

month waiting period before he can receive benefits.

A veteran from Salina, KS, in the central part of our State indicates that he received double vaccinations before he was deployed to Desert Storm due to the fact that his predeployment package had been lost. He indicates he now suffers from several health conditions as a result and has been informed that the VA denies his benefits.

A veteran from Hutchinson, north of Wichita, indicated he has been fighting with the VA for 7 years on appeal. He has something pending with VA. They provided him an answer that was unsatisfactory, and he is appealing that decision. He claims the VA has continued dragging out his appeal process, and he has difficulty finding updates on his appeal when he contacts the VA. That is an example of someone who called the office and asked for help.

A veteran from Wichita said his doctors discovered a mass on his brain, and it will require an MRI to determine what the mass is. The earliest appointment available for him is on June 30. He, of course, as all of us would be, is concerned over that long wait. This is a veteran who has been diagnosed with a mass on his brain, doesn't know what it is, needs an MRI—exactly what a doctor would order to get additional diagnostic information—and cannot get the MRI until June 30.

A veteran from Junction City—which is a community that is adjacent to Fort Riley where a significant number of veterans and military retirees reside—indicates that he is living in a nursing home. He is 100-percent service connected with a disability and the VA is currently paying for his nursing home services. He has recently been informed that his physical therapy will no longer be covered by the VA and they are discontinuing payment but offer no explanation as to why. He filed an appeal late last year and has not received a response or status update from the VA since that request.

A veteran from Lawrence has had an appeal pending with the VA for over 1½ years and wants our help because he has received no communication from the VA in more than a year.

A veteran from Overland Park, KS—a suburb of Kansas City—is the primary caregiver for his wife who suffers from Alzheimer's. He has had tremendous difficulty in working with the VA to schedule appointments when he can be away from her to receive his treatments from the VA.

A daughter of a veteran from Wichita who passed away in the Wichita VA is concerned about the events that took place while he was in the care of the VA.

A veteran who lives north of Bird City, KS, is a category 1 disabled marine veteran due to a service-connected disability. He indicates that he has had two heart attacks and is now paying for stress tests and his own medical bills out of pocket because the VA has denied him fee basis. What that means

is if you are a veteran in Bird City, KS, which is the very northwest corner of our State, access to a VA hospital is a long way away, and that fee basis allows the veteran to receive care and treatment from a doctor and hospital closer to their hometown or neighborhood.

My point is that the people who are most deserving of care and attention are not receiving the care and attention they need. The Department of Veterans Affairs is supposed to provide the services and benefits earned and promised to those veterans. This is not anything that is out of the ordinary.

This report is something I read every week, and the reports that I convey to my colleagues here on the floor of the Senate are not unusual. I suppose what is unusual is that the number is increasing. What used to be a shorter list of problems with the VA has grown over time to be a longer and longer list.

I have been asking for a plan by the Department of Veterans Affairs from its top leadership, Secretary Shinseki, to explain to me, the Senate, the American people, and veterans what the Department of Veterans Affairs is going to do to meet the needs of these and other veterans across our country.

As I have indicated on the Senate floor before on this topic, if we are incapable of caring for our veterans today, how are we going to be capable of taking care of veterans in the future as more and more military men and women return from our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? The physical and mental circumstances those veterans will find themselves in will be even more difficult and challenging.

We have an aging veteran population from World War II and now Vietnam veterans will most likely be needing more care and treatment from the Department of Veterans Affairs. What we need is the leadership that is necessary to meet the needs of these veterans and a commitment that the status quo is unacceptable and that the bureaucratic culture at the Department of Veterans Affairs is not something that is going to remain. There is going to be a concerted effort to make certain that the Department meets the needs of those who served and sacrificed for our country.

Again, who, other than those who served our country, would we expect to be at the top of the list to receive the most timely and highest quality of care than those who served our Nation? It seems to me that as these issues are raised, we have a Department of Veterans Affairs that is doing damage control. What we need is a Department of Veterans Affairs that reduces the damage being done to the veterans—the men and women who served our country—in Kansas and across our Nation.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION ANNIVERSARY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, last Saturday we celebrated the 60th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education. In that unanimous opinion, the U.S. Supreme Court held that the State-sanctioned segregation of public schools was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and therefore unconstitutional. The Court "concluded that," in the field of public education, the doctrine of separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." This landmark decision is rightly celebrated every year.

The case of Hernandez v. State of Texas, however, decided by the Supreme Court just 2 weeks before the Brown decision, is an often overlooked and yet momentous advancement of civil rights in our country. In that case, the Supreme Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment protects those beyond the racial classes of white or black, and extends to all racial groups in the United States. Fortunately, we are only left to imagine a world without the Hernandez decision, a world that would have blocked Hispanics and other racial groups from the promise of equality made in the Constitution.

Taken together, the Brown and Hernandez decisions stand as landmarks of progress in our country. We have come far in the march towards equality; yet, we must recognize that we can and must achieve more. Six decades after the Brown and Hernandez decisions, our country must continue to confront social, economic, and racial inequalities throughout this country.

Racial inequality is not an issue that our society can just wish away in the 21st century. It still exists in our criminal justice system, educational, and voting systems, and in our housing and lending markets. As chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and as a member of the Senate for nearly 40 years, I have fought to uphold the promise of equality in our fundamental charter.

The anniversary of these civil rights cases is a moment to reflect on our past, and to evaluate and commit to the next steps that we need to take as we strive to build a more perfect Union. As many families across the Nation celebrate the graduation of hard-