

State was that in rural areas of the country—rural areas of Minnesota, rural areas of Virginia, rural areas in Wyoming—there are not enough paramedics. Here we have these returning soldiers who are trained in this area, but for them to have to move again and to go through an entire 2 years of training can be very difficult. The idea is not to say no training is needed but to simply give them some credit; set up rules to make it easy for colleges to give them credit for that on-the-job training they had as paramedics in Iraq and Afghanistan. It involves two problems: the problem of returning veterans who don't have jobs, and the problem of the lack of paramedics in the rural areas. So we are very hopeful, with the help of Senator ENZI and Senator HARKIN, that we will be able to get this bill on the health care reform bill.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass not just the Veterans to Paramedics Act but also this bill we introduced last week to make it easier for veterans, when they come home—our soldiers—to choose if they want to go to a pipefitting program or to go to a law enforcement program. For those veterans, there will probably be 10 percent of them who don't feel at that moment that they want to pursue an academic degree, but they need a job.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor, and I note 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. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2010

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3082, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3082) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2010, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Johnson-Hutchison amendment No. 2730, in the nature of a substitute.

Udall (NM) amendment No. 2737 (to amendment No. 2730), to make available from Medical Services, \$150,000,000 for homeless veterans comprehensive service programs.

Johnson amendment No. 2733 (to amendment No. 2730), to increase by \$50,000,000 the amount available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for minor construction projects for the purpose of converting unused Department of Veterans Affairs structures into housing with supportive services for homeless veterans, and to provide an offset.

Franken-Johnson amendment No. 2745 (to amendment No. 2730), to ensure that \$5,000,000 is available for a study to assess the feasibility and advisability of using service dogs for the treatment or rehabilitation of veterans with physical or mental injuries or disabilities.

Inouye amendment No. 2754 (to amendment No. 2730), to permit \$68,500,000, as requested by the Missile Defense Agency of the Department of Defense, to be used for the construction of a test facility to support the Phased Adaptive Approach for missile defense in Europe, with an offset.

Coburn amendment No. 2757 (to amendment No. 2730), to require public disclosure of certain reports.

Durbin amendment No. 2759 (to amendment No. 2730), to enhance the ability of the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit and retain health care administrators and providers in underserved rural areas.

Durbin amendment No. 2760 (to amendment No. 2730), to designate the North Chicago Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Illinois, as the "Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center."

Johanns amendment No. 2752 (to amendment No. 2730), prohibiting use of funds to fund the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN).

Akaka amendment No. 2740 (to amendment No. 2730), to extend the authority for a regional office of the Department of Veterans Affairs in the Republic of the Philippines.

Menendez amendment No. 2741 (to amendment No. 2730), to provide, with an offset, an additional \$4,000,000 for grants to assist States in establishing, expanding, or improving State veterans cemeteries.

DeMint (for Inhofe) amendment No. 2774 (to amendment No. 2730), to prohibit the use of funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this act to construct or modify a facility in the United States or its territories to permanently or temporarily hold any individual held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

DeMint amendment No. 2779 (to amendment No. 2730), to prohibit the use of funds for the transfer or detention in the United States of detainees at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, if certain veterans programs for fiscal year 2010 are not fully funded.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, as we come back from the Veterans Day recess, the Senate resumes consideration of the MILCON-VA appropriations bill. As I have stated several times on the floor during this debate, this is a vital piece of legislation that needs to be passed as quickly as possible.

As I speak, the VA is operating under a stopgap funding measure. Funding the VA in that manner is far from ideal and interrupts planning and hiring at VA hospitals. The bill before the Senate today protects against this sort of problem in the future by providing \$48.2 billion in advance appropriations for VA medical care. This is something that is supported by both sides of the aisle. In fact, this bill is one of the most bipartisan measures that we take up every year. That is why it mystifies me that we seem to be in a holding pattern.

One of the most critical parts of this bill is medical care for our Nation's vets. The VA is expecting to treat almost 6.1 million patients in fiscal year 2010, an increase of 2.1 percent over last year. Moreover, the Department estimates it will see the number of Iraq and Afghanistan war vets rise to 419,000 this year, a 61-percent increase in patient load since 2008. With these facts in mind, the bill targets the vast majority of discretionary funding for vets' medical care. The bill provides a total of \$44.7 billion for medical care. Additionally, it provides \$580 million for vital medical and prosthetic research. This is one of the many reasons why we need to get this bill passed and sent to conference as soon as possible.

In addition, hundreds of urgent military construction projects are on hold awaiting passage of this bill.

Under a unanimous consent agreement entered into last Monday, there are 27 amendments in order to this bill and one motion. As I understand it, we will soon be voting on one of the amendments and the motion to commit. Between now and the time of the vote, I wish to try to clear some of the other amendments that are in order to the bill. I have read all these amendments, and the vast majority are not controversial. It seems to me we should be able to clear them. If there are objections to any of these amendments, I urge my colleagues to come to the floor and express what objections they may have.

Taking care of our vets and our military troops and their families is one of the most important tasks of this body. Surely, we can all work together and pass this bill quickly.

AMENDMENT NO. 2781 TO AMENDMENT NO. 2779

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator DURBIN, I send a second-degree amendment to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. JOHNSON], for Mr. DURBIN, proposes an amendment numbered 2781 to amendment 2779.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

At the end of the amendment, add the following:

The provision of the amendment shall become effective 1 day after enactment.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEMIEUX. Mr. 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.