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.