

doing that in the right way, but I also stand here with 35 other Senators saying that to do that and make another program that exists more insolvent is not acceptable. I oppose that. I hope that is not used to create a new entitlement.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Madam President, I also ask unanimous consent that the Republican time be preserved.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to have about 6 minutes to address the body on national defense.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Madam President, I wish to begin my comments on this year's national defense authorization by first thanking all the members of the Personnel Subcommittee. And I particularly would like to thank the subcommittee's ranking member, Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM. He and I have worked together for several years on this subcommittee, changing the chairmanship back and forth, and I have always found our time on the subcommittee is decidedly non-partisan, bipartisan, regardless of who currently chairs it.

All the Members of the Personnel Subcommittee strive to do what is right by servicemembers and their families, and any disagreements we have are minimal, and are always focused on how best to serve those who serve us.

The annual National Defense Authorization Act is one of the most important pieces of legislation that Congress passes every year. It provides authority for everything the Department of Defense does, from the ships and planes it buys, to the pay and compensation of servicemembers, to retirement and disability benefits. So I look forward to this year, once again, passing a Defense Authorization Act for the 48th year in a row.

As in past years, the committee has focused heavily on personnel issues, including taking care of the families of

servicemembers. There is an old axiom in the military that you recruit the soldier but you retain the family. So providing support to those families is more important now than ever before. I am happy with the bill, and I recommend it to my fellow Senators. I wish to emphasize that the committee also voted this bill out of committee unanimously.

The bill before us authorizes \$135.6 billion for military personnel, including pay, allowances, bonuses, death benefits, and permanent change of station moves. The bill contains many important provisions that will improve the quality of life of our men and women in uniform and their families.

First and foremost, the bill would authorize a 3.4-percent pay raise, which is half a percent higher than the increase in the Employment Cost Index and the administration's request and reauthorizes over 25 types of bonuses and special pays aimed at encouraging enlistment and reenlistment.

The bill also addresses the administration's request to increase the permanent end strengths of all the services over last year's authorization. The bill authorizes fiscal year 2010 end strengths of 547,400 for the Army; 202,100 for the Marine Corps; 331,700 for the Air Force; and 328,800 for the Navy. The Active Duty end strength of every service will increase over last year's levels. Moreover, the bill authorizes additional Army Active Duty end strength in fiscal years 2011 and 2012, if needed.

The bill also authorizes pay for travel and transportation expenses for Reserve component members to go home when training has been suspended at their temporary duty station. Operation Airlift, as we call it, came to my attention when members of the 110th Medical Battalion, based in Lincoln, NE, were stranded at Fort Lewis, WA, when training was suspended and the base was shut down for the holidays. Military rules prohibited using military funds to pay for their travel back to Nebraska until training resumed. This measure addresses this problem which has occurred in many other States and to many other reservists and guardsmen and demands that the military commands appropriately plan and schedule training exercises.

The bill also supports the continued provision of world-class health care to our servicemembers and their families, authorizing \$27.9 billion for the Defense Health Program.

The bill authorizes TRICARE standard coverage for National Guard and Reserve retirees previously in an uncovered so-called gray area. The TRICARE gray area retiree measure ensures nearly 225,226 eligible retirees nationwide will have the opportunity to purchase coverage under the military's TRICARE health care program.

In support of our increasing number of wounded warriors, the bill authorizes special compensation for caregivers for the time and assistance they

provide to servicemembers with combat-related catastrophic injuries or illnesses requiring assistance in everyday living. Additional support is provided through this bill which authorizes travel and transportation allowances for nonmedical attendants of very seriously wounded, ill or injured servicemembers.

To ensure we continue to increase the care of our wounded warriors, this bill requires the establishment of a task force to assess the effectiveness of the policies and programs to assist and support the care, management, and transition of recovering wounded, ill, and injured servicemembers.

To help resolve the dire shortage of physicians needed to care for the mental health of combat proven servicemembers, the bill authorizes the service Secretaries to add up to 25 officers each year as students at accredited schools of psychology for training leading to the degree of doctor of psychology in clinical psychology. In an effort to ensure our servicemembers get the mental health care they need and to help overcome the stigma associated with seeking mental health care, the bill requires person-to-person mental health assessments at designated intervals for servicemembers deployed in connection with contingency operations.

The bill also requires initiatives to increase the number of military and civilian behavioral health personnel at the Department of Defense.

Continuing our efforts to support wounded warriors and their families, the bill requires the Secretary of Defense to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the impacts of military deployment on dependent children of servicemembers, and a review of the mental health care and counseling services available to military children.

Finally, the bill authorizes \$45 million in impact aid to local school districts, including \$5 million for educational services for severely disabled children, and \$10 million for districts experiencing rapid increases in the number of students due to rebasing, activation of new military units or base realignment and closure.

These are just some of the highlights. There were over 60 legislative provisions affecting personnel policy, pay, end strength, health care, and family support. It is paramount we take care of our servicemembers by ensuring their pay and compensation is what it should be, and needs to be, to sustain the All-Volunteer Force and enable them to fight and win the Nation's wars and to take care of them and their families when they return home injured and wounded.

So, again, I would like to thank Senator GRAHAM and all the members of the Personnel Subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee. I look forward to working with our colleagues to pass this extremely important legislation as we continue the process of authorization of the parent bill.

With that, I conclude my remarks.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I understand we have up to 10 minutes each?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. That is correct.

(The remarks of Ms. LANDRIEU pertaining to the introduction of S. 1458 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

FOREIGN ADOPTED CHILDREN EQUALITY ACT

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I wish to speak for a moment about another bill Senator INHOFE and I introduced earlier: the Foreign Adopted Children Equality Act. This would make a small but important change in the way orphans are identified or classified when they are adopted overseas so that they can become automatic citizens.

I was very proud to work with Senator KENNEDY on this issue, with Senator Don Nickles from Oklahoma when he served in the body. We worked very hard to find a way, when families go overseas to adopt, once that adoption is final—we believe the active adoption itself puts that child in automatic custody of that parent. That parent, being an American citizen, should automatically be able to transfer that citizenship to that adopted child just as if you are born in the United States to an American citizen or you are born in the United States, you are an automatic American citizen; and most certainly if you are born overseas, but if your parents are citizens, you are an automatic citizen of the United States. You don't need any extra paperwork done on your behalf because we believe the act of adoption should be treated the same way as the act of birth. We believe this right should be transferred to orphan children adopted overseas.

Right now, there is a little bit of a glitch in the law that is not allowing this. This act would correct that.

I will finally end with one of my most wonderful memories of my time in the Senate, which was in Faneuil Hall in Boston with Senator KENNEDY and with Congressman DELAHUNT, when we, on one special day, were able to swear in as citizens of the United States thousands of children who had been waiting to become citizens, having been adopted by American families. That was a very proud moment of mine and something many of us worked on. But this bill will take that to a new level. When families travel overseas to

adopt, as my sister and many relatives and friends of Members of Congress took the opportunity to do, at the time the adoption is official in that country, the child becomes an automatic citizen of the United States, which is a great benefit.

As I grow older in my life, I realize what an extraordinary privilege it is to be a citizen of the United States of America. So as our families adopt, that citizenship will be automatically transferred to their adopted children.

So I thank you. Again, it is the Foreign Adopted Children Equality Act I am speaking about this morning and introducing for consideration of the body the Families for Orphans Act.

Thank you, Madam President. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized for 20 minutes in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I rise to speak of two topics. The first is health care.

We had a significant development yesterday in the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, of which I am a member, where we actually voted the bill out of the committee. It is the first time in many years that a major piece of health care legislation, other than major initiatives such as children's health insurance, has been voted out of the Senate committee.

We have a long way to go. We have the Senate Finance Committee working on this, the House is working on this, and President Obama has made this a major priority of his administration and I believe part of his economic recovery short-term and especially long-term. I commend two people for their work: Chairman DODD, working in place of our chairman, Senator KENNEDY. Between the two of them, they did a great job of leading this effort, not just in the course of some 60 hours of hearings and probably another 20 or more hours prior to the hearings—prior to the markup when we were offering amendments—but many months and weeks and, in the case of both of these Senators, years working on health care. I also commend the staffs, and my staff, especially Morna Murray, who did great work.

I say all that because it was a significant development. We know it is just

one chapter in a long book. We have a long way to go. I think it is significant that a bill is out of a committee and moving through the Senate.

I wish to focus in particular on a couple of aspects of the bill and then move to some reactions on the question of health care that we get from across Pennsylvania.

The bill itself has as its foundation this principle: The status quo is not only unacceptable, it is, in fact, unsustainable. We cannot continue to ignore the issue of health care. We have to act on it this year—not next year or the year after but this year, 2009—at long last tackling a problem the American people have been debating for decades now across the country. Now we have a President who is leading, with the opportunity to finally make progress.

The bill does a lot. First, as part of its foundation, it covers 97 percent of the American people. It is critical that we make that part of the final bill. Secondly, in terms of the overall impact of the bill, it will reduce costs, it will preserve choices, and it will, in fact, enhance quality. All of the issues we have talked about for years are now going to be part of this bill.

People have been frustrated by the unfairness of the failure of insurance companies to cover preexisting conditions. It is right there in the bill. Preexisting conditions, in the bill, will no longer be a bar to treatment and to the curing of disease and the treatment of individuals.

It also has as a foundation to it the question of what to do to preserve choice? The American people have a right to not only keep the health care they like, but also they should have a choice—if they don't like what they have or if they have no insurance at all, they ought to be given a choice. I believe part of that choice isn't just within the framework of private insurance, the insurance companies, but, in fact, a public option, preserving not just choice for the American people but also enhancing competition and bringing down costs. That is essential. Even as we are concerned about the almost 50 million Americans, including 5 million children, who don't have coverage, we have to make sure we are preserving that choice.

So reducing costs, preserving choice, and enhancing quality are very much a part of the bill that does change the status quo. At some point, people in Washington are going to have to join one team or the other—the status quo team, the "can't do it now, satisfied with the current system" team, or the side of changing the status quo, the side of reform, the team that is working with President Obama to at long last address the question of quality, the question of access, and the question of bringing down the cost of care for our families and our businesses. So they have to choose their team. In my judgment, there are two teams: the status quo team and the reform change team with President Obama.