because of the individual's lack of military service.

(q) POSTING NOTICES.—Every employer, employment agency, labor organization, or joint labor-management committee covered under this section shall post notices to applicants, employees, and members describing the applicable provisions of this section, in the manner prescribed by section 711 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000e–10).

(r) REGULATIONS.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commission shall issue regulations to carry out this section in accordance with subchapter II of chapter 5 of title 5, United States Code.

(s) ENFORCEMENT.—The powers, remedies, and procedures set forth in sections 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, and 712 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000e–4, 2000e–5, 2000e–6, 2000e–7, 2000e–8, 2000e–9, and 2000e–11) shall be the powers, remedies, and procedures this section provides to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, to the Attorney General, or to any person alleging discrimination on the basis of military service in violation of any provision of this section, or regulations promulgated under subsection (r), concerning employment.

SEC. 1002. ENDING HOUSING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—Section 802 of the Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 3602) is amended by adding at the end the following:

''(p) 'Member of the uniformed services' means an individual who—

''(1) is a member of—

''(A) the uniformed services (as defined in section 101 of title 10, United States Code); or

''(B) the National Guard in State status under title 32, United States Code; or

''(2) was discharged or released from service in the uniformed services (as so defined) or the National Guard in such status under conditions other than dishonorable.''.

(b) DISCRIMINATION IN THE SALE OR RENTAL OF HOUSING AND OTHER PROHIBITED PRACTICES.—Section 804 of the Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 3604) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by inserting ''or because the person is a member of the uniformed services'' after ''national origin'';

(2) in subsection (b), by inserting ''or because the person is a member of the uniformed services'' after ''national origin'';

(3) in subsection (c), by inserting ''or because a person is a member of the uniformed services,'' after ''national origin,''; and

(4) in subsection (d), by inserting '', or because the person is a member of the uniformed services,'' after ''national origin''.

(c) DISCRIMINATION IN RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE-RELATED TRANSACTIONS.—Section 805 of the Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 3605) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by inserting ''or because the person is a member of the uniformed services'' after ''national origin''; and

(2) in subsection (c), by striking '', or familial status'' and inserting ''familial status, or whether a person is a member of the uniformed services''.

(d) DISCRIMINATION IN THE PROVISION OF BROKERAGE SERVICES.—Section 806 of the Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 3606) is amended by inserting ''or because a person is a member of the uniformed services'' after ''national origin''.

(e) RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION OR PRIVATE CLUB EXEMPTION.—Section 807(a) of the Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 3607(a)) is amended, in the first sentence by inserting ''or to persons who are not members of the uniformed services'' after ''national origin''.

(f) ADMINISTRATION.—Section 808(e)(6) of the Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 3608(e)(6)) is amended, in the first sentence, by inserting ''(including whether such persons and households are or include a member of the uniformed services)'' after ''persons and households''.

(g) PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION.—Section 901 of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3631) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by inserting '', or because the person is a member of the uniformed services (as such term is defined in section 802 of this Act),'' after ''national origin'';

(2) in subsection (b)(1), by inserting ''or because a person is a member of the uniformed services (as such term is defined in section 802 of this Act),'' after ''national origin,''; and

(3) in subsection (c), by inserting ''or because a person is a member of the uniformed services (as such term is defined in section 802 of this Act),'' after ''national origin,''.

(h) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—The Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 3601 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

''SEC. 821. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION RELATING TO THE TREATMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES.

''(a) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this Act may be construed to prohibit any person from—

''(1) making available to an individual a benefit with respect to a dwelling, a residential real estate-related transaction (as defined in section 805 of this Act), or a service described in section 806 of this Act because the individual is a member of the uniformed services; or

''(2) selling or renting a dwelling only to members of the uniformed services.

''(b) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this section, the term 'benefit' includes a term, condition, privilege, promotion, discount, or other favorable treatment (including an advertisement for such treatment) having the purpose or effect of providing an advantage to a member of the uniformed services.''.

SEC. 1003. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This title shall become effective 120 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

SA 2800. Mr. BLUMENTHAL 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—Diagnosis, Treatment, and Research on Exposure to Toxic Substances

SEC. 391. DEFINITIONS.

In this subtitle:

(1) ARMED FORCE.—The term ''Armed Force'' means the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve components thereof.

(2) DESCENDANT.—The term ''descendant'' means, with respect to an individual, the biological child, grandchild, or great-grandchild of that individual.

(3) TOXIC SUBSTANCE.—The term ''toxic substance'' shall have the meaning given that term by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and shall include all substances that have been proven by peer reviewed scientific research or a preponderance of opinion in the medical community to lead to disabilities related to the exposure of an individual to those substances while serving as a member of the Armed Forces.

(4) VETERAN.—The term ''veteran'' has the meaning given that term in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 392. NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE DIAGNOSIS, TREATMENT, AND RESEARCH OF HEALTH CONDITIONS OF THE DESCENDANTS OF INDIVIDUALS EXPOSED TO TOXIC SUBSTANCES DURING SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES.

(a) NATIONAL CENTER.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall select a medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs to serve as the national center for the diagnosis, treatment, and research of health conditions of descendants of individuals exposed to toxic substances while serving as members of the Armed Forces that are related to that exposure (in this section referred to as the ''Center'').

(2) CRITERIA FOR SELECTION.—The Center shall be selected under paragraph (1) from among medical centers of the Department with expertise in diagnosing and treating functional and structural birth defects and caring for individuals exposed to toxic substances, or that are affiliated with research medical centers or teaching hospitals with such expertise, that seek to be selected under this section.

(b) FUNCTIONS.—

(1) DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Center may diagnose and treat, without charge, each patient for whom the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has made the following determinations:

(i) The patient is a descendant of an individual who served as a member of the Armed Forces.

(ii) The individual was exposed to a toxic substance while serving as a member of the Armed Forces.

(iii) The patient is afflicted with a health condition that is determined by the advisory board established in section 393 to be a health condition that results from the exposure of that individual to that toxic substance.

(B) TREATMENT.—Treatment under this section is limited to treatment of health conditions for which the advisory board established in section 393 has made a determination described in subparagraph (A)(iii).

(C) ADDITIONAL DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT.—Nothing in this section shall preclude a patient from receiving additional diagnosis or treatment at the Center or another facility of the Department in connection with other health conditions or benefits to which the individual is entitled under laws administered by the Secretary.

(D) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE TREATMENT.—Recommendations for future treatment of a patient shall be transmitted to a primary care provider for that patient, with follow-up consultations with the Center scheduled as appropriate.

(E) USE OF RECORDS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense or the head of a Federal agency may make available to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for review records held by the Department of Defense, an Armed Force, or that Federal agency, as appropriate, that might assist the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in making the determinations required by subparagraph (A).

(ii) MECHANISM.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense or the head of the appropriate Federal agency may jointly establish a mechanism for the availability and review of records by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs under clause (i).

(2) RESEARCH.—The Center may conduct research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of descendants of individuals exposed to toxic substances while serving as members of the Armed Forces that are related to that exposure.

(c) SOCIAL WORKERS.—The Center shall employ not less than one licensed clinical social worker to coordinate access of patients to appropriate Federal, State, and local social and healthcare programs and to handle case management.

(d) REIMBURSEMENT FOR NECESSARY TRAVEL AND ROOM AND BOARD.—The Center may reimburse any parent, guardian, spouse, or sibling who accompanies a patient diagnosed or treated pursuant to this section for the reasonable cost of—

(1) travel to the Center for diagnosis or treatment of the patient pursuant to this section; and

(2) room and board during the period in which the patient is undergoing diagnosis or treatment at the Center pursuant to this section.

(e) REPORT.—Not less frequently than annually, the Center shall submit a report to Congress that includes the following:

(1) A summary of the extent and nature of care provided pursuant to this section.

(2) A summary of the research efforts of the Center under this section that have been completed within the previous year and that are ongoing as of the date of the submission of the report under this subsection.

SEC. 393. ADVISORY BOARD.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish an advisory board (in this section referred to as the ''Advisory Board'') to advise the center established under section 392, to determine which health conditions result from exposure to toxic substances, and to study and evaluate cases of exposure of current and former members of the Armed Forces to toxic substances if such exposure is related the service of the member in the Armed Forces.

(b) MEMBERSHIP.—

(1) COMPOSITION.—Not later than 150 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services and other heads of Federal agencies as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines appropriate, select not less than 13 members of the Advisory Board, of whom—

(A) not less than three shall be members of organizations exempt from taxation under section 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986;

(B) not less than one shall be—

(i) a descendant of an individual who was exposed to toxic substances while serving as a member of the Armed Forces and the descendant has manifested a birth defect or functional disability as a result of the exposure of that individual; or

(ii) a parent, child, or grandchild of that descendant; and

(C) additional members may be selected from among—

(i) health professionals, scientists, and academics with expertise in—

(I) birth defects;

(II) developmental disabilities;

(III) epigenetics;

(IV) public health;

(V) the science of environmental exposure or environmental exposure assessment; or

(VI) the science of toxic substances;

(ii) social workers; and

(iii) advocates for veterans or members of the Armed Forces.

(2) CHAIRPERSON.—The Secretary shall select a Chairperson from among the members of the Advisory Board.

(3) TERMS.—Each member of the Advisory Board shall serve a term of two or three years as determined by the Secretary.

(c) DUTIES.—

(1) ADVISORY ROLE WITH RESPECT TO THE CENTER.—With respect to the center established under section 392, the Advisory Board shall—

(A) oversee and assess the work of the center; and

(B) advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on—

(i) issues related to the provision of treatment and care at the center;

(ii) issues related to the research conducted at the center; and

(iii) the particular benefits and services required by the descendants of individuals exposed to toxic substances while serving as members of the Armed Forces.

(2) DETERMINATION THAT HEALTH CONDITIONS RESULTED FROM TOXIC EXPOSURE.—The Advisory Board shall determine which health conditions in descendants of individuals exposed to toxic substances while serving as members of the Armed Forces are health conditions that resulted from the exposure of that individual to that toxic substance for purposes of eligibility for the following:

(A) Treatment of that descendant at the center established under section 392.

(B) Medical care for that descendant under section 1781 of title 38, United States Code.

(C) Support for the family caregiver of that descendant under section 1720G(a) of such title.

(D) Support for the caregiver of that descendant under section 1720G(b) of such title.

(3) STUDY AND CONSIDERATION OF TOXIC SUBSTANCE EXPOSURE CLAIMS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Advisory Board shall study and evaluate claims of exposure to toxic substances by current and former members of the Armed Forces that is related to the service of the member in the Armed Forces.

(B) SUBMISSION OF CLAIMS.—Claims of exposure described in subparagraph (A) may be submitted to the Advisory Board in such form and in such manner as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may require by any of the following individuals or entities:

(i) A member of the Armed Forces.

(ii) A veteran.

(iii) A descendant of a member of the Armed Forces.

(iv) A descendant of a veteran.

(v) A veterans advocacy group.

(vi) An official of the Department of Veterans Affairs with responsibility or experience monitoring the health of current and former members of the Armed Forces.

(vii) An official of the Department of Defense with responsibility or experience monitoring the health of current and former members of the Armed Forces.

(C) CONSIDERATION OF CLAIMS.—Not later than 180 days after receiving a claim submitted pursuant to subparagraph (B), the Advisory Board shall consider the claim and take one of the following actions:

(i) If the Advisory Board determines that exposure to a toxic substance occurred to a degree that an individual exposed to that substance may have or develop a medical condition that would qualify that individual for health care or compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Department of Defense, the Advisory Board shall submit to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs a report described in subparagraph (D).

(ii) If the Advisory Board determines that further consideration of the claim is necessary to adequately assess the extent of exposure, the Advisory Board shall refer the claim to the Office of Extramural Research

established under section 394 to conduct further research and report its findings to the Advisory Board.

(iii) If the Advisory Board determines that exposure to a toxic substance did not occur or occurred to a negligible extent, the Advisory Board shall report such determination to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(D) REPORT.—If the Advisory Board makes a determination under subparagraph (C)(i), the Advisory Board shall submit to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs a report that contains the following:

(i) Evidence used by the Advisory Board in making the determination under subparagraph (C)(i), including, if appropriate, the following:

(I) Scientific research, including any research conducted by the Office of Extramural Research established under section 394.

(II) Peer-reviewed articles from scientific journals relating to exposure to toxic substances.

(III) Medical research conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense, or the medical community.

(ii) Recommendations on the extent to which the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Department of Defense should provide health care, benefits, or other compensation with respect to exposure to a toxic substance to the following individuals:

(I) An individual exposed to a toxic substance as determined under subparagraph (C)(i).

(II) A descendant of that individual.

(iii) Information on cost and attributable exposure, as defined in regulations prescribed pursuant to this subtitle.

(E) PUBLICATION OF EVIDENCE.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in clause (ii), the Secretary shall publish in the Federal Register the evidence described in clause (i) of subparagraph (D) that is submitted with the report required by that subparagraph.

(ii) EXCEPTION.—Such evidence may not be published if the Secretary determines that preventing such publication—

(I) is in the national security interest of the United States; or

(II) protects the privacy interests of individuals exposed to toxic substances.

(F) SUBPOENA AUTHORITY.—The Advisory Board may require by subpoena the attendance and testimony of witnesses necessary to consider claims of exposure to toxic substances under this paragraph.

(G) COOPERATION OF FEDERAL AGENCIES.—The head of each relevant Federal agency, including the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, shall cooperate fully with the Advisory Board for purposes of considering claims of exposure to toxic substances under this paragraph.

(d) MEETINGS.—The Advisory Board shall meet at the call of the Chair, but not less frequently than semiannually.

(e) COMPENSATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The members of the Advisory Board shall serve without compensation.

(2) TRAVEL EXPENSES.—The members of the Advisory Board shall be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, at rates authorized for employees of agencies under subchapter I of chapter 57 of title 5, United States Code, while away from their homes or regular places of business in the performance of services for the Advisory Board.

(f) PERSONNEL.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Chairperson may, without regard to the civil service laws and regulations, appoint an executive director of the Advisory Board, who shall be a civilian employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and such other personnel as may be necessary to enable the Advisory Board to perform its duties.

(2) APPROVAL.—The appointment of an executive director under paragraph (1) shall be subject to approval by the Advisory Board.

(3) COMPENSATION.—The Chairperson may fix the compensation of the executive director and other personnel without regard to the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of title 5, United States Code, except that the rate of pay for the executive director and other personnel may not exceed the rate payable for level V of the Executive Schedule under section 5316 of such title.

SEC. 394. OFFICE OF EXTRAMURAL RESEARCH.

(a) OFFICE.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish an Office of Extramural Research (in this section referred to as the ''Office'')—

(1) to conduct research on wounds, illnesses, injuries, and other conditions suffered by individuals as a result of exposure to toxic substances while serving as members of the Armed Forces; and

(2) to assist the Advisory Board established under section 393 in the consideration of claims of exposure to toxic substances.

(b) DIRECTOR.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall select a Director of the Office.

(c) GRANTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to approval by the advisory council established under subsection (e), the Director may award grants to reputable scientists and epidemiologists to carry out this section.

(2) EXCEPTION.—The Director may not award grants to individuals or organizations associated with or having an interest in a chemical company or any other organization that the Secretary determines may have an interest in the increased use of toxic substances.

(d) SUPPORT TO ADVISORY BOARD.—Not later than 180 days after receiving a request from the Advisory Board established under section 393 to review a claim of exposure pursuant to subsection (c)(3)(C)(ii) of that section, the Office shall submit a report to the Advisory Board with one of the following determinations:

(1) A determination that exposure to a toxic substance occurred to a degree that an individual exposed to that substance may have or develop a medical condition that would qualify that individual for health care or compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Department of Defense.

(2) A determination that further study of the claim is necessary, to be carried out by, or under the direction of, the Office in coordination with the Advisory Board.

(3) A determination that exposure to a toxic substance did not occur or occurred to a negligible extent.

(e) ADVISORY COUNCIL.—

(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish an advisory council (in this section referred to as the ''Council'') for the Office established under this section.

(2) MEMBERSHIP.—

(A) COMPOSITION.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services and any other heads of Federal agencies as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines appropriate, select 11 members of the Council, of whom—

(I) not less than three shall be members of organizations exempt from taxation under section 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986; and

(II) additional members may be selected from among—

(aa) environmental epidemiologists;

(bb) academics; and

(cc) veterans or the descendants of veterans.

(ii) REQUIREMENTS FOR SCIENTISTS.—When considering individuals who are members of the scientific community for selection to the Council, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may select only those individuals—

(I) who have evidenced expertise in and demonstrate a commitment to research that leads to peer-reviewed scientific evaluation of the wounds, illnesses, injuries, and other conditions that may arise from exposure to toxic substances; and

(II) who are not associated with and do not have an interest in a chemical company or any other organization that the Secretary determines may have an interest in the increased use of toxic substances.

(B) CHAIRPERSON.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall select a Chairperson from among the members of the Council.

(C) TERMS.—Each member of the Council shall serve a term of two or three years as determined by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(3) DUTIES.—The Council shall—

(A) approve or disapprove of grants proposed to be awarded by the Director pursuant to subsection (c); and

(B) advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Director on—

(i) establishing guidelines for grant proposals and research proposals under this section; and

(ii) assisting the Advisory Board established under section 393 in the consideration of claims of exposure to toxic substances.

(4) MEETINGS.—The Council shall meet at the call of the Chairperson, but not less frequently than semiannually.

(5) COMPENSATION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The members of the Council shall serve without compensation.

(B) TRAVEL EXPENSES.—The members of the Council shall be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, at rates authorized for employees of agencies under subchapter I of chapter 57 of title 5, United States Code, while away from their homes or regular places of business in the performance of services for the Council.

(f) REPORT.—Not later than two years after the establishment of the Office under this section, the Director and the Chairman of the Council shall jointly submit to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Congress a report that contains the following:

(1) A summary of the research efforts conducted and the grants awarded under this section.

(2) A summary of the effects of exposure to toxic substances studied pursuant to this section.

(3) Recommendations for steps to be taken to care for and serve—

(A) individuals exposed to toxic substances while serving as a member of the Armed Forces; and

(B) the progeny of those individuals.

SEC. 395. PROVISION OF DEPENDENT CARE AND CAREGIVER ASSISTANCE TO DESCENDANTS OF VETERANS EXPOSED TO CERTAIN TOXIC SUBSTANCES DURING SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES.

(a) DEPENDENT CARE.—Section 1781(a) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (3), by striking '', and'' and inserting a comma;

(2) in paragraph (4), by striking the semicolon at the end and inserting '', and''; and

(3) by inserting after paragraph (4) the following new paragraph:

''(5) an individual who is the biological child, grandchild, or great-grandchild of a

veteran who the Secretary has determined was exposed to a toxic substance while serving as a member of the Armed Forces, if—

''(A) the individual has a health condition that is determined by the Advisory Board established by section 393 of the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 to be a health condition that results from exposure to that toxic substance,

''(B) the individual is homebound as a result of that health condition, and

''(C) the Secretary determines that the veteran has or had the same health condition,''.

(b) CAREGIVER ASSISTANCE.—

(1) COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE.—Subsection (a) of section 1720G is amended—

(A) by striking ''veteran'' each place it appears (except for paragraph (2)(A)) and inserting ''individual'';

(B) by striking ''veterans'' each place it appears and inserting ''individuals'';

(C) in paragraph (2)—

(i) by striking subparagraphs (A) and (B) and inserting the following:

''(A)(i) is a veteran or member of the Armed Forces undergoing medical discharge from the Armed Forces and has a serious injury (including traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma, or other mental disorder) incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service on or after September 11, 2001; or

''(ii) is the biological child, grandchild, or great-grandchild of a veteran who the Secretary has determined was exposed to a toxic substance while serving as a member of the Armed Forces, if—

''(I) the individual has a health condition that is determined by the Advisory Board established by section 393 of the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 to be a health condition that results from exposure to that toxic substance;

''(II) the individual is homebound as a result of that health condition; and

''(III) the Secretary determines that the veteran has or had the same health condition; and''; and

(ii) by redesignating subparagraph (C) as subparagraph (B); and

(D) in paragraph (9)(C)(i), by striking ''veteran's'' and inserting ''individual's''.

(2) GENERAL CAREGIVER SUPPORT.—Subsection (b) of such section is amended—

(A) by striking ''veteran'' each place it appears and inserting ''individual'';

(B) by striking ''veterans'' each place it appears and inserting ''individuals'';

(C) in paragraph (1), by striking ''who are'' and all that follows through ''of this title''; and

(D) in paragraph (2)—

(i) by redesignating subparagraphs (A), (B), and (C) as clauses (i), (ii), and (iii), respectively; and

(ii) in the matter preceding clause (i), as redesignated by clause (i), by striking ''any individual who needs'' and inserting ''any individual who—

''(A)(i) is enrolled in the health care system established under section 1705(a) of this title; or

''(ii) is the biological child, grandchild, or great-grandchild of a veteran who the Secretary has determined was exposed to a toxic substance while serving as a member of the Armed Forces, if—

''(I) the individual has a health condition that is determined by the Advisory Board established by section 393 of the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 to be a health condition that results from exposure to that toxic substance;

''(II) the individual is homebound as a result of that health condition; and

''(III) the Secretary determines that the veteran has or had the same health condition; and

''(B) needs''.

(3) DEFINITIONS.—Subsection (d) of such section is amended—

(A) by striking ''eligible veteran'' each place it appears and inserting ''eligible individual'';

(B) by striking ''covered veteran'' each place it appears and inserting ''covered individual'';

(C) in paragraph (1), by striking ''the veteran'' and inserting ''the eligible individual or covered individual'';

(D) in paragraph (2), by striking ''the veteran'' and inserting ''the eligible individual'';

(E) in paragraph (3), by striking ''the veteran'' each place it appears and inserting ''the eligible individual'';

(F) in paragraph (4), by striking ''the veteran'' and inserting ''the eligible individual or covered individual''; and

(G) by adding at the end the following:

''(5) The term 'toxic substance' has the meaning given that term in section 391 of the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014.''.

(c) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

(1) BENEFICIARY TRAVEL.—Section 111 is amended—

(A) in subsection (b)(1), by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

''(G) An individual described in section 1720G(a)(2)(A)(ii) of this title.''; and

(B) in subsection (e)—

(i) by striking ''veteran'' each place it appears (except for paragraph (2)(B)) and inserting ''individual''; and

(ii) in paragraph (2)(B)—

(I) by striking ''a veteran'' and inserting ''an individual''; and

(II) by striking ''such veteran'' and inserting ''such individual''.

(2) COUNSELING, TRAINING, AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.—Section 1782(c)(2) is amended by striking ''an eligible veteran or a caregiver of a covered veteran'' and inserting ''a veteran who is an eligible individual or a caregiver of a veteran who is a covered individual''.

SEC. 396. DECLASSIFICATION BY DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OF CERTAIN INCIDENTS OF EXPOSURE OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES TO TOXIC SUBSTANCES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense may declassify documents related to any known incident in which not less than 100 members of the Armed Forces were exposed to a toxic substance that resulted in at least one case of a disability that a member of the medical profession has determined to be associated with that toxic substance.

(b) LIMITATION.—The declassification authorized by subsection (a) shall be limited to information necessary for an individual who was potentially exposed to a toxic substance to determine the following:

(1) Whether that individual was exposed to that toxic substance.

(2) The potential severity of the exposure of that individual to that toxic substance.

(3) Any potential health conditions that may have resulted from exposure to that toxic substance.

(c) EXCEPTION.—The Secretary of Defense is not required to declassify documents if the Secretary determines that declassification of those documents would materially and immediately threaten the security of the United States.

SEC. 397. NATIONAL OUTREACH CAMPAIGN ON POTENTIAL LONG-TERM HEALTH EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO TOXIC SUBSTANCES BY MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AND THEIR DESCENDANTS.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Secretary of Defense shall jointly conduct a national outreach and education campaign directed towards members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their family members to communicate the following information:

(1) Information on—

(A) incidents of exposure of members of the Armed Forces to toxic substances;

(B) health conditions resulting from such exposure; and

(C) the potential long-term effects of such exposure on the individuals exposed to those substances and the descendants of those individuals.

(2) Information on the national center established under section 392 for individuals eligible for treatment at the center.

SA 2801. Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself, Mr. UDALL of New Mexico, and Mrs. GILLIBRAND) 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 207, between lines 8 and 9, insert the following:

Subtitle F—VOW to Hire Heroes Extension

SEC. 451. SHORT TITLE.

This subtitle may be cited as the ''VOW to Hire Heroes Extension Act of 2014''.

SEC. 452. EXTENSION OF WORK OPPORTUNITY CREDIT FOR VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subparagraph (B) of section 51(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended by striking ''after December 31, 2013.'' and inserting ''after—

''(i) December 31, 2017, in the case of a qualified veteran, and

''(ii) December 31, 2013, in the case of any other individual.''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by this section shall apply to individuals who begin work for the employer after December 31, 2013.

SEC. 453. SIMPLIFIED CERTIFICATION OF VETERAN STATUS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subparagraph (D) of section 51(d)(13) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended to read as follows:

''(D) PRE-SCREENING OF QUALIFIED VETERANS.—

''(i) IN GENERAL.—Subparagraph (A) shall be applied without regard to subclause (II) of clause (ii) thereof in the case of an individual seeking treatment as a qualified veteran with respect to whom the pre-screening notice contains—

''(I) qualified veteran status documentation,

''(II) qualified proof of unemployment compensation, and

''(III) an affidavit furnished by the individual stating, under penalty of perjury, that the information provided under subclauses (I) and (II) is true.

''(ii) QUALIFIED VETERAN STATUS DOCUMENTATION.—For purposes of clause (i), the term 'qualified veteran status documentation' means any documentation provided to an individual by the Department of Defense or the National Guard upon release or discharge from the Armed Forces which includes information sufficient to establish that such individual is a veteran.

''(iii) QUALIFIED PROOF OF UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION.—For purposes of clause (i), the term 'qualified proof of unemployment compensation' means, with respect to an individual, checks or other proof of receipt of payment of unemployment compensation to such individual for periods aggregating not less than 4 weeks (in the case of an individual seeking treatment under paragraph (3)(A)(iii)), or not less than 6 months (in the case of an individual seeking treatment under clause (ii)(II) or (iv) of paragraph (3)(A)), during the 1-year period ending on the hiring date.''.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by this section shall apply to individuals who begin work for the employer after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 454. CREDIT MADE AVAILABLE AGAINST PAYROLL TAXES IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Paragraph (2) of section 52(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended—

(1) by striking ''QUALIFIED TAX-EXEMPT ORGANIZATIONS'' in the heading and inserting ''CERTAIN EMPLOYERS'', and

(2) by striking ''by qualified tax-exempt organizations'' and inserting ''by certain employers''.

(b) CREDIT ALLOWED TO CERTAIN FOR-PROFIT EMPLOYERS.—Subsection (e) of section 3111 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended—

(1) by inserting ''or a qualified for-profit employer'' after ''If a qualified tax-exempt organization'' in paragraph (1),

(2) by striking ''with respect to whom a credit would be allowable under section 38 by reason of section 51 if the organization were not a qualified tax-exempt organization'' in paragraph (1),

(3) by inserting ''or for-profit employer'' after ''employees of the organization'' each place it appears in paragraphs (1) and (2),

(4) by inserting ''in the case of a qualified tax-exempt organization,'' before ''by only taking into account'' in subparagraph (C) of paragraph (3),

(5) by inserting ''or for-profit employer'' after ''the organization'' in paragraph (4),

(6) by redesignating subparagraph (B) of paragraph (5) as subparagraph (C) of such paragraph, by striking ''and'' at the end of subparagraph (A) of such paragraph, and by inserting after subparagraph (A) of such paragraph the following new subparagraph:

''(B) the term 'qualified for-profit employer' means, with respect to a taxable year, an employer not described in subparagraph (A), but only if—

''(i) such employer does not have profits for any of the 3 taxable years preceding such taxable year, and

''(ii) such employer elects under section 51(j) not to have section 51 apply to such taxable year, and'', and

(7) by striking ''has meaning given such term by section 51(d)(3)'' in subparagraph (C) of paragraph (5), as so redesignated, and inserting ''means a qualified veteran (within the meaning of section 51(d)(3)) with respect to whom a credit would be allowable under section 38 by reason of section 51 if the employer of such veteran were not a qualified tax-exempt organization or a qualified for-profit employer''.

(c) TRANSFERS TO FEDERAL OLD-AGE AND SURVIVORS INSURANCE TRUST FUND.—There are hereby appropriated to the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Trust Fund and the Federal Disability Insurance Trust Fund established under section 201 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401) amounts equal to the reduction in revenues to the Treasury by reason of the amendments made by subsections (a) and (b). Amounts appropriated by the preceding sentence shall be transferred from the general fund at such times and in such manner as to replicate to the extent possible the transfers which would have occurred to such Trust Fund had such amendments not been enacted.

(d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsections (a) and (b) shall apply to individuals who begin work for the employer after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 455. REPORT.

Not later than 2 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor, shall report to the Congress on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the amendments made by sections 452, 453, and 454 in increasing the employment of veterans. Such report shall include the results of a survey, conducted, if needed, in consultation with the Veterans' Employment and Training Service of the Department of Labor, to determine how many veterans are hired by each employer that claims the credit under section 51, by reason of subsection (d)(1)(B) thereof, or section 3111(e) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

SEC. 456. TREATMENT OF POSSESSIONS.

(a) PAYMENTS TO POSSESSIONS.—

(1) MIRROR CODE POSSESSIONS.—The Secretary of the Treasury shall pay to each possession of the United States with a mirror code tax system amounts equal to the loss to that possession by reason of the amendments made by this subtitle. Such amounts shall be determined by the Secretary of the Treasury based on information provided by the government of the respective possession of the United States.

(2) OTHER POSSESSIONS.—The Secretary of the Treasury shall pay to each possession of the United States which does not have a mirror code tax system the amount estimated by the Secretary of the Treasury as being equal to the loss to that possession that would have occurred by reason of the amendments made by this subtitle if a mirror code tax system had been in effect in such possession. The preceding sentence shall not apply with respect to any possession of the United States unless such possession establishes to the satisfaction of the Secretary that the possession has implemented (or, at the discretion of the Secretary, will implement) an income tax benefit which is substantially equivalent to the income tax credit in effect after the amendments made by this subtitle.

(b) COORDINATION WITH CREDIT ALLOWED AGAINST UNITED STATES INCOME TAXES.—The credit allowed against United States income taxes for any taxable year under the amendments made by this subtitle to section 51 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to any person with respect to any qualified veteran shall be reduced by the amount of any credit (or other tax benefit described in subsection (a)(2)) allowed to such person against income taxes imposed by the possession of the United States by reason of this section with respect to such qualified veteran for such taxable year.

(c) DEFINITIONS AND SPECIAL RULES.—

(1) POSSESSION OF THE UNITED STATES.—For purposes of this section, the term ''possession of the United States'' includes American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands.

(2) MIRROR CODE TAX SYSTEM.—For purposes of this section, the term ''mirror code tax system'' means, with respect to any possession of the United States, the income tax system of such possession if the income tax liability of the residents of such possession under such system is determined by reference to the income tax laws of the United States as if such possession were the United States.

(3) TREATMENT OF PAYMENTS.—For purposes of section 1324(b)(2) of title 31, United States Code, the payments under this section shall be treated in the same manner as a refund due from credit provisions described in such section.

SA 2802. Mr. BOOZMAN 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:

SECTION 918. REPEAL OF CERTAIN REDUCTIONS MADE BY THE BIPARTISAN BUDGET ACT OF 2013.

Section 403 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 (Public Law 113–67) is repealed as of the date of the enactment of such Act.

SA 2803. Ms. WARREN (for herself, Mr. RUBIO, and Mr. MARKEY) 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 367, after line 14, insert the following:

SEC. ____. PLACEMENT OF A CHAIR HONORING AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR/MISSING IN ACTION ON THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL GROUNDS.

(a) FINDINGS.—The Congress finds the following:

(1) In recent years, commemorative chairs honoring American Prisoners of War/Missing in Action have been placed in prominent locations across the United States.

(2) The United States Capitol Grounds are an appropriate location to place a commemorative chair honoring American Prisoners of War/Missing in Action.

(b) OBTAINING AND PLACEMENT OF CHAIR.—

(1) OBTAINING CHAIR.—The Architect of the Capitol shall enter into an agreement to obtain a chair featuring the logo of the National League of POW/MIA Families under such terms and conditions as the Architect considers appropriate and consistent with applicable law.

(2) PLACEMENT.—Not later than 2 years after the date of enactment of this section, the Architect shall place the chair obtained under paragraph (1) on the United States Capitol Grounds in a suitable permanent location.

(c) FUNDING.—

(1) DONATIONS.—The Architect of the Capitol may—

(A) enter into an agreement with any organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 that is exempt from taxation under section 501(a) of that Code to solicit private donations to carry out the purposes of this section; and

(B) accept donations of funds, property, and services to carry out the purposes of this section.

(2) COSTS.—All costs incurred in carrying out the purposes of this section shall be paid for with private donations received under paragraph (1).

SA 2804. Ms. LANDRIEU 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 61, between lines 5 and 6, insert the following:

SEC. 314. PROGRAM ON ESTABLISHMENT OF SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING COMMUNITIES FOR VETERANS AND CAREGIVERS.

(a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—Commencing not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall implement a pilot program to assess the feasibility and advisability of establishing and promoting semi-independent living communities for covered veterans and their caregivers.

(b) COVERED VETERANS.—For purposes of this section, a covered veteran is any veteran who is enrolled in the system of annual patient enrollment established and operated by the Secretary under section 1705 of title 38, United States Code.

(c) DURATION OF PROGRAM.—The program shall be carried out during the three-year period beginning on the date of the commencement of the pilot program.

(d) LOCATIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry out the pilot program in not fewer than three sites selected by the Secretary for purposes of the pilot program.

(2) CONSIDERATIONS.—In selecting locations for the pilot program, the Secretary shall consider the feasibility and advisability of selecting locations in the following areas:

(A) Areas that provide access to complimentary services, including to services of the Veterans Administration.

(B) Areas that allow for group and individual interaction to occur through intentional community planning.

(C) Areas in different geographic locations and regions of the United States.

(e) LIMITATION ON EXPENSES.—In establishing and supporting the pilot program, the Secretary may expend amounts as follows:

(1) For planning and initial implementation of a pilot site, not more than $250,000.

(2) For establishment and support of a pilot site, not more than $750,000.

(f) REPURPOSING OF PHYSICAL SPACE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subsection (e), the Secretary may, in carrying out the pilot program, authorize the repurposing of existing Federally owned space as the Secretary considers appropriate for purposes of the pilot program.

(2) REPURPOSING EXCEPTION.—Existing physical space used for the direct delivery of health care to patients may not be repurposed under paragraph (1).

(g) VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION.—The participation of a covered veteran in the pilot program shall be at the election of the covered veteran.

(h) REPORTS.—

(1) PERIODIC REPORTS.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the commencement of the pilot program and not less frequently than once every 90 days thereafter until the completion of the pilot program, 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 activities carried out to implement the pilot program, including outreach activities to veterans and community organizations.

(2) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the commencement of the pilot program and not less frequently than once every year thereafter until the completion of the pilot program, 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 detailing—

(A) the timeline for completion, the locations selected, and conclusions of the Secretary as a result of the pilot program; and

(B) recommendations for the continuation or expansion of the pilot program.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Ms. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 27, 2014, at 9:30 a.m.

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

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Ms. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 27, 2014, at 2:30 p.m.

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

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

Ms. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 27, 2014, at 10 a.m. to conduct a hearing entitled ''The Semiannual Monetary Policy Report to the Congress.''

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

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Ms. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 27, 2014, at 10:30 a.m. in room SR–253 of the Russell Senate Office Building to conduct a hearing entitled ''North Pacific Perspectives on Magnuson-Stevens Act Reauthorization.''

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

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Ms. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 27, 2014, at 11:15 a.m., to hold a hearing entitled ''International Parental Child Abduction.''

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

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

Ms. SHAHEEN. 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 27, 2014, at 10 a.m. in room SH–216 of the Hart Senate Office Building to conduct a hearing entitled ''Promoting College Access and Success For Students With Disabilities.''

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

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Ms. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 27, 2014, at 1:30 p.m. to conduct a hearing entitled ''Recycling Electronics: A Common Sense Solution for Enhancing Government Efficiency and Protecting Our Environment.''

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

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Ms. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate, on February 27, 2014, at 10 a.m., in SD–226 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, to conduct an executive business meeting.

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

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

Ms. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Select Committee on Intelligence be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 27, 2014, at 2:30 p.m.

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

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER

Ms. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Water and Power of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on February 27, 2014, at 2:30 p.m., in room SD–366 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

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

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Basant Sanghera, a Brookings fellow in my office, be granted floor privileges for the remainder of today's session of the Senate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my legal fellow, Don Bell, be granted floor privileges for the remainder of the calendar year.

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

RESOLUTIONS SUBMITTED TODAY

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to immediate consideration en bloc of the following resolutions, which were submitted earlier today:

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution en bloc.

Mr. REID. I ask consent the resolutions be agreed to, the preambles be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table en bloc, with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolutions were agreed to.

The preambles were agreed to. (The resolutions, with their preambles, are printed in today's RECORD under ''Submitted Resolutions.'')

MEASURES READ THE FIRST TIME—S. 2062, S. 2066, S. 2067, and H.R. 3865

Mr. REID. Madam President, there are four bills at the desk and I ask for their first reading en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bills by title for the first time.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2062) to authorize Members of Congress to bring an action for declaratory and injunctive relief in response to a written statement by the President or any other official in the executive branch directing officials of the executive branch to not enforce a provision of law.

A bill (S. 2066) to amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit the intentional discrimination of a person or organization by an employee of the Internal Revenue Service.

A bill (S. 2067) to prohibit the Department of the Treasury from assigning tax statuses to organizations based on their political beliefs and activities.

An act (H.R. 3865) to prohibit the Internal Revenue Service from modifying the standard for determining whether an organization is operated exclusively for the promotion of social welfare for purposes of section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I now ask for a second reading en bloc on each of these four measures, but I object to my own request en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bills will be read for the second time on the next legislative day.

ORDERS FOR MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2014

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 2 p.m. on Monday, March 3, 2014; that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, and 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 until 5 p.m. with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each; that following morning business, the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the nomination of Debo Adegbile with up to 30 minutes of debate equally divided and controlled in the usual form prior to the cloture vote on the nomination; and that for the purposes of rule XXII, Friday, February 28, 2014, count as an intervening day.

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

PROGRAM

Mr. REID. The next rollcall vote will be at 5:30 p.m. on Monday.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2014, at 2 P.M.

Mr. REID. 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 6:46 p.m., adjourned until Monday, March 3, at 2 p.m.

NOMINATIONS

Executive nominations received by the Senate:

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

LISA S. DISBROW, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE, VICE JAMIE MICHAEL MORIN.

LAURA JUNOR, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE A PRINCIPAL DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, VICE JO ANN ROONEY, RESIGNED.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

ROBERT W. HOLLEYMAN II, OF LOUISIANA, TO BE A DEPUTY UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE, WITH THE RANK OF AMBASSADOR, VICE DEMETRIOS J. MARANTIS, RESIGNED.

INTER-AMERICAN FOUNDATION

JUAN CARLOS ITURREGUI, OF MARYLAND, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE INTER–AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR A TERM EXPIRING JUNE 26, 2014, VICE THOMAS JOSEPH DODD, TERM EXPIRED.

JUAN CARLOS ITURREGUI, OF MARYLAND, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE INTER–AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR A TERM EXPIRING JUNE 26, 2020. (REAPPOINTMENT)

ROBERTA S. JACOBSON, OF MARYLAND, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE INTER–AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR A TERM EXPIRING SEPTEMBER 20, 2014, VICE ADOLFO A. FRANCO, TERM EXPIRED.

ROBERTA S. JACOBSON, OF MARYLAND, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE INTER–AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR A TERM EXPIRING SEPTEMBER 20, 2020. (REAPPOINTMENT)

BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS

KAREN KORNBLUH, OF NEW YORK, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS FOR A TERM EXPIRING AUGUST 13, 2016, VICE MICHAEL P. MEEHAN, TERM EXPIRED.

INTER–AMERICAN FOUNDATION

ANNETTE TADDEO–GOLDSTEIN, OF FLORIDA, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE INTER–AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR A TERM EXPIRING SEPTEMBER 20, 2018, VICE JOHN P. SALAZAR, TERM EXPIRED.

CONFIRMATION

Executive nomination confirmed by the Senate February 27, 2014:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

MICHAEL L. CONNOR, OF NEW MEXICO, TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.