

## RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ENZI). Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

## MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business until the hour of 12 p.m., with the time equally divided between the Senator from Texas or her designee, and the Democratic leader or his designee.

The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I yield 7 minutes to the senior Senator from Alaska.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

## VETERANS DAY

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, it has been over 50 years since my good friends, Senator INOUE, Senator HOLLINGS, Senator WARNER, Senator LAUTENBERG, Senator AKAKA, and I returned home from World War II. When I joined the Senate in 1968, approximately half of the Members of the Senate were World War II veterans. While there are several Senators here who have served in Korea, Vietnam, and in later engagements, there are a few of us still around who lived through World War II. We are proud of a tradition of over 48 million Americans who have served in our Armed Forces since 1776.

Whenever our Nation has needed warriors to defend our Nation, young men and women in uniform have stepped forward, willing to bear that burden. This day, Veterans Day, is a reminder to us of their courage, bravery, and sacrifice.

These days, our thoughts are never far from a battlefield. New generations have answered the call to service, and as we meet today, they are defending us in some of the most dangerous places in the world, where they face determined enemies and terrorists. I join all here today in thanking each of them for their service and thank their families for their sacrifice.

I had the honor to serve in the Army Air Corps with a squadron in China in World War II. Our squadron motto was: We do the impossible immediately, miracles take slightly longer.

The history of our Nation's Armed Forces is one of impossible challenges and formidable enemies. But our men and women in uniform have met and overcome them on battlefields, and in the air, and on the sea and, as our Chaplain reminded us, under the sea, across the globe.

Secretary of State Colin Powell recently spoke of the tradition of service and said:

We have gone forth from our shores repeatedly over the last hundred years . . . and put

wonderful young men and women at risk, many of whom have lost their lives, and we have asked for nothing except enough ground to bury them in.

It is right and proper for the Senate to remember the young men and women who have served our great Nation in uniform and those who did not return because they made the ultimate sacrifice.

Veterans share a common bond. We are truly comrades in the deepest sense of the word, and I salute each one of them.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin is recognized.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, as the country marks the Veterans Day holiday, I wish to take a moment to express my thanks to the people of Wisconsin and to our Nation's veterans and their families.

I urge my colleagues and all Americans to take a moment today to reflect upon the meaning of this day and to remember those who have served and sacrificed to protect our country and the freedoms we enjoy as Americans.

Webster's Dictionary defines a veteran as "one with a long record of service in a particular activity or capacity" or "one who has been in the armed forces." But we can also define a veteran as a grandfather or a grandmother, a father or a mother, a brother or a sister, a son or a daughter, or a friend. Veterans live in all of our communities, and their contributions have touched all of our lives.

November 11 is a date with special significance in our history. On that day in 1918, at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, World War I ended. In 1926, a joint resolution of Congress called on the President to issue a proclamation to encourage all Americans to mark this day by displaying the U.S. flag and by observing the day with appropriate ceremonies.

In 1938, Armistice Day was designated as a legal holiday "to be dedicated to the cause of world peace" by an act of Congress. This annual recognition of the contributions and sacrifices of our Nation's veterans of World War I was renamed Veterans Day in 1954 so that we might also recognize the service and sacrifice of those who had fought in World War II and the veterans of all of America's other wars.

Our Nation's veterans and their families have given selflessly to the cause of protecting our freedom. Too many have given the ultimate sacrifice for their country on the battlefields of the Revolutionary War that gave birth to the United States, to the Civil War which sought to secure for all Americans the freedoms envisioned by the Founding Fathers, to the global fight against nazism and fascism in World War II.

In the last century, Americans fought and died in two World Wars and in conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf. They also participated in peacekeeping missions around the

globe, some of which are still ongoing. Today our men and women in uniform are waging a fight against terrorism and, at the same time, are participating in ongoing military operations in Iraq.

As we commemorate Veterans Day, 2003, we should reflect on the sacrifices—past, present, and future—that are made by our men and women in uniform and their families. We should also resolve to do more for our veterans to ensure they have a decent standard of living and adequate health care.

This is especially important as we welcome home a new generation of veterans who are serving in Iraq and in the fight against terrorism. Today's soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are tomorrow's veterans. These men and women selflessly put their lives on the line as the countless military personnel before them whom we honor today. We must ensure that their service and sacrifice, which is much lauded during times of conflict, is not forgotten once the battles have ended and our troops come home.

For that reason, I am committed to ensuring that the Department of Veterans Affairs makes every effort to educate our veterans about benefits for which they may be eligible through the VA.

Our veterans and their families have made great personal sacrifices to protect our freedoms. Making sure our veterans know about the benefits they have earned is an important first step in starting to repay this debt. That is why I am fighting to overturn a VA policy that prevents the agency from reaching out to veterans who may be eligible for health care benefits, and that is why I have introduced legislation to improve the VA's outreach to veterans.

In addition, I continue to hear from many Wisconsin veterans about the need to improve claims processing at the VA. These veterans are justifiably angry and frustrated about the amount of time it takes for the Veterans' Administration to process their claims. In some instances, veterans are waiting well over a year. Telling the men and women who served our country in the Armed Forces that they "just have to wait" is wrong and unacceptable.

Last month, the VA issued a press release declaring "partial victory" in its efforts to reduce the number of pending claims. The release noted that the VA has reduced its claims backlog from 432,000 to 253,000 over the last 2 years. I am pleased the VA has made claims processing a priority, but there is much more work to be done. I urge the Secretary to continue this effort to reduce the claims backlog. The more than a quarter of a million veterans who are still waiting to have their claims processed, coupled with the thousands of new veterans returning from the battlefield of Iraq and Afghanistan, deserve the concerted effort of the VA and the Pentagon to process

claims quickly and to educate new veterans about their benefits in an effective and clear manner that may help to prevent the filing of additional claims in the future.

I am looking forward to continuing to meet with veterans and their families around Wisconsin to hear directly from them what services they need and what gaps remain in the VA system.

So on Veterans Day, and throughout the year, let us continue to honor America's brave veterans and their families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I yield up to 7 minutes to the Senator from Virginia, Mr. WARNER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia is recognized.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise to join my colleagues on this magnificent day which we set aside for the veterans of all of our wars.

As I was presiding at the time we took a moment of silence, I reflected back to 1918 when the guns fell silent at 11 o'clock across the trenches in Europe. There was a young doctor there who had been wounded, who had been decorated, but he was still at his post in the trenches when that hour arrived. That was my father.

I read a poem in his honor and in honor of all veterans which reflects my understanding and my deep belief and gratitude to veterans. It is called "In Flanders Fields":

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

I wear one of those poppies on this Veterans Day. It is issued by the veterans organizations all across America in reverence to those who have gone before us to make it possible today to exercise free speech.

My distinguished colleague, Senator STEVENS, my friend of these 25 years in the Senate, just mentioned that there are five of us who are here who served in World War II. My record pales against his record, Senator HOLLINGS, Senator INOUE, and others. But I was privileged as a very young 17-year-old to volunteer and take up my responsibilities, as did all in my generation in those days. Yet the heavy lifting, the heavy work, the heavy losses had been done that went before us, and in 1945, when I was simply in a training command, the war ended.

I say that only because had it not been for what the U.S. military has done for me in these 58 years that I

have been privileged to be associated, I would not be here in the Senate. That is why I labor with others, primarily those on the Armed Services Committee, to do what we can for today's veterans and, most importantly, for those who are still in uniform and those who will follow in uniform in the generations to come, together with their families.

I speak in gratitude from my heart to all the veterans and, indeed, for what the military did for this humble soul to make it possible through the GI bill twice. I received it once for World War II and once for brief service again in Korea. Again, my heart is filled with gratitude, and it is such a magnificent day to rise and reflect.

Back in World War II, I remember on our block, when our neighbors were lost in battle, a gold star went on their door to remind all of the sacrifices of that family. And on the other doors were a little decal which said: We proudly have our son in the Army, the Navy, the Air Corps, the Marines, the Coast Guard.

Those were days when there was absolute sacrifice all across the Nation. Today, this Nation again is united. We stand strong behind our men and women of the Armed Forces, as it should be. So by the grace of God, by the sacrifices of all who have gone before us, we stand humbly today and express our gratitude to them and their families.

I ask unanimous consent that a list of United States service personnel casualties be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SERVICE PERSONNEL CASUALTIES

Contingency	Total casualties (KIA/WIA)	Killed in action (KIA)	Wounded in action (WIA)
World War I .....	321,000	115,000	206,000
World War II .....	1,077,245	405,399	671,846
Korea .....	139,852	36,568	103,284
Vietnam .....	211,506	58,203	153,303
Afghanistan .....	252	31	221
Iraq .....	2,336	398	1,938

Mr. WARNER. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I yield up to 4 minutes to the Senator from Wyoming, Mr. THOMAS.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, we all rise to recognize this day. As we think about it, I suspect there is no other day of recognition that has as much bearing on the freedoms we enjoy as this day of recognizing veterans. It is so important that we take time to recognize and honor those men and women who have worn this country's uniform.

Certainly, as we think about it today, our thoughts are primarily focused on those men and women now serving overseas in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places. Of course, historically we have many things to think about: Those who have given so much so we can continue to live in freedom.

I suppose if we have a weakness in terms of our recognition, it is identifying what others have done for us to be able to have the freedoms we enjoy and have done for so many years. I think it is appropriate we set this day aside not only to recognize those who have done so much but, frankly, to ensure young people understand the sacrifices that have been made. We want people who were not around at all in World War II, Korea, or even Vietnam to understand what has happened.

Dwight Eisenhower once said that:

War demands real toughness of fiber, not only in the soldiers who must endure, but in the homes that must sacrifice their best.

That is true. All families sacrifice as well. This morning, we visited a VA hospital in DC. We visited with a number of veterans who were being treated in that hospital, some from World War II who had done so much.

Today we honor those who made these sacrifices, in many cases the ultimate sacrifice in defense of liberty, justice, and democracy. We are engaged today in the struggle which will test our national resolve, and I hope today helps us to understand the importance of that resolve. A new generation of Americans has answered the call and is defending our country.

Today, as we commemorate and honor those who have gone before, we must remember the brave souls currently serving in harm's way. We must renew our commitment to the ideals for which so many have fought and died. We must never forget freedom has a very high price indeed. That price has been paid by our Nation's veterans and their families.

I was impressed when I think it was the commandant of the Marine Corps who said there is a direct connection between the land of the free and the home of the brave. That is true.

Today we say thank you on behalf of a very grateful Nation. We are extremely proud of all the veterans have done.

I ask unanimous consent the poem "A Cowboy Defends Us" be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objections, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

A COWBOY DEFENDS US

(By Tina Willis, Apr. 9, 2003)

I wonder what it means to you  
When you see the flutter of red, white, and blue  
I think of American history and days that are gone  
I think of our troops in Iraq and Iran  
I think of the folks that settled this west  
Who've raised sons and daughters and offered their best  
These children traded a tractor for a humvee's rough ride  
And their parents now wait with no sleep but much pride  
I think of the cowboy called to duty today  
Throwing his pony a last flake of hay  
Before boarding a bus in this dawn's early light  
As he joins the forces to fight the good fight  
I think of the bunkhouse with one empty bed

There's a tent in the sand where he'll now  
lay his head  
As I savor my freedom and pray for our  
troops  
I think of the cowboys that now wear infantry  
boots  
Their instincts and courage were learned on  
the range  
They're taking care of the homestead—with  
a scenery change  
Our nation is safer and stronger today  
Because some cowboy defends us—time zones  
away  
And I wonder what it means to you  
When you see the flutter of red, white, and  
blue. . . .

Mr. THOMAS. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I yield up to 4 minutes to the senior Senator from Missouri, Mr. BOND.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Texas and the others who have spoken.

It is a great honor and privilege to be on the Senate floor on this Veterans Day to acknowledge the sacrifices of America's veterans and the priceless service our veterans have rendered to a grateful Nation.

Earlier this morning Senator THOMAS, Senator INHOFE, and I visited the Washington VA hospital to say thank you. Previously, I had been to Walter Reed and Bethesda National Naval Medical Center, as I know many Members have, to say thanks also to those returning from the current war. In all of these visits and in everything we do, we should express our thankful appreciation to America's veterans, particularly while we find ourselves embroiled in a war against those seeking to destroy all America stands for, what we hold most dear, our freedom.

It is the soldier, sailor, airman, and the marine to whom we have turned for protection from terrorists and the failed nation states that support them. Our troops are performing in an exemplary manner, taking the fight to those who would harm us on enemy territory and on our terms. The events of September 11 and the military operations that have ensued since then have brought a renewed understanding and respect for our Nation's military and our veterans.

In response to the horrendous acts carried out on 9/11, our men and women in uniform have taken action, as our veterans have done countless times throughout history.

We are fighting the war on terrorism on many fronts, using all the tools at our disposal. We will win this conflict through the patient accumulation of successes, by meeting a series of challenges with determination, with will and with purpose. This campaign is a marathon, not a sprint. We must be mindful to think not only in the near term but to look ahead 5, 10, 15 years and to take this opportunity to shape our future world. We must find a way to help contribute to the peace and sta-

bility of what is clearly still a dangerous and unpredictable world.

After 9/11, President Bush said:

In the months ahead, our patience will be one of our strengths. . . . patience and understanding that it will take time to achieve our goals; patience in all the sacrifices that may come.

Today, sacrifices are being made by our troops who defend us far from home, and by their proud yet worried families. The sacrifices they make are the same sacrifices made by those who served before them. We ask an awful lot of those who wear the uniform. We ask them to leave their loved ones, to travel great distances, to risk injury, even risk death. They are dedicated, they are honorable, and they represent the very best of our country. We are indeed grateful for these countless sacrifices. We can never repay our debt to those who serve our Nation, but we can ensure they know they will never be forgotten. Today, we have some very real reminders of the cost of freedom. It is an absolute that we would not enjoy the freedoms we have today were it not for the willingness of our men and women to serve each of us and our country by committing to fight on our behalf in the armed services.

We are fighting every day on the many fronts around the world and those of us in this body work to provide not only the resources we need to ensure that our men and women in the field are the best trained, best equipped, best prepared, and the best protected, but we also work to ensure we meet the commitments made to our veterans who have served in the past.

As former Secretary of Defense William Cohen once said, we are "unwilling to live in a world in which evil triumphs. And as a result, the flag of freedom flies not only over America, but over those countries whose people had to yield to the terror of tyranny and under the heel of boots of dictators." Our veterans have kept the flame of freedom alive, and they are a true reflection of the American spirit.

There are many accolades for veterans, but the one I like best is from Father Dennis Edward O'Brien's "What Is A Vet?"

He is an ordinary yet extraordinary human being, a person who offered some of his life's most vital years in the service of his country and who sacrificed his ambitions so others would not have to sacrifice theirs. . . .

He is a soldier and savior and a sword against the darkness, and his is nothing more than the finest, greatest testimony on behalf of the finest, greatest nation ever known.

So remember, each time you see someone who served our country, just lean over and say thank you. That is all most people need, and in most cases will mean more than any medals they could have been awarded or were awarded.

President Bush said it best when he described the will of our Nation by saying:

We will not waiver; we will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail.

That peace and freedom will prevail because of the commitment of those

who serve in uniform. America's veterans are the rock on which we have defended America's shores and are the reason our President can make such promises.

May God bless our veterans for their service, and may He continue to bless America.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I yield up to 3 minutes to the Senator from Idaho, Mr. CRAIG.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, let me thank the Senator from Texas for taking out this special order this morning.

I join with all Idahoans and all Americans to pause during Veterans Day to honor the service of all our American soldiers. It is a day set apart to celebrate peace and freedom through ceremonies of thanksgiving and prayer. It is a day dedicated to the men and women whose great sacrifices made it possible that we might pause to recognize them, to pray and to give thanks. Sadly, however, as battles fade, so do the memories of our soldiers, and what was once a fervent memory becomes but a passing one of only photographs and pictures of men and women who served their country.

But this is beginning to change.

As our Nation reaches out to free oppressed people around the world, a new generation of American soldiers is joining the honored body of U.S. veterans. Men and women who fought and continue to fight in Iraq are bringing fresh faces and new experiences to the legacy of those who have gone before. Troops stationed in Afghanistan work to maintain the standard of freedom others obtained for us in the past. These soldiers are expanding the image of American veterans as they stand for liberty and redefine the world.

Like the soldiers before them, today's members of the armed services are risking everything to ensure the freedom and happiness of their fellow Americans. On a daily basis, they lay their lives on the line to face an unsure and dangerous future. Some of them pay the ultimate cost and remind us all that freedom is not free.

Exactly who are the new veterans? They are just like you. They are fathers and mothers whose children anxiously await their return. They are sons and daughters whose parents proudly boast to their neighbors. They are students, graduates, neighbors, and friends. They are people in our State, our hearts, and our homes.

For many people, this newest fight for liberty is bringing home the reality of war. A veteran is no longer an unfamiliar face in an old black and white photograph. The price of freedom is no longer a thing of the past—it is our present and our future. With a new generation of young soldiers fighting for our Nation, we are forcefully reminded of the sacrifices previous veterans have paid for our happiness.

In the nearly 80 years since Congress first marked November 11th as a day to recognize and honor veterans, the image of the American veteran has been changing. Time has gradually brought a seasoned maturity of age to the once youthful faces of American soldiers. Sons have turned into fathers and fathers into grandfathers as each generation replaced the last.

Following the terrible attacks on our homeland two years ago, President George W. Bush declared:

Americans should always honor our veterans. At this moment, we especially need the example of their character. And we need a new generation to set examples of its own, examples in service and sacrifice and courage.

Today we see the fulfillment of this challenge. We see a rising generation of new veterans fighting for the American people.

To the veterans of our past and present, we thank you. We honor your service, commend your example, and remember your sacrifice. While some of us may never fully understand the significance of your labor, we all feel your impact on our Nation and our lives.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I yield up to 4 minutes to the Senator from New Mexico, Mr. DOMENICI.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, first, I thank the distinguished Senator from Texas for yielding me a few moments. Obviously, this is a time when it is very easy to talk about our veterans. But I thought I might just take about half of my time to tell the Senate a little story about my father.

My father came to the United States in 1908 as a 12-year-old immigrant from Italy. I don't think many of you know that in the First World War, immigrants, noncitizens, were drafted. My father was in little Albuquerque in business, 27 years old, couldn't write English, couldn't speak English too well, and he got a draft notice. Sure enough, 3 months later he went off to war, the First World War.

Another thing that is most interesting is that Armistice Day was this day, November 11; but it was also my dad's birthday. So he was a young American soldier, unable to speak very much English. He was sufficiently uncertain of his language that when he was up for promotion he didn't want to be promoted because he was afraid he couldn't drill the soldiers; he would sound funny because he had a big accent. Nonetheless, he did move up and whatever he was entitled to he got.

He remembered vividly November 11, Armistice Day—and one man in particular. I think all our veterans have a memory of some leader. His memory was of his captain, the captain of his Corps of Engineers which was building pontoon bridges and the like. The reason he remembered him was because this man told his men: Armistice is in

the air. We are going to have peace. I don't want any of you dying while we are about to have peace. So he shepherded all of them and put them under bridges in the Argonne Forest, saying: Hide for 24 hours because I sense that there will be no war in 24 hours and I don't want you dying.

Sure enough, within 24 hours the war was over. My father used to write to this captain, who lived in Illinois, and thank him for taking good care of him in the midst of that war, in the Argonne Forest, as a non-American who had become an American citizen by getting drafted and serving. Just as all our other veterans, he was very proud.

Today we have so many millions of American men and women who, one way or another, were like my father. They went off to serve their country. They have had times of great fear. They have had times of great concern. They have had times when there was heroism all around them.

I close today by saying something to all of them. In all of our wars—I know a little about the First World War because of my father, as I told you—but from all of the wars, I thank them all on behalf of the people of my State for what they have done to preserve the greatness of this country and the concept of freedom and liberty.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. I yield up to 1 minute to the Senator from Mississippi, Mr. LOTT.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. LOTT. I thank the Senator from Texas for coordinating the opportunity today for us to honor our veterans.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends," or in this case his country.

This quotation embodies my sentiment on this Veteran's Day, as we honor those men and women who have laid down their lives for our great country, and those who stand ready in her defense.

I stand today to render my sharpest salute to the selfless, brave professionals who epitomize the most noble of citizens.

How can we express our gratitude and overflowing pride for our service men and women who have paid the ultimate price for their country, and those friends and family members who have endured the loss of their loved ones?

How can we ever truly appreciate the comfort and safety that the soldier, airman, or seaman affords us through his or her daily dedication to duty?

Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from the strong, silent, tall soldier whose steely eyes well up with tears at the sounding of our National Anthem.

Perhaps we could stand to learn some things from the weathered, silver haired, proud veteran who stands taller and breathes deeply as he hears another painful round of Taps.

Today we all stand in solemn remembrance of those Americans who gave

their lives so that others may be free. Today I would like to remind everyone that those lives lost were not in vain. Because of these individual sacrifices we are able today to remain the greatest free nation in the world.

I would like to mention my personal pride for the men and women from Mississippi who so bravely currently serve and have served their nation in defense.

During the Vietnam War, 637 Mississippians gave their lives. In the Korean Conflict, from 1950 to 1957, 412 of our statesmen made the ultimate sacrifice.

Since the horrific day that will forever be remembered, September 11, 2001, Mississippi has lost nine soldiers during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

More than 3000 of Mississippi's sons and daughters have responded to this Nations latest call for arms in the global war on terrorism, and operations in Afghanistan in Iraq.

Unlike previous wars, the veterans of these latest operations will probably not have battle names to remember like Leyte Gulf or Vicksburg.

As the President has said, the global war on terror is a different kind of war, where some operations would be visible and others would not be.

In this global war, our troops are supporting freedom and democracy around the globe, and fighting terrorism in the homelands of the terrorists and those who support them.

The war on terrorism will be a long war, and it will call for the endurance and perseverance of every American. In the end, there probably won't be a truce or surrender document signed aboard a great battleship. What there will be is stability, peace, and representative government in places where terrorism used to breed—where dictators no longer use poison gas on their own people, or have mass executions.

And on this Veterans Day we should remember all veterans, including those who continue to serve in this different kind of war.

And it is most appropriate to honor and salute those Mississippians who have lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are: Kenneth Bradley, Army Staff Sergeant of Jackson, MS; Henry L. Brown, Army Corporal, of Natchez, MS; Larry K. Brown, Army Specialist, of Jackson, MS; James Anderson Chance III, Army Specialist, of Kokomo, MS; Therrel S. Childers, Marine Corps 2nd Lieutenant, of Harrison, MS; John K. Klinesmith, Jr., Army Specialist, of Carriere, MS; Jonathan W. Lambert, Marine Corps Sergeant, of Newsite, MS; Vincent Parker, Navy Engineman First Class, of Preston, MS; Joe N. Wilson, Army Staff Sergeant, of Crystal Springs, MS.

In the words of Boyd Lewis:

The tranquility we enjoy was purchased dearly. May we never forget.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, how much time is remaining on our side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 2 minutes 45 seconds.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to take up to 4 minutes.

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

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the remarkable men and women who have, over the years, placed their lives in danger to preserve ours. On this Veterans Day, we remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice. We express sincere gratitude for those who continue to serve and protect our freedom, and we honor those families who also contribute every day in service of our country.

On the heels of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom, this Veterans Day is particularly significant. As we speak, American and allied soldiers continue to fight and die in defense of our liberty. Many are face to face with danger at this very moment.

It is these remarkable men and women, past and present, who embody the democratic ideals that are the foundation of our great Nation. I would like to share with you the story of one soldier who recently lost his life in Iraq. The following commentary was written by LTC John Kem, a former Army legislative fellow who worked on the Subcommittee on Military Construction during his year here. He wrote:

There are very few events more poignant than a memorial service for a fallen Soldier. The service finishes with a final roll call by the company first sergeant of the Soldier's squad members. Each Soldier in turn responds: "Here, first sergeant." Then, three times in a row, the first sergeant calls out the dead Soldier's name. Finally, after the third silent pause, waiting for a response that will never come, a lone bugler sounds Taps.

This evening [he said] I went to a memorial service for Private Second Class Jonathan Falaniko. Jonathan was killed on Oct. 27 in Baghdad by a rocket-propelled grenade. As you would expect, the memorial service was sad, but it was also a profound lesson on faith, selfless service and a family's love.

Jonathan's unit, the 70th Engineer Battalion, is part of the Army's 1st Armored Division Engineer Brigade. The senior enlisted soldier in the brigade happened to be Jonathan's father, Command Sergeant Major Ioakimo Falaniko.

After the company commander and a few of Jonathan's friends spoke at the memorial service, the command sergeant major stepped forward and spoke. He spoke about Jonathan as both a soldier and a son.

Sergeant Major Falaniko read from a few of Jonathan's recent letters.

For a point of reference, Jonathan was a new soldier who had been in the Army less than 6 months. He attended basic training beginning in May 2003 and deployed to Iraq in August of this year. The following quotes are from some of his letters in the last few months of his life:

Dad, I love being in the Army and I love serving my country.

Dad, this is where I belong, and this is where I need to be with you and the other iron soldiers.

Dad, I push myself hard because I know the drill sergeants expect a lot out of me.

Dad, Iraq is a mess and I am glad we are here to fix it.

Sergeant Major Falaniko finished by sharing from his heart talking about the kind of kid his was; the kind that loved his sisters and sent them money on every payday just to let them know he was thinking about them.

He concluded by saying to the hundreds of soldiers there at their memorial service, from the three-star general to the private:

What our country brings to Iraq is a chance for freedom and democracy . . . making a difference every day. My son died for a good cause . . . he answered the Nation's call like a typical American soldier. Jonathan was accomplishing his mission, doing what he was supposed to be doing. He had a big heart and he was proud to be a soldier.

Then, First Sergeant Allen called:

Private Falaniko.

And there was silence.

Again, he called:

Private Jonathan Falaniko.

And finally:

Private Jonathan Ioakimo Falaniko.

Silence prevailed.

Jonathan Falaniko was a hero who made the ultimate sacrifice. Both he and his father are examples of what makes our Army and our country great.

The Army and our Nation mourn his death. That young man—a soldier for not even a full year—was buried at Arlington National Cemetery on Friday.

On this Veterans Day, I think we should reflect on the wonderful young men and wonderful fathers who would put service to country above all else, for they are the ones who are protecting the freedom that we enjoy today.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, today is Veterans Day. It is a time to pay tribute to those who have fought for our freedom and made us the Nation we are today.

On November 11, 1919, Veterans Day began as Armistice Day. It marked the first anniversary of the cease-fire agreement among the Allied powers and Germany to end World War I. It was also to honor the men and women who sacrificed during that conflict.

In 1926, a congressional resolution officially named Armistice Day in the United States. It became a national holiday 12 years later. In 1954, Congress passed a law to change the name from Armistice Day to Veterans Day to honor veterans of all U.S. wars.

As I think about our veterans and all they have sacrificed, I am reminded of a day 6 months ago when I visited Madisonville, TN, to see and participate in the raising of the largest American flag in our State—1,800 square feet.

It was really an awful day. The rain was coming down, there was lightning and thunder, but hundreds of people stood there to participate in that ceremony because we knew we were enduring much less in that rain and in that lightning than men and women from Tennessee who are serving in Afghanistan or Iraq, or had served on the beaches of Normandy, or in the rice fields of Vietnam.

Tennessee is the Volunteer State. From the battle of King's Mountain in the Revolutionary War, through the Mexican War, the Civil War, and our World Wars, Tennesseans have volunteered. We have honored those volunteers, and we have honored them as veterans.

As this Nation devotes a day to our veterans, we honor both Tennessee veterans and Tennessee soldiers because so many Tennesseans—thousands—are serving in the battle against terrorism—men and women in active duty, as well as men and women in the National Guard and those in the Reserves.

The best thing we all can do on this Veterans Day is to show as much respect and honor to our veterans as our veterans have always shown to our country.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, this year, as we again remember our veterans and the sacrifices they have made for our country on this 11th day of the 11th month, the men and women serving in our Armed Forces deserve special recognition. This year's remembrance is a unique time as we honor new veterans coming home from the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq who have made the sacrifice and have answered the call. Our appreciation and gratitude extends to all of them and their families for the sacrifices that they have made.

As of last week, 395 American service members have been killed and 1,889 American service members have been wounded during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families. We pray for the safety of those still in harm's way and hope they return home soon. I visited some of our servicemen and women at Walter Reed Army Medical Center here in Washington, DC recuperating from wounds they received in Iraq. Some of them had lost limbs, and face significant physical challenges in building a new life. As I expressed my appreciation to them for their sacrifices, I was humbled and inspired by their high spirits, their determination and their abiding faith in our country.

November 11th—the day World War I ended in 1917—has been a distinguished day of recognition for America's veterans since 1954 when President Dwight Eisenhower signed into law the day that would honor the men and women who have served in our Nation's Armed Forces. Since the founding of our country, almost 50 million men and women have served in the United States military, and nearly half of them are still

alive. So today, there are appropriate ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery, throughout Michigan and the rest of the country to honor our veterans and what their service has meant to our country.

I would also like to recognize the African-American men and women who in years past served our Nation's Armed Forces in primarily segregated units. While segregation in our Armed Forces is a shameful chapter in our Nation's past, these veterans should be uniquely recognized for their honorable service in the face of the burden of segregation. African-American soldiers overcame a pattern of prejudice that questioned their ability and prevented them from training and working with their white counterparts. Segregated African-American units have played an important and powerful role in America's military, from the Civil War's 54th Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, to the Indian War's Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th and 10th Cavalry to World War II's Tuskegee Airmen. Four hundred thousand African-American troops served the United States in World War I and a million African Americans served in World War II's segregated services. We should acknowledge their commitment which went beyond normal service and the call to duty. I am pleased that this past weekend, a special celebration of our African-American veterans took place in my home State of Michigan at the Color of Liberty Celebration at the Wayne County Armory.

I would also like to take a moment to stress the importance of the Federal Government meeting its obligations to all veterans to provide appropriate and adequate health care. There is a commitment by the appropriate committees to add an additional \$1.3 billion for veterans health care before Congress adjourns this year. Right now, 60,000 veterans are waiting 6 months or longer for an appointment at VA hospitals. I am hopeful that Congress will fulfill our commitments to our veterans so that they have a strong VA health care system that is well-funded and suitably staffed.

The terrorist attacks of September 11th and the courageous actions of our armed forces in Afghanistan and Iraq remind us that friends of tyranny and enemies of freedom still exist. Whether they are soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who fought in the World Wars, Korea, Vietnam or the Gulf wars, we thank them for their service, their commitment and their sacrifice in the cause of America's freedom.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, on this Veterans Day, I rise to recognize a group of truly deserving American veterans—the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II.

This heroic group of African American flyers fought in two types of battles—the battle of World War II and the battle against racism at home.

The Tuskegee airmen were dedicated, determined young men who enlisted to

become America's first black military airmen, at a time when rampant racism led many people to falsely assume that black men lacked intelligence, skill, and patriotism. And boy, were they proved wrong.

The military feats of this group can be described as nothing less than phenomenal.

In Order to enter the training program, the young men were held to the same demanding physical and mental standards as all other military pilots and soldiers of supporting fields. And between 1942 and 1946, 992 black American pilots graduated from the rigorous program offered at Tuskegee Army Air Field, not to mention the black navigators, bombardiers, and gunnery crews that were trained at selected military bases elsewhere due to a lack of facilities at Tuskegee.

Four-hundred and fifty of the Tuskegee trained pilots headed to the Selfridge Air Base in Michigan for combat preparation, before bravely heading overseas as proud members of either the 99th Fighter Squadron or the 332nd Fighter Group, later to be conjoined. As the only four-squadron fighter group performing bomber escort missions in the 15th Air Force, the 332nd Fighter Group had extraordinary and unprecedented success. They flew all of their bomber escort missions—over 200—without the loss of a single bomber to enemy aircraft.

The bomber escort missions of the famed 332nd "Red Tail" fighters were so daunting to the enemy that they served as an immensely strong deterrent to challenges. The bomber crews that the group escorted offered abundant expressions of appreciation since they faced far fewer challenges than other crews in the 15th Air Force.

Sadly, while these men were defending liberty for the people half a world away, they were also fighting for their own liberation right here in the United States. Despite their valiant deeds abroad, racism and bigotry impeded their success at home. Due to strict segregationist policies, their assignments were restricted to only two fighter groups, and one fighter wing. Their morale suffered more damage due to the lack of opportunities for advancement than their air fleet did by enemy fire.

Despite this setback, these soldiers still performed splendidly. In 1949, Tuskegee pilots took first place in the Air Force National Fighter Gunnery Meet, surpassing the performances of all the white units.

The bigotry against these men only served to hurt America. During the war, many white units badly needed additional qualified soldiers, but could not draw upon the superb skills of the Tuskegee airmen due to the military's segregationist policies.

But this cloud had its silver lining. The willpower and skill that brought success for the Tuskegee airmen abroad also helped in the war against racism at home. President Harry Tru-

man, recognizing the need for an integrated air force, enacted an executive order demanding equality of treatment and opportunity in all of the armed forces.

The Tuskegee airmen were instrumental in the passing of this executive order, which paved the way for broader victories later on, including the end of racial segregation in all military forces, and eventually in the United States as a whole.

These soldiers are a vibrant part of America's history and a part of Michigan's. Not only did many of the soldiers train at Selfridge Air Base, but the cadet classes drew heavily from the Detroit citizenry. One such citizen made Michigan understand the value of the Tuskegee program to its own history.

Lieutenant Coleman Young, later to become a long-time mayor of Detroit, was a product of the Tuskegee experience. Assigned to the 477th bombardier, he and his colleagues were never sent into combat due to racism from senior officers. Determined to preserve the memory of the Tuskegee airmen, with the help of other Detroit members, he fostered what has become the National Tuskegee Airmen Historical Museum, housed at historic Fort Wayne. This small but dignified museum, occupying an old officer's quarters, perpetuates the great story the Tuskegee have to tell.

A story I believe we should all listen to. All in all, these soldiers gave over 150 lives in the name of their country and in the name of freedom. I now call on that country, the United States, to provide them the recognition they deserve on this Veterans Day.

According to existing records, 155 Tuskegee soldiers originated from Michigan, I wish to recognize each one of them:

#### TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

Kermit Bailer; Clarence Banton; James Barksdale of Detroit; Hugh Barrington of Farmington Hills; Naomi Bell; Thomas Billingslea; Lee Blackmon; Charles Blakely of Detroit; Robert Bowers of Detroit; James Brown of Ypsilanti; Willor Brown of Ypsilanti; Ernest Browne of Detroit; Archibald Browning; Otis Bryant; Joseph Bryant, Jr. of Dowagiac; Charles Byous; Ernest Cabule of Detroit; Waldo Cain; Clinton Canady of Lansing; Carl Carey of Detroit; Gilbert Cargil; Nathaniel Carr of Detroit; Donald Carter of Detroit; Clifton Casey; David Cason, Jr.; Peter Cassey of Detroit; Robert Chandler of Allegan; Pembleton Cochran of Detroit; Alfred Cole of Southfield; James Coleman of Detroit; William Coleman of Detroit; Eugene Coleman; Matthew Corbin of Detroit; Charles Craig of Detroit; Herbert Crushshon; John Cunningham of Romulus; and John Curtis of Detroit.

Donald Davis of Detroit; Cornelius Davis of Detroit; Eugene Derricotte of Detroit; Taremund Dickerson of Detroit; Walter Downs of Southfield; John Egan; Leavey Farro, Jr.; Howard Ferguson; Thomas Flake of Detroit; Harry Ford, Jr. of Detroit; Luther Friday; Alfonso Fuller of Detroit; William Fuller of West Bloomfield; Frank Gardner; Robert Garrison of Muskegon; Thomas Gay of Detroit; Charles Goldsby of Detroit; Ollie Goodall, Jr. of Detroit; Quintus Green, Sr.;

Mitchell Greene; James Greer of Detroit; Alphonso Harper of Detroit; Bernard Harris of Detroit; Denzal Harvey; James Hayes of Detroit; Ernest Haywood of Detroit; Minus Heath; Milton Henry of Bloomfield Hills; Mary Hill; Charles Hill, Jr. of Detroit; Lorenzo Holloway of Detroit; Lynn Hooe of Farmington Hills; Heber Houston of Detroit; Ted Hunt; and Hansen Hunter, Jr.

Leonard Isabelle Sr., Leonard Jackson; Lawrence Jefferson of Grand Rapids; Alexander Jefferson of Detroit; Silas Jenkins of Lansing; Richard Jennings of Detroit; Louie Johnson of Farmington; Ralph Jones; William Keene of Detroit; Laurel Keith of Cassopolis; Hezekiah Lacy of River Rouge; Richard Macon of Detroit; Albert Mallory; Thomas Malone; Ralph Mason of Detroit; J. Caulton Mays of Detroit; William McClenic; Arthur Middlebrooks; Oliver Miller of Battle Creek; Vincent Mitchell of Mt. Clemens; Wilbur Moffett of Detroit; Dempsey Morgan of Detroit; Russell Nalle, Jr. of Detroit; Robert O'Neil of Detroit; Frederick Parker; Robert Pitts of Detroit; Wardell Polk of Detroit; Walter Poole; Calvin Porter of Detroit; Calvin Porter; Leonard Proctor; Della Rainey; Sandy Reid of Southfield; Edward Rembert; Harry Riggs of Bloomfield Hills; Walter Robinson of Detroit; Major Ross of Oak Park; Washington Ross of Detroit; John Roundtree of Westland; Calude Rowe of Detroit; William Ruben; William Rucker; Jesse Rutledge of Detroit; and Issac Rutledge.

Calvin Sharp; Albert Simeon, Jr. of Detroit; Paul Simmons, Jr. of Detroit; Leon Smith; Chauncey Spencer; William Stevenson; Chester Stewart of Detroit; Harry Stewart of Bloomfield Hills; Roosevelt Stiger of Jackson; Howard Storey; Willie Sykes of Detroit; Willis Tabor; Kenneth Taitt of Detroit; William Taylor, Jr. of Inkster; Lucius Theus of Bloomfield Hills; Donald Thomas of Detroit; Austin Thomas; Wm. Horton Thompson of Detroit; Jordan Tiller; Paul Tucker of Detroit; Edward Tunstall of Detroit; Allen Turner of Ann Arbor; Cleophus Valentine of Detroit; Charles Walker of Jackson; Robert Walker; Roderick Warren of Detroit; Theodore Washington of Detroit; Richard Weatherford of Aibion; Jimmie Wheeler of Detroit; William Wheeler of Detroit; Cohen White of Detroit; Harold White of Detroit; Paul White; Peter Whittaker of Detroit; Leonard Wiggins of Detroit; David Williams of Bloomfield Hills; Willie Williamson of Detroit; Robert Wolfe; William Womack; and Coleman Young.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, today, on Veterans Day, we commemorate and pay special honor to all the veterans who have made such great sacrifices in the name of country and democracy.

This day is particularly poignant as our Nation is at war. There are more than 150,000 military service members in harm's way, fighting overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan.

They fight for freedom of the Iraqi people, who have faced decades of extreme oppression and brutality under Saddam Hussein, and against the Taliban forces, who continue to pose a challenge in Afghanistan.

Sadly, nearly 500 have paid the ultimate sacrifice and many more have sustained life altering injuries.

And as we prepare to send thousands more in harm's way, I believe that it's our obligation to ensure that our military service members and veterans receive full support from Congress, and that our efforts are tailored to benefit those who proudly serve this Nation.

We have recently granted the Administration an additional \$87 billion dollars in supplemental funding for Iraq and Afghanistan.

While I would have preferred that some of those funds be in the form of a loan to Iraq, and that there be more safeguards to ensure the funds are well-used, I believe that it was necessary to provide these funds.

It is clear to me that we must stay the course, and we must rebuild the infrastructure, prevent civil war, and see to it that Iraq does not become a base for terror and instability throughout the region.

We must see to it that a stable governmental structure and viable economy apart from Saddam's tyrannical dictatorship can be put in place.

And most importantly, we must see to it that our troops are given all the tools necessary to accomplish these objectives.

Approving the additional funding was the only way to truly support our military service members and aid their ultimate success.

As we seek to ensure that the current war efforts are well funded, we also need to realize that very soon, the young men and women of our armed forces will be returning home.

Some will require extraordinary care for a long period of time. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that they have adequate facilities to aid them in their recovery and recuperation.

There must not be any doubt by any of our injured veterans that they did the right thing in sacrificing health to defend our nation's interest.

The best way to prove to them that they have our full support is to ensure that they receive good health care and adequate benefits once they return home.

It is our responsibility to make sure that our veterans are not waiting six months or longer for appointments at VA hospitals, nor should they have to wait for 15 months for disability claims to be finalized, as is now often the case.

And prescriptions costs must be affordable.

We need to make room available in VA hospitals to ensure that all of our veterans whether active duty or reserves are adequately served.

In order to accomplish this task we must be cautious as we close hospitals under the Capital Assets Realignment for Enhanced Services—CARES—program to ensure that we don't leave our veterans stranded without accessible services.

As our veterans return home, some with great and debilitating injuries, we must also ensure that their compensation is just, full, and reflective of the American spirit.

Finally, we need to remember the families of the great men and women who are separated from their loved ones.

We must make sure that their concerns are the Nation's concerns. While their loved ones are overseas fighting

for America's interest, Congress must ensure that their medical needs are covered.

As I reflect on the origin of Veterans Day, it brings me great hope that our service members will be home and peace will reign again.

On June 4, 1934, Congress enacted a concurrent resolution, recognizing November 11, 1918. The resolution states: "Whereas the 11 of November 1918, marked the cessation of the most destructive, sanguinary, and far reaching war in human annals and the resumption by the people of the United States of peaceful relation with other nations, which we hope may never again be severed, and Whereas it is fitting that the recurring anniversary of this date should be commemorated with thanksgiving and prayer and exercises designed to perpetuate peace through good will and mutual understanding between nations; . . ."

On May 13, 1938, the 11 of November was approved as a legal holiday dedicated to world peace, known as Armistice Day. Finally, on June 1, 1954, Congress renamed Armistice Day to Veterans Day, thereby commending all veterans.

Veterans Day is often associated with war, but its true significance lies in peace and humanity.

Since September 11 this country has undergone tremendous struggle and uncertainty.

We have shown that our resiliency is greater than our fears and our convictions of freedom and right can not be compromised.

This country is great because its citizens are great. This country was born from the sacrifice of its citizens and the vision they saw.

Today we honor the citizens who served and continue to serve our great country. They are the protectors of our democracy and our way of life; they are our veterans.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, in the past few days, the tragic headlines from Iraq have reminded us of the selfless sacrifices our soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen make every day to keep this country strong and safe. The conflict in Iraq brings home again the debt we owe to America's veterans for their service and their sacrifices.

In North Dakota, we are extremely proud to have the highest per capita participation in the Guard of any State and to be among the leaders in per capita participation in the Reserves. More than 1,000 North Dakota National Guardsmen and reservists in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan are serving with distinction. Behind these statistics, though, are individual soldiers who have left behind families. With the wonders of modern technology, I can hear directly from soldiers who are on the frontlines in Iraq. I hear of their accomplishments, when they've helped make life just a little better for an Iraqi family or even a whole community. I hear of their pride in doing a job well for their country. But I also hear

of their frustration with searing heat, swirling dust, and irregular access to showers and the other comforts we take for granted. I hear of their worries about family at home, how their loved ones are coping with their absence and their concern that the news of deaths and injuries among their fellow soldiers are adding to the stress on their families. I hear their longing to get back to home and family. In short, I hear of the sacrifices they are making on our behalf.

And every day I hear from the family members of our activated servicemen and servicewomen. I hear how proud they are that their beloved ones are serving the country they love. But I also hear of the added burden that those left behind must bear. I hear the frustration of not knowing when a loved one will come home and of learning that the deployment has been extended. I hear of the hit on the family finances for Guardsmen or reservists who have left higher paying jobs to serve their country—and of the spouses who are left to keep the family business running on their own. I hear of the added work as one parent takes on the work normally done by two—the caregiving, the helping with homework, the coaching, the meal preparation—all the little chores that add up and are starting to become a source of stress for some families. I hear the added anxiety of knowing that a loved one is serving in a dangerous role far from home. Each time the phone rings, they hope that it will be a rare opportunity to hear that everything is going well and to say “I love you,” but they fear that it could be news of a casualty. In short, I hear of the sacrifices that they are making on our behalf.

And I hear of the tremendous impact on small communities throughout North Dakota. The current call-up has meant the loss of valued employees in small businesses on main streets across the state. It has meant the loss of teachers, volunteer firefighters, policemen, and medical personnel. And it has meant the absence of church leaders, PTA leaders, Little League coaches. In short, it has meant sacrifices great and small.

So this Veterans Day, we are reminded of the tremendous sacrifices of our veterans and their families. Today is a Federal holiday. But it is more than that. It is an opportunity to stop and thank veterans for their service and their sacrifice. It is an opportunity to tell them how proud they make you. And it is an opportunity to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice and the debt of gratitude and honor this country owes to their heroism.

I deeply regret that the business of the Senate is keeping me here in Washington so that I am not able to deliver that message personally to the tens of thousands of North Dakota veterans who served in past conflicts and wars. More than 50,000 veterans currently live in my State. Their service is rich in history. I remember reviewing his-

torical accounts of one of the most significant engagements involving North Dakotans in 1942, when members of the 164th Infantry Regiment of the ND Army National Guard were the first Army unit to engage in combat action in the Pacific Theater on Guadalcanal. I was honored to have introduced a resolution that passed the Senate in 1992 paying tribute to the heroic actions of the 164th Infantry unit.

Today, as I noted earlier, military personnel from our State continue to protect our homeland and to serve in hostile environments around the world. Active duty personnel from the Minot and Grand Forks AFB, Air National Guard from Fargo, and the more than 1,000 Army National Guardsmen and reservists continue to play a vital role in homeland security and in the fight against terrorism. We owe these active duty personnel and their families a deep debt of gratitude for responding to the extraordinary challenges posed by international terrorism.

As we observe Veterans Day, let us remember that the respect and appreciation that we show our veterans and active duty personnel on this day is an act that we should demonstrate every day of the year. It is especially important that we honor veterans and their families by making certain that our active duty personnel and veterans receive the benefits that we have promised and that they are entitled to receive. We can do no less for the sacrifices that they have made.

That is why I am working hard in the remaining days of the 1st Session of the 108th Congress to make certain that our veterans receive significant increases in funding for VA health care, funding that should come as close as possible to the recommendations of our national veterans service organizations in the annual Independent Budget. I am hopeful that Congress will increase the VA health care budget by \$1.3 billion, bringing the level close to \$27.2 billion. I strongly support that increase. Additionally, I am very concerned by the uncertainty of annual appropriations for VA health care every year, and believe that we need to make VA health care funding mandatory to guarantee that veterans get the health care they need and deserve. I am pleased to be a cosponsor of legislation, S. 50, that would guarantee full funding for VA health care.

I also believe that it is time to end the penalty against our disabled veterans, and am pleased that we are making progress on providing full concurrent receipt of veterans disability compensation and military retirement pay for more veterans. While final action has not been completed on the concurrent receipt, I am hopeful that an agreement to expand significantly the number of veterans eligible for concurrent receipt and military retirement pay, without an offset, will be enacted by Congress in the very near future. We must, however, continue our efforts to provide full concurrent receipt for all veterans entitled to this benefit.

Let me close by saying thank you. Thank you to our veterans. Thank you to our military personnel now on active duty around the world. Your service and your sacrifice make me, and you make America, very, very proud.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, today marks the 50th anniversary of Veterans Day. This historic occasion is an important opportunity for all Americans to express our gratitude to our Nation's veterans for the sacrifices they have made serving our country and defending our freedom.

My first sense of the sacrifice made by our veterans came from my family. My father volunteered to serve in the Air Force during World War II, and flew missions over Europe. I will never forget his stories of the war, of the men with whom he served, and of the dangers they faced together. Yet he knew full well the risks he would face when he joined up.

In fact, my father enlisted after learning that his brother was missing in action. Like the hundreds of thousands who fell at places like Normandy, Guadalcanal, Anzio, and Attu, and places so desolate they remain unnamed, my uncle never came home. He and his brothers in arms gave their lives to defend freedom at home and around the world.

In perhaps the most eloquent testament to the sacrifice of our Nation's veterans, President Abraham Lincoln said:

But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

President Lincoln's stirring words are as true today as they were at Gettysburg 140 years ago this month. The ongoing deployments in the Middle East are a reminder of these sacrifices. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to visit American troops stationed in Afghanistan and Iraq. I was impressed by their grit and their resolve to carry out a dangerous mission under extremely difficult circumstances.

I was also proud to join the families and neighbors who welcomed home the thousands of Washington sailors, aviators, and Marines who served in the U.S.S. *Abraham Lincoln* carrier battle group. It was uplifting to see such a tremendous outpouring of support for our troops.

Sadly, not all of them will make it home. To the families and loved ones of those men and women who have given their lives, I offer my heartfelt sympathy. You have the everlasting gratitude of the State of Washington and the Nation.

I am profoundly grateful for the service of America's military personnel and for the sacrifices they have made in protecting our country and our freedoms. Although we commemorate their service on this special day each year, it



is important to remember that the men and women in uniform make sacrifices to safeguard America every day.

Their service, both in peacetime and in war, protects us all. Our responsibility to them is to ensure that they and their families are provided the recognition that they have earned and so greatly deserve. It is also our charge, as Lincoln described it, to renew our dedication to the "great task remaining before us"—to renew our dedication to freedom and democracy. I am confident that as we a nation will continue to live up to this challenge. I hope that we can meet our obligations as citizens with the same sense of duty and honor with which America's veterans served.

Mr. BENNETT, Mr. President, on Veterans Day, it is fitting to pause, remember and recognize the contributions of those who have defended America throughout our history. Today, I would also like to recognize a man who risked his life to save his fellow marines in the horrific World War II battle for Iwo Jima.

Historian David Kennedy, in his book "Freedom from Fear," describes the battle of Iwo Jima:

The twenty-one-thousand-man Japanese garrison had honeycombed Iwo's basaltic ridges and Suribachi's ashen flanks with reinforced concrete-and-steel bunkers and stuffed them with artillery, anti-aircraft guns, mortars, and machine guns. They were so well and deeply entrenched that seventy-two days of aerial bombing and three days of naval shelling barely scratched them. At first light on February 19 two divisions of marines, each man carrying up to a hundred pounds of gear, stepped from their amphibious tracs onto Iwo's beaches and sank to their boot-tops in the powdery mixture of sand and volcanic ash. Vehicles, including tanks and half-tracks, soon bogged down in the quicksand-like topping of pumice and cinder that blanketed the island. From the Japanese bunkers and pillboxes a hellish rain of shells and bullets pelted the beaches, where the marines seemed to be moving in slow motion through the sucking sand. . . .

The battle ground on . . . with unmatched barbarity. Japanese soldiers stubbornly refused to surrender. When the fighting ended at last in late March, only a few hundred Japanese, mostly wounded, had allowed themselves to be taken prisoner.

From February 19 to March 25, 1945, 6,140 Marine and Navy soldiers were killed on Iwo Jima and 17,372 were wounded. Nearly two of three soldiers who fought on Iwo Jima were killed or wounded. Twenty-two Marines and four corpsmen received medals of honor.

During those terrible days of February and March of 1945, George E. Wahlen was a medical corpsman. James Bradley, in the book, *Flags of our Fathers* said this:

. . . In the European theater, my dad (a navy corpsman) would have worn a red cross on his helmet and expected the Germans to spare him as a noncombatant. And he would have been unarmed, according to the Geneva Convention, but the Pacific theater was different. . . . The Japanese on Iwo Jima had been trained to look for corpsmen by identifying their telltale medical pouch—and shoot them on the spot. Without a corpsman to save the wounded, the Japanese knew, their kill ratio would be much higher. . . .

Though seriously wounded three times in 26 days, corpsman George Wahlen refused evacuation and repeatedly defined heavy mortar and rifle fire from the enemy to find and treat his wounded comrades. Disregarding his own safety, he continued to cross open terrain under fire to aid his friends, until he was so badly wounded, he could no longer walk. Even then, he carried on, crawling across the ground through the raging battle to administer aid to yet another fallen comrade. For his unselfish and steadfast courage, and for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty," George Wahlen was awarded the Medal of Honor, and is Utah's only living recipient of that rare recognition.

We are all familiar with the language of military honors, but, in these challenging times, where American soldiers and sailors, airmen and marines, once again are serving in foreign lands and showing the same gallant spirit of sacrifice and courage in the face of battle, we need to hear it again. I would like to quote from Mr. Wahlen's citation:

Painfully wounded . . . he remained on the battlefield, advancing well forward of the front lines to aid a wounded marine and carrying him back to safety despite a terrific concentration of fire. Tireless in his ministrations, he consistently disregarded all danger to attend his fighting comrades as they fell under the devastating rain of shrapnel and bullets. . . . When an adjacent platoon suffered heavy casualties, he defied the continuous pounding of heavy mortars and deadly fire of enemy rifles to care for the wounded, working rapidly in an area swept by constant fire and treating 14 casualties before returning to his own platoon. Wounded again . . . he gallantly refused evacuation, moving out with his company the following day in a furious assault across 600 yards of open terrain and repeatedly rendering medical aid while exposed to the blasting fury of powerful Japanese guns. Stouthearted and indomitable, he persevered in his determined efforts as his unit waged fierce battle and, unable to walk after sustaining a third agonizing wound, resolutely crawled 50 yards to administer first aid to still another fallen fighter. By his dauntless fortitude and valor, Wahlen served as a constant inspiration and contributed vitally to the high morale of his company during critical phases of this strategically important engagement. His heroic spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of overwhelming enemy fire upheld the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

James Bradley, in an article in the *Wall Street Journal* on November 10, 2002, considered the phrase "Uncommon Valor was a Common Virtue" in his search to learn the story of his dad, and others at Iwo Jima. Mr. Bradley wrote:

Corpsman George Wahlen was injured in the eye and shoulder, but patched himself up secretly so he would not be evacuated. When an exploding shell shattered his ankle, leaving his foot dangling and all but disconnected from the leg, he shot himself with morphine, taped up his ankle, and crawled back to the fight with one good eye, one good arm, and one good leg. Corpsman Wahlen had to be dragged off the field of battle. "Why?" I asked. He answered, "I just did

what anyone else would have done in the situation."

. . . I thought to myself, "If uncommon valor was so common on Iwo Jima, why can't I find the Rambos of my imagination?" All I could find were humble guys who insisted they hadn't done much. . . . But I realized then that what my dad's life and words, and the words and lives of these other heroes, were trying to tell me, was that it was all about common virtue.

My dad and his comrades were men of common virtue before Iwo Jima, on Iwo Jima, and after Iwo Jima. Their actions and lives were consistent. . . . I realized that the key to my dad's life was the attitude of common virtue he practiced throughout his days. . . . My dad, running through bullets on Iwo Jima, doing his duty in the Pacific. My dad having the patience to teach me, a young son, how to tie his shoes. My dad, just lending a hand in his community. . . . And I am confident that if my dad were here to read these words about common virtue being the root of heroism, he would shake his head in agreement and say: "It's as simple as that."

Mr. Wahlen has demonstrated common virtue throughout his life and continues to do so. He did not end his service on Iwo Jima. Following World War II, true to the code of what Tom Brokaw called "the greatest generation," he went on to serve his country in two more wars and to dedicate countless volunteer hours in following years to the service of his fellow veterans.

It is to honor this fine and humble man, who would be the last to claim such an honor for himself, that I am proposing to change the name of the Department of Veterans Affairs' Medical Center in Salt Lake City, UT to the "George E. Wahlen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center." Senator HATCH and I introduced this legislation, S. 1815, last week.

This is a proper and fitting thing to do, not only because of Mr. Wahlen's accomplishments and service, but also because he is beloved by his fellow veterans. This is made clear by the unanimous support I received in support of this change from all of the State commanders and directors of Utah's veterans' organizations and State and Federal agencies: the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the VA Regional Office, the Utah Division of Veterans Affairs, and the VA Medical Center itself.

When carrying the 2002 Olympic Torch George Wahlen said, "It's an honor, but I feel like I'm representing all the veterans in the State of Utah." He has represented veterans so often over the last 30 years. In this circumstance, we honor George Wahlen, as a veteran, a Medal of Honor recipient, a man of both valor and virtue, and as a representative of all of the veterans who have served their country.

Many veterans who returned as heroes are often uncomfortable with the designation of heroes. James Bradley, in *Flags of our Fathers*, recounted a story where his third grade teacher referred to James's father as a hero and wanted him to come and speak to his

class. He recounts the exchange with his father:

“Jim, your teacher said something about heroes . . .”

I shifted expectantly in my chair, waiting to hear some stories of valor. Instead he looked me directly in my nine-year-old eyes, signaling that he'd like to embed an idea in my brain for the rest of my life. He said “I want you to always remember something. The heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who didn't come back.”

Today, we remember those who came back and those who didn't—those who didn't come back from Iwo Jima, from Guadalcanal, from Normandy, from Vietnam, from Korea, from Afghanistan, from Iraq.

While words fail to make an adequate tribute to those who lost their lives and paid a price in sacrifice for what we enjoy today, I will borrow from what has already been written. In 1940, Winston Churchill spoke to the House of Commons in relation to the Battle of Britain. He said, “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”

There are heroes that never came back. There are heroes that did. Let us not forget.

Mr. BREAUX. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the veterans of the U.S. Armed Services and to thank those who continue to serve bravely and protect the United States around the world.

My home State of Louisiana has made a significant contribution to the war on terrorism. Since September 11, 2001, more than 15,000 Louisiana men and women have fought to protect Americans from those that threaten our safety. Every military installation in Louisiana has contributed to this effort. There are 4,000 men and women from Fort Polk currently serving in Iraq, more than 6,000 members from Barksdale Air Force Base deployed since September 11, and thousands of reservists and Guardsmen continue to be activated and deployed throughout our country and the world. In the coming months, over one hundred more Marine Reservists from Belle Chasse Joint Reserve Base in Louisiana will be called into action in Iraq. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude for their sacrifice.

I also want to let the roughly 379,000 veterans living in Louisiana and those around the country know we do not forget your service to our country. We will be eternally grateful for your service to the United States in our past and present wars against communism, fascism, and terrorism. Our Nation stays strong because of your efforts, and the world is a better place for the things you have done.

On this anniversary of the historic World War I armistice in Europe, I honor the great achievements and sacrifices of the acting and retired members of the United States Armed Services and thank them for their bravery.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I pay tribute to the 26.4 million military veterans and their families living in the

United States who have served in defense of our great Nation. In 1918, on the 11th hour of the 11th day in the 11th month, the world rejoiced and celebrated. After four years of bitter war, an armistice was signed. The “war to end all wars” was over. How unpropagated were these sincere but hopeful words.

The turn of events has since made us realize more than ever that “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty,” and Armistice Day has turned into Veterans Day to honor all our brave men and women who served since that hope-filled day in many countries to defend liberty and freedom.

America today, and this imperfect world, is a better place because of the sacrifices made by our veterans and their families, many of whom paid the ultimate price, for “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” When duty called, our veterans responded magnificently.

As we engage in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Noble Eagle, and countless other missions around the world, it is important that we support our men and women in the military by providing them with the training, equipment, and resources necessary for them to accomplish their mission so that they can return to their families in a timely manner. We must also honor their families who also sacrifice precious time with them so that they can defend our freedom.

At the same time, we must never forget the contributions and sacrifices made by those veterans who served in past conflicts, and their families. We must work to ensure that our veterans are provided with appropriate services and benefits, such as adequate health care, in a timely fashion. We currently face a \$1.8 billion shortfall in funding needed to provide healthcare for our veterans. I remain committed to ensuring that our veterans are provided with the services and benefits that they have earned.

I am honored to pay tribute to these fine individuals on behalf of a grateful Nation.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, from the Meuse-Argonne campaign of World War I to the action in Operation Iraqi Freedom, American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines have fought on front lines around the globe to defend our freedom at home. Whether fighting on the battlefield or manning the ramparts against the threat of Communist aggression, it is courage, commitment and endurance of the American fighting forces that have made possible the unprecedented prosperity and political freedom that we enjoy today. As a result of the constant struggle to defend freedom, we now have 26 million American veterans, about 768,000 of which are from my home state of Georgia.

With each year that passes, these veterans are growing older. At last

count, 37 percent of these heroes are over 65 years old and many of them need medical care. Caring for these brave men and women is an obligation that we must take seriously. In my first year as a Congressman, in 1995, spending on veterans healthcare was \$16 billion. Just 9 years later, President Bush's fiscal year budget request was \$27 billion, an increase of \$11 billion. We can always do better, and we will, but I think that this dramatic rise in funding is remarkable.

We have taken other significant steps to help our Nation's veterans, including concurrent receipt legislation in the fiscal year 2004 Defense Authorization Act, which we will consider today on the floor of the Senate. This provision helps disabled veterans wounded in combat to receive both their disability compensation as well as the pension which they earned in service to our Nation. In addition, the concurrent receipt provision will extend full disability and Veterans Affairs retirement pay for all disabled veterans rated 50 percent and higher. When enacted, this provision does more to honor our Nation's disabled veterans than Congress has done in years.

On this day, my thoughts and prayers are with the families of the fallen soldiers who were deployed from my home State and throughout the Nation, who served with honor and bravery in the Middle East and Afghanistan. My thought and prayers are also with the family of GEN Ray Davis, who passed away earlier this year and whose legacy of service, honor, and heroism will be remembered for years to come.

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. President, I join with my colleagues on this Veterans Day in paying tribute to those men and women who have so ably served in our Nation's Armed Forces and honoring the tremendous sacrifices they have made for this great country.

I firmly believe that those citizens who have been called upon to defend our Nation, to risk and in many cases sacrifice their lives, deserve our utmost respect and gratitude, for these noble men and women are responsible for the peace and freedom which we, as Americans, cherish.

As we use this time to reflect upon the heroic deeds of the past, we should also recognize the significance of these deeds for the present and the future. Due to the unselfish efforts of those of who have served, those who serve now, and the efforts of all of those who are no longer here with us, the world continues to be a safer place and the principles of democracy survive.

I have often said we ought not be sunshine patriots, that our dedication to the men and women who have served should not solely be reserved for days such as this. Rather, we should be cognizant of their contributions every day of the year.

Throughout my time in Congress, I am pleased to have fought hard on behalf of the issues of importance to our Nation's veterans: improving veterans

health care and making it more accessible, protecting our veterans' benefits, including the authorization of concurrent receipt, and ensuring that each veteran has a proper burial.

This week, the Senate may take up the Department of Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill—which will fund VA and its programs during the current fiscal year. I am pleased to have joined with many of my colleagues in working to increase the VA budget by \$1.3 billion—to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits to which they are entitled. I am hopeful that this increase will ultimately be included in the bill when it is sent to the President for signature.

In my view, we have a responsibility to adequately fund these programs—programs critical to the continued health and welfare of our Nation's veterans. It is simply a matter of fairness and is, indeed, the very least we can do to honor their commitment and service to this Nation.

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, I rise to call attention to the importance of the Veterans Day commemoration ceremonies and private remembrances, both formal and informal, being observed today by Americans around the Nation and across the world.

Given the many demands on this body and the hectic pace of modern life, it is all too easy for the Senate, as well as for all Americans, to fail to give this day—Veterans' Day the attention it demands. It is all too easy to let the date on the calendar pass without stopping and reflecting.

But, as citizens, as well as public servants, we must never fail to commemorate, honor, and remember in our hearts our veterans and their sacrifices and what those sacrifices have meant to our country.

A mere once a year we are called to publicly applaud and honor the many Americans, living and deceased, men and women of every ethnic group and walk of life, who have given of themselves, their time, their youth, their sweat, and, all too frequently, their blood, and their lives. Their sacrifices have kept us free and enabled us to remain the last best hope of the world.

About this nation's revolution, Thomas Paine wrote:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

In observing Veterans Day today, we offer our love and thanks to those Americans, over the course of our history, who did not shrink from the service of their country.

Most came to military service willingly, even eagerly, many with good humor and high hopes, some more reluctantly, and more than a few who, frankly, would rather have been elsewhere.

I can remember myself some years ago, as a young marine humping an 81-millimeter mortar tube across the

California desert, wishing very sincerely to be elsewhere at that moment.

What they all have in common, and what we all honor today, is that they did not shrink from the service to their country, and still don't.

As they did not shrink from service during World War II in the Pacific and in Europe, in long and bitter wars in Korea and Vietnam, in Lebanon and Grenada, in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and, today, in Iraq and in Afghanistan, on hundreds of ships in every ocean of the world; in Minot, ND; and in Fort Dix, NJ; on Diego Garcia and in Misawa, Japan; at Ft. Benning, GA; on Paris Island, SC; and at Walter Reed Army Hospital and Bethesda Naval Hospital here in Washington.

They responded to a sense of duty, obligation, and a desire to belong to or strive for something separate and apart from personal ambition.

They may not even see or clearly understand at the time their own motivations, but they do not shrink from service all the same, and our country is the better for it.

A simple choice on the face of it—the willingness to serve—but one that, given the unparalleled abundance of choices that Americans today enjoy—we must recognize, honor and support.

As we stop to honor our veterans, we must go beyond rhetorical support.

We must provide for those who have served the rest of us so well, and we need to do so in practical and concrete terms, for our debt to our veterans' demands that we respond to their needs and their concerns, and demands that we deliver the benefits they have earned through their service and sacrifice.

First, full accountability for all MIA/POW's, without exception. There is no higher obligation for a country than to keep faith with those of its fighting men and women who may still be in enemy hands. We must not turn away.

In this regard, I urge the administration and the Defense Department to continue their search for CAPT Michael Scott Speicher, United States Navy, whose family is from New Jersey and whose aircraft was shot down over Iraq in 1991.

Then-Commander Speicher was reported as the first American service member killed in action in Desert Storm. His status, however, was changed by the Department of Defense from killed in action to MIA and then, in 2002, to POW. More indications suggesting Captain Speicher may have survived his 1991 shoot-down came to light after our liberation of Iraq.

The Defense Department's search for him, with the urging of my Senate colleagues and me, must continue until Captain Speicher's fate is fully accounted for.

Turning to the VA health care system, tens of thousands of veterans now must wait six months and more for appointments. Some find they have to wait as long as one to two years to be seen.

This kind of delay and lack of access to healthcare is unacceptable and yet is all too common. It is also completely unnecessary. The difficulties faced by our veterans are caused by chronic underfunding of the VA health system.

The VA system relies on the annual appropriations process, a process which is contentious and unpredictable and which makes it all too tempting to slash current year funding regardless of how this affects our veterans.

This year, for example, veterans organizations estimate that the VA health system needs \$1.8 billion more than the President requested.

As a result, veterans advocates have once again found themselves playing catch-up.

The solution is mandatory funding of VA health needs so that veteran's benefits are no longer subject to the politics of the annual appropriations process.

Without such a mechanism, the VA system will remain chronically underfunded, and veterans needing care will continue to have to wait disgracefully long periods of time.

I also wish to note that today I am introducing the Comprehensive Hepatitis C Health Care Act, to provide increased testing and care for veterans at risk of or infection with hepatitis C.

Most veterans who have hepatitis C don't even know it, and often don't get treatment until it's too late.

Yet despite recent advances in care, the VA still lacks a comprehensive approach to testing and treating veterans for the virus.

The legislation I am introducing would improve access to hepatitis C testing and treatment for all veterans, ensure that the VA spends all allocated hepatitis C funds on testing and treatment, and set new, national policies for hepatitis C care.

I have also introduced and will continue to push for a measure to lower the retirement age for reservists to 55.

This measure is a way to ensure fairer treatment for reservists in their career planning and to make a reserve career more attractive to military members who might otherwise opt out of further service.

We need to think about equity for reservists, and about the attractiveness of Reserve careers as our global strategy comes to rely ever more heavily on reservist citizen-soldiers.

We also owe our veterans full concurrent receipts.

There should be no conflict between a veteran's right to receive his or her retirement benefits and a disabled veteran's right to disability income. And yet, incredibly enough, disabled veterans continue to pay what is, in effect, a tax on their disability payments. It is time—once and for all—to eliminate this tax.

Ensuring that all veterans have access to quality healthcare is a small repayment for the contributions veterans have made in service to this Nation.

Unfortunately, the current Veterans Administration healthcare funding formula—VERA—puts veterans in high-cost areas, such as New Jersey, at a severe disadvantage in getting adequate medical care.

Vets shouldn't be forced to wait months for an appointment at a veterans medical clinic or to shoulder excessive fees because of a quirk in the formula that funds VA health care.

That is why I introduced legislation to make VA healthcare funding fairer by accounting for the distinct financial challenges confronting veterans and healthcare providers in different parts of the country.

This legislation, S. 1014, would replace the national income threshold for classification as a low-income veteran—currently \$24,000 for all parts of the country—with regional thresholds defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

This adjustment would help low-income veterans across the country afford quality health care and help ensure that Veterans Integrated Service Networks, VISN's, receive adequate funding to care for their distinct veteran populations.

In thinking about our veterans, we must also consider the brave men and women fighting for us now in Iraq and in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

As we honor their service, we must never forget what we owe them—now and when they return.

With so many Guard men and women and Reservists serving, it is critical that we extend to them the benefits they deserve.

One benefit for which we have had to fight is the extension of TRICARE coverage to all reservists. We have succeeded in getting this critical benefit for a year. We will, therefore, be revisiting this issue next year. I and like-minded colleagues remain advocates of extending such coverage to reservists.

As we asked our young citizens in the past, we are again today asking them to do extraordinary things, and we need to see that they have the proper care and assistance when they come home. There is no excuse for failing them.

We all remember that Veterans Day began as a commemoration of the Armistice which ended World War I, a catastrophic event which this body described as "the most destructive, sanguinary and far reaching war in human annals" to that point.

We pause and remember, and we again commit ourselves to honor and to stand by the veterans of the Great War and of all America's wars, past and present.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I am proud to come to the floor of the Senate and join in solemn tribute to the millions of American men and women who have protected our freedom over the long history of our Republic.

Every American knows it is part of our national character to pay tribute to the service of those who have worn

the uniform of our Armed Forces to defend our way of life.

As a nation, we have dedicated this day to reflect upon the service and sacrifice of the many generations of Americans who have delivered and preserved for us a nation free and strong.

This Veterans Day is even more solemn and thoughtful for all Americans for we are a nation at war. Americans are fully aware that hundreds of thousands of their neighbors, son and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers are in harms way around the globe. Americans are fully aware that over four hundred service members have lost and continue to risk their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan while over 2,400 more have been wounded or injured. All Americans share the pain and sense of loss for those killed and those suffering from wounds. And Americans recognize and are ready for the many sacrifices that lie ahead. We are a resolute people determined to defend our liberty and bring peace and justice to a dangerous world. This determination is evident throughout our Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard.

I saw it myself when I visited soldiers of the Florida National Guard's 124th Infantry in Baghdad last summer. They are tough, well-trained, devoted citizen soldiers demonstrating their professionalism every day on the dangerous streets of a city that still quakes with war. These great soldiers are worthy of their legacy; they are worthy of our admiration and gratitude.

We must be worthy of them and keep the Nation's promises to them—our promise to attend to their welfare and the welfare of their families.

As Abraham Lincoln instructed us, ours is an obligation to, "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and for his orphan." Too often we fall short on this care. We must meet this obligation with the same sense of determination and honor as our veterans' service is always rendered.

We have underfunded our veterans health care system and the backlog of claims remains unacceptably high. This is not right.

We have partially eliminated the disabled veterans tax, or Concurrent Receipt, but only for one-third of those entitled to both their retired pay and disability compensation. We have created among our retired veterans the "haves" and "have-nots" and this is simply not right. They are all worthy and deserve to have what they have been promised now without delay.

We have done nothing to improve our systems for caring for the survivors of veterans or retirees, especially those that were 100 percent disabled. The Department of Defense Survivor Benefits Plan remains uncorrected for offsets based on benefits from Social Security and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation—reductions in income in amounts and at times that widows often can least afford.

We, the Congress, must keep trying to do the right thing by these our greatest Americans.

The Nation continues to be truly blessed that our youth, our future generations, take inspiration from the devotion and sacrifice of those who have answered the Nation's call to arms in the past and those who defend us around a very dangerous world today.

Today we are reminded of where we have been as a nation, and upon whose sacrifice we have become what we are.

Let us rededicate ourselves to freedom and justice and peace—and the sacrifice of those men and women whose service will deliver and preserve them for America and our friends around the world. For this we are a stronger people, a stronger nation, and a stronger community.

Let us pray for the safety of our men and women in uniform past and present, and let us pray for the comfort of their loved ones.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, once again we find our young men and women in harm's way in a foreign land. As they have so many times in our history, Americans in uniform carry the torch of freedom in their hands and the promise of peace in their hearts as they face those who would rule by tyranny and violence. On this Veterans Day, I rise not only to commend our veterans but also to recognize the men and women of the State of Maine engaged on the front lines in the Global War on Terrorism.

Maine is well represented by young men and women serving on active duty in our Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. Since September 11, 2001, citizen-soldiers from across the State of Maine from all Reserve and Guard components have closed ranks with those on active duty to protect our shores and secure our future.

The men and women from Maine have left homes, jobs, and loved ones to answer the call to duty. Senior Master Sergeant Stephen Valley is among them. Steve, who hails from Millinocket, ME, left the active Air Force in 1994 after nearly eighteen years of service. In 1998, he joined the Air Force Reserve, and despite family challenges, including a father sick with Parkinson's disease, stepped forward and mobilized in November of 2001. Steve served nearly continuously in the Middle East since then, including duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, until he retired from active service on November 1. He is a man of courage and character. He represents the best we offer to a world longing for freedom and peace.

Mainers are deployed around the globe. Nearly twenty-five percent of the Maine Army National Guard is on alert, mobilized, or deployed. Maine National Guard soldiers are guarding prisoners at Guantanamo Naval Station in Cuba. Soldiers of Company E, 120th Aviation of Bangor are controlling air traffic in Afghanistan. Members of the 112th Air Ambulance Unit

from Bangor are performing medic evac missions in Iraq. Soldiers of the 11-36 Transportation Company from Bangor and Sanford are moving supplies across Iraq and Kuwait. Soldiers from the 94th Military Police Company of Maine and New Hampshire are performing police missions across Iraq and are helping to train Iraqi forces to assume security responsibilities.

This past summer, I went to Iraq. I met hundreds of American and British troops. I saw people from Maine performing key roles in rebuilding the country after the fall of Saddam Hussein's brutal regime. In the city of Kirkuk, I ate lunch with five service members from Maine—Specialist Gregory Norster of Phillips, Chief Warrant Officer Brian Mucci of Shapleigh, Specialist Wayne Goodrich from Oakland, Specialist Erin Maynard from Washburn, and Senior Airman Bill Spreng from Ellsworth. The contributions of Mainers to bring freedom to the people of Iraq make me very proud.

The courage and commitment of the American and other coalition troops were strikingly clear during my visit. By night, many of the soldiers conduct raids on pockets of resistance; by day, they renovate schools, rebuild roads and utilities, and help Iraqis take their first steps toward democracy. Despite the continuing danger, the harsh living conditions, and the oppressive heat, morale among the soldiers and Marines I met was high. Army Sergeant Michael Levesque of Winslow put it best when he told me how proud he was to have "helped to give the Iraqi people a precious gift: their freedom." In Kirkuk, where I met Michael, morale was particularly high because the Iraqis there are so grateful. Everywhere we went in this city south of the Kurdish section, local citizens waved and called out "thank you, America!"

By contrast, conditions—both in July and today—remain hostile in and around Baghdad. Our troops face near daily ambushes and sniper attacks. The fighting goes on for many of our troops who must contend with the threat of rocket-propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices, and rogue gunmen.

Of all the places I have visited as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, including Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Korea, nowhere have I found the challenges more difficult and the dangers more present than in Iraq. In the end, the commitment of the Iraqi people will determine whether Iraq will prosper in peace and freedom, or succumb to a violent minority bent on division, destruction, and domination. The dedicated young men and women serving in uniform, from Maine and from all over America, are giving the Iraqi people the opportunity to seize what all humanity desires and deserves.

On this day set aside to honor sacrifice, we must also honor the sacrifices made by the spouses, parents, children and other loved ones of our troops. The families left behind must

face the challenges of daily living as they suffer from the separation and from the relentless worry. The news of any casualty strikes a chilling chord in their hearts. Every death, every injury, is a blow to them as they wait, and hope, and pray.

In September, I met with family members of the deployed soldiers of the 94th Military Police company. These families have had to endure two extended deployments in three years: the 94th conducted a peacekeeping rotation to Bosnia that ended in 2001; in 2002, the 94th was called to arms again and is performing admirably in Iraq. The soldiers of the 94th are proud and professional and committed to getting the job done. Their families bear the burden of absence and uncertainty. Among them was Penny Mills, wife of Sergeant Curtis Mills of Shapleigh, ME.

Just one week later, soldiers of the 94th were ambushed in Iraq. Two were severely wounded: Specialist Christopher Kotch of Brunswick and Sergeant Curtis Mills. Soon after, I visited them at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. There was Penny, standing by her husband. We had no idea we would meet again—not so soon, not under those circumstances. Sergeant Mills, with the support of his wife and family, is recovering well. After reconstructive surgery and extensive physical therapy, he will one day return to work as a letter carrier. Specialist Kotch, after his recovery, will likely return to college and a life of possibility and promise.

In times of peace and in times of trial, we rely on our young men and women to step forward for our defense. The citizens of Maine have answered the call. America's first casualty in the War on Terrorism was Master SGT Evander Earl Andrews of Solon, ME, who lost his life in Qatar on October 10, 2001. Today, in Litchfield, ME, a father grieves for his daughter, Army Warrant Officer Sharon Swartworth, who miraculously survived the attack on the Pentagon two years ago but who did not survive an attack on a Black Hawk helicopter in Iraq last Friday. These are but two of the soldiers who died not just in the service of their country, but also in the service of mankind. They did so on behalf of millions of people they did not know—innocent Iraqis, Afghans, and Americans who died on 9-11, and all peace-loving people everywhere.

Our service members and veterans—whether they served in World War I or II, Korea, Vietnam, Haiti, Kosovo, Bosnia, Kuwait, or now in Afghanistan or Iraq—share a common bond: their uniform is not that of a conqueror, but of a liberator. We can never fully pay the debt we owe those who put their lives on the line to advance the cause of freedom.

Nor can we repay the debt we owe those families and loved ones they leave behind. The enormity of that debt was best summed up one-hundred thirty-nine years ago in a President's letter to a mother who lost five sons in

the war to preserve this Nation. I will close with the words of Abraham Lincoln:

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, today, I had hoped to be in Sutton, WV to fully celebrate Veterans Day with West Virginia veterans and their families. Since the Senate is in session, I must be in Washington, but I do want to recognize some of our Nation's finest men and women who have served to protect that which we hold most dear, our very freedom.

Last weekend, I was in West Virginia and I had the chance to talk with Army Sergeant Jared Welker of Putnam County. Sergeant Welker is a tank gunner who saw considerable action in Iraq, and who has just recently returned home. I had the privilege to spend a few hours with this young soldier. Hearing about the war in Iraq from his point of view, a young man serving in a tank division entering Baghdad, made me very proud of the men and women serving in the military—where ever they are stationed. Sergeant Welker's description of his days in Iraq will stay with me. His courage and his commitment to duty are truly inspiring.

And it is also a sobering reminder of the obligations that we in Congress have to fully support our troops in the field, and at home, and as veterans later in their lives.

On Veterans Day, we should take time to pay our respect to those who put their lives on the line and sacrificed in our defense. We have a duty to honor all veterans in both word and deed.

We honor them by remembering their courage, their loyalty, and their love of country. My State has one of the strongest traditions of military service, and I could not be more proud of that. When the call has come to defend this Nation, West Virginians have answered in great numbers. In a State as patriotic as our Mountain State, reminders of our veterans, heroes and heroines, are everywhere. They stand as a reminder of the battles fought defending the principles of democracy.

Understanding the sense of patriotism of the people of West Virginia is what caused me to seek a seat on the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs the day I arrived in the Senate 19 years ago. Joining the committee was one of the best decisions I ever made.

These last few weeks in Congress have been extremely important ones for our Nation's veterans. One of the most important issues of concern today

is the President's budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2004. Everything provided by VA will be a direct result of the proposed budget now before Congress. Regrettably, the President's budget request for VA health care for fiscal year 2004 will barely cover the cost of inflation at our VA Medical Centers, but there is still time to fix those misplaced priorities.

Full funding is needed for a health care system that is besieged with responsibilities. I am fighting, along with a number of my Senate colleagues, to get an additional \$1.8 billion appropriated for VA health care before Congress recesses this year.

In addition to our veterans who depend upon VA for their health care and prescription drugs today, current law allows members of the military, who serve during an armed conflict, to use VA upon their return. This includes currently deployed Reservists and National Guardsmen, who are such a big part of West Virginia's contribution to our war effort. The system must be adequately funded for all these veterans.

Another critical issue of concern continues to be long-term care for veterans. As our veteran population grows older, VA must make sure that it can meet the need for long-term care. A bill I introduced earlier this year extending, for five years, the congressional mandate requiring VA to provide long-term care for veterans through both nursing homes and community-based options still has potential to be enacted this year. This is extremely important legislation, and I will continue to push until this become law. If I cannot convince my colleagues to act this year, I will be right back next year fighting for it until it is done.

I was thrilled to be in Clarksburg last month for the ground breaking of our new State veterans' home, which will be built adjacent to the Clarksburg VA Medical Center. I have worked closely with both State and Federal officials on this project over the last several years, and I am very proud of everyone who has been involved in making this much needed nursing home a reality. It is time that West Virginia had a State veterans' nursing home.

In closing, I would like to read a paragraph from a letter found in the gear of a 20-year-old boy from Beckley serving during World War II. I think it is appropriate on this Veterans Day.

Private First Class Walter Walker was killed in battle in 1944 and he had written a letter to be delivered to his parents in case of his death.

He wrote:

Frankly I think I will come back, but you never can tell what little accident will happen. I am doing this for my country and people I love. So that little children may grow up to be free and not have to take orders from devils like Hitler and Tojo. I will gladly give my life to keep you and dad free as long as you may live.

Private Walker was a hero of WWII.

Sergeant Welker, and the more than 100,000 brave men and women serving today, are the heroes of Iraq.

Today, we honor all our young men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for freedom, and all those who have served in our military. We need to remember to stand proud when we see the American flag waving high in the air, and nod our heads in respect when we pass by a veterans' cemetery. We need to remember that behind each of these symbols of America are the people who have made them so remarkable—our Nation's veterans.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I rise to honor this day and the men and women for whom it was established. On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918, the armistice was signed ending the first modern global conflict.

World War I was an exceptionally bloody conflict that required tremendous sacrifices. It was therefore appropriate for President Wilson to establish Armistice Day as a time to recognize those who served in that war.

Unfortunately, the hope for a new, more peaceful world after the Great War was shattered as we found ourselves embroiled in a life or death struggle against tyranny. Americans again rose to the challenge. Over 405,000 American soldiers lost their lives and over 671,000 were wounded. That's over three times the casualties of World War I. Still, the bravery and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform showed the world the extent to which the United States of America was prepared to go to preserve liberty.

Then, after our soldiers and sailors were called upon again to fight aggression in Korea, it became evident that it was necessary to set aside a day to recognize all American veterans. To encourage Americans to pay respects to all those who have served in America's Armed Forces, President Eisenhower signed into law a proclamation in 1954 changing the name of the November 11 holiday to Veterans Day.

Today, we thank all those who have risked life and limb in service to their country, including those who served in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf war, as well as Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and other smaller conflicts. It is particularly appropriate today to pay tribute to the new generation of veterans who are serving their country so bravely in the global war on terrorism.

Americans have never hesitated to answer the call of duty and this generation is no exception. America continues to owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to the brave men and women who respond to the call of duty. Following in the footsteps of those who served in the 20th century, our men and women in uniform are living up to a heritage of service, loyalty, honor, sacrifice, and patriotism passed down for generations.

Members of the active duty military, National Guard, and Reserves selflessly put their country first. They serve to

protect the American people, defend national security, preserve freedom and safeguard our way of life.

This Veterans Day, let's remember the patriots who are putting their lives on hold while they put their lives on the line. Their sacrifices guarantee America's promise for generations to come. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have paid the ultimate sacrifice while serving in the Armed Forces. Their irreplaceable loss of life reminds us that freedom isn't free.

It is important for younger generations to appreciate the service and sacrifice made by those serving their country. Awareness and appreciation for veterans has decreased in recent times as fewer individuals and families in America have a personal connection with the Armed Forces.

Now that family members, friends, neighbors, and other fellow citizens are again putting themselves in harm's way in service to their country, I hope all Americans will take the opportunity this Veterans Day to remember and honor all veterans, to whom we owe our freedom.

Today I salute the patriotism, courage, and sacrifice of all American veterans who have answered their country's call in times of need.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, as I was watching the sunrise this morning, I thought of the men and women currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, and our Nation's veterans of past wars.

Today, we must remember those who have sacrificed to defend the freedoms and ideals all Americans enjoy. In our thoughts are not just the proud Americans who are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan today, nor just the members of the "Greatest Generation" who fought in World War II. We think about those who lost their lives or served in the extended Cold War, the Korean War, Vietnam or who gave their lives in some of the less-known engagements across the globe aimed at preserving our country and preserving basic human rights throughout the world.

Of course, most in our minds right now are 130,000 men and women serving in Iraq. Over 30,000 of these troops are reservists who left their civilian jobs and families to serve in Iraq with pride and determination. Whether Active-Duty soldiers or Reserves, every single person in the military is there because they want to be there, and we owe them a special kind of gratitude for their service.

Today we should not just think about our veterans, but also address policies that will directly address their needs, whether they are still in the service or after they have returned. We must come together as a Senate to ensure that we honor that unspoken social contract with our active troops, guaranteeing superb quality-of-life programs exist for our active service members and their families and that they will never become forgotten soldiers of history.

Let's come behind our citizen soldiers of the Guard and Reserve to ensure they and their families are as healthy as possible. And, above all, let's make sure our veterans have a flourishing medical program to ensure they receive the high-quality care they deserve.

On this time-honored day, we express our gratitude to our veterans, we remember their courage and dedication, and we act to make up a small part of the large debt we owe them.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, today I wish to pay my respects to my fellow veterans. It is only through the leadership, dedication and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform, that we are able to enjoy the freedoms that being an American entails.

No matter what your views on the war on terror or the war in Iraq, all Americans can unite behind our brave men and women in uniform. These fine Americans have truly answered our Nation's highest calling and we are better off for it. Today is a day to give thanks to these heroes.

On Veterans Day, I like to share the story of one of my heroes during my service, Mike Christian. I have shared his story before and it has become familiar to many, yet it bears repeating. This year, as Americans serve across the globe in important battles against error and tyranny, Mike Christian's story takes on even more meaning. In the same manner as service in Vietnam, a new generation of heroes is emerging in Iraq.

In the early years of our imprisonment in Hanoi, the North Vietnamese kept us in solitary confinement, or if we were fortunate, two or three to a cell. In 1971, the North Vietnamese moved us from these conditions of isolation into large cells with as many as 30 to 40 men to a room. This was, as you can imagine, a wonderful chance. And was a direct result of the efforts of millions of Americans, led by people like Nancy and Ronald Reagan, on behalf of a few hundreds POWs, 20,000 miles from home.

One of the men who moved into my cell was Mike Christian. Mike came from a small town near Selma, AL. He didn't wear a pair of shoes until he was 13 years old. At 17, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He later earned a commission. He became a naval aviator, was shot down and captured in 1967. Mike had a keen and deep appreciation for the opportunities this country—and our military—provide for people who want to work and want to succeed.

The uniforms we wore in prison consisted of a blue short-sleeved shirt, trousers that looked like pajama trousers and rubber sandals that were made out of automobile tires. I recommend them highly; one pair lasted my entire stay.

As part of the change in treatment, the Vietnamese allowed some prisoners to receive packages from home. In some of these packages were handkerchiefs, scarves, and other items of

clothing. Mike got himself a piece of white cloth and a piece of red cloth and fashioned himself a bamboo needle. Over a period of a couple, of months, he sewed the American flag on the inside of his shirt.

Every afternoon, before we had a bowl of soup, we would hang Mike's shirt on the wall or our cell, and say the Pledge of Allegiance. I know that saying the Pledge of Allegiance may not seem the most important or meaningful part of our day now, but I can assure you that—for those men in the stark prison cell—it was indeed the most important and meaningful event of our day.

Our day, the Vietnamese searched our cell and discovered Mike's shirt with the flag sewn inside, and removed it. That evening they returned, opened the door of the cell, called for Mike Christian to come out, closed the door of the cell, and for the benefit of all of us, beat Mike Christian severely for the next couple of hours.

Then they opened the door of the cell and threw him back inside. He was not in good shape. We tried to comfort and take care of him as well as we could. The cell in which we lived had a concrete slab in the middle on which we slept. Four naked light bulbs in each corner of the room.

After things quieted down, I went to lie down to go to sleep. As I did, I happened to look in the corner of the room. Sitting there beneath that dim light bulb, with a piece of white cloth, a piece of red cloth, another shirt and his bamboo needle, was my friend, Mike Christian. Sitting there, with his eyes almost shut from his beating, making another American Flag. He was not making the flag because it made Mike Christian feel better. He was making the flag because he knew how important it was for us to be able to pledge our allegiance to our flag and country.

Duty, Honor, Country. We must never forget the millions of Americans who, with their courage, with their sacrifice, and with their lives, made those words live for all of us.

This year, as we pause to remember those men and women currently serving their country, as well as our family and friends who serve before us, we need to remember the sacrifices of people like Mike Christian who made this Nation what it is today.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, America today has the most powerful, most capable and best-equipped military in the history of the world. But none of this would be possible without the brave men and women who volunteer to serve in the Armed Forces, who accept any challenge and face any danger to protect their country on battlefields around the world. Each of them is a volunteer—no conscription, no draft. They have a genuine desire to serve, and they do so with great sacrifice with great honor, great courage, great commitment, and often with great sacrifice.

Time and again, our Nation has called its sons and daughters to put themselves in harm's way, and many bear the scars of battle forever. Despite the rhetoric of praise that we hear again and again, too often when their service ends, these veterans are forgotten, except on Veterans Day. We have consistently underfunded the veterans' health care system. The Veterans' Administration is now preparing plans to close veterans' hospitals in New England and across the Nation. They oppose allowing disabled veterans to receive disability benefits if they also receive military retirement compensation.

As troops continue to serve in Iraq, we need to make sure we can take care of them and their families, especially when they return home. We have a solemn responsibility to those who are willing to sacrifice so much. We do them a grave injustice when they return home to be cast aside. Today, tens of thousands of newly discharged veterans are unemployed. National Guard and Reserve soldiers face lower wages and possible job loss while they are deployed. The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, USERRA, protects soldiers from employment discrimination, but service members can have difficulty enforcing their rights.

We can't have any more situations like the one at Fort Stewart, where Guard and Reserve troops were housed in deplorable accommodations, with unacceptable access to health care and needed services to heal their injuries. Such neglect is no way for a grateful Nation to honor its armed services. We can and we must do better.

For generations, we have honored our fallen veterans on November 11 each year. The Armistice Agreement that ended the First World War was signed on this historic day in 1918—the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month that year. Many of those we honor today have fallen in battle in Iraq.

Last week, I attended the funeral service of a Massachusetts soldier who gave his life in combat there and was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. It was a beautiful fall day and the military ceremony was conducted with solemn dignity and utmost reverence. It was a very moving moment to be there with his family and friends and veterans of his unit. His parents have lost a son, and the Nation has lost a hero. As the bugler played taps, and the sounds of the rifle volleys from a final salute faded across the Arlington hills, it was moving to see that the veterans there had also lost a brother, although none of them knew the fallen soldier personally. The brave paratrooper who had tried to carry his dying comrade to safety during the attack was also there. His silent presence spoke volumes about the valor and dedication that our service members give to our Nation every day, and have given us throughout our history ever

since that day at Concord Bridge, when the embattled farmers stood and fired the shot heard 'round the world.

On Veterans Day 2003, we thank our veterans. We remember those who have given the last full measure of devotion to our country, and we affirm our support for all who now wear the uniforms of our armed forces. We give thanks to all who have served America so well in years gone by, and to all the brave men and women serving now in the ongoing war against terrorism. And we pledge, in words that too often pass and are soon forgotten, to do a better job of meeting our responsibility to them every day, not just on each November 11. May God give us the strength to make each day a Veterans Day.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to add five additional minutes on each side.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, on this Veterans Day, I want to share a few ideas about the meaning this day holds for my family and for thousands of families throughout Washington State.

Today is a day to honor the sacrifices that generations of Americans have made to defend our country and to support freedom throughout the world. It is a day to reflect on the courage and bravery of our soldiers. And it is made even more special as we think of all our military personnel who are deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan and other hostile environments. But it is much more than that.

It is a day to make sure that we are living up to the promise we make to all veterans—a promise that President Lincoln described as:

... to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan.

Today throughout Washington State, people are coming together to honor our veterans at places such as the Tahoma National Cemetery, the Washington Veterans Home, and in communities large and small. Washington State is home to almost 700,000 veterans, and every day I am honored to represent them in the United States Senate.

Growing up, I saw firsthand the many ways that military service can affect both veterans and their families.

My father served in World War II. He was among the first soldiers to land on Okinawa. He came home as a disabled veteran and was awarded the Purple Heart. I should note that, like many soldiers of his generation, my father did not talk about his experiences during the war. In fact, we only really learned about them by reading his journals after he passed away.

And I think that experience offers a larger lesson about veterans in general. They are reluctant to call attention to their service, and they are reluctant to ask for help. That's why we have to

publicly recognize their sacrifices and contributions. It is up to us to make sure that they get the recognition they have earned—and not just on Veterans Day. It is one of the reasons why a few years ago I worked to ensure that all veterans could get the military funeral honors. My father had them, and they meant a great deal to our family.

I was proud to introduce legislation and to work with the VA and veterans service organizations to ensure that any family that requests military funeral honors can get them.

In addition to my own family experiences, when I was a senior in college at Washington State University, I spent a semester interning at the Seattle Veterans Hospital, helping to treat young soldiers returning from Vietnam. They were my age at the time. I will never forget the sound of the door locking behind me after walking on to the hospital's psychiatric ward to spend the day with these heroes. While these combat veterans were my age, they had endured experiences most of us could never imagine.

Today, as I see an administration that is considering closing veterans hospitals in Washington State—even as today's veterans have to wait 6 months just to see a doctor, and as the war in Iraq adds to the number of veterans who will need medical care—I get upset, and I fight with everything I have. Our veterans have already fought for our country, they should not have to fight to get the healthcare or benefits they were promised, so we've got to fight on their behalf.

Today we must ask, Are we keeping our promise to America's veterans? Here are some facts to help us answer that question.

Fact: Right now, 80,000 veterans are waiting 6 months or longer for an appointment at VA hospitals.

Fact: For the past 2 years, an average of 14,000 veterans have been waiting more than 15 months for their "expedited" disability claims to be finalized.

Fact: Veterans could face new fees and higher co-payments—just to get the healthcare they are already entitled to.

Fact: Each year in Congress there is a debate over how much money we should spend on veterans' healthcare. Too often, our veterans lose out to other budget priorities.

Fact: Disabled veterans pay a high penalty through what is called the "Disabled Veterans Tax." They must give up a dollar of their pension for every dollar of disability pay they receive.

Fact: The VA is looking to "reconfigure" veterans' health care and is now studying the closure of two VA facilities in Washington State.

And finally, the war in Iraq—and the tremendous toll it is taking on our soldiers—is increasing the number of veterans who will need medical care for years down the road.

Those are all facts. To me, they show that we are coming up short in keeping

our promise to America's veterans. So what can we do about it?

Simply put, we need to make veterans services a priority once again. No. 1, to cut down on the long waits that veterans endure; to help expedite claims; and to avoid higher fees and co-payments. We need to increase funding for veterans services.

To end the annual appropriations game, we should make VA healthcare funding mandatory. That is why I support the Veterans' Health Care Funding Guarantee Act. It would make veterans' healthcare an automatic priority for our Nation.

The VFW, AMVETS, the Disabled American Veterans and many other veterans groups strongly support this bill.

We must also make sure that the Department of Veterans Affairs does not close critical medical facilities at a time when more are seeking VA healthcare.

In addition, we must end the disabled veterans tax and ensure that veterans are not penalized just because they receive disability pay.

I am proud to be a cosponsor of a plan that would authorize full payment of both retirement pay and disability compensation to half a million disabled military retirees. And unlike other proposals, our plan would take effect immediately, instead of over 10 years.

And finally, we have to do right by today's veterans and by tomorrow's veterans. The brave men and women who are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan today will need our help when they return home. How we treat them will send a signal to a generation of young people who may be considering military service.

We have to keep our promise today and tomorrow.

So while we are currently coming up short, I am going to keep pushing for the solutions that will truly serve our veterans. America's veterans have earned our respect, and they have earned the benefits they were promised when they signed up. They should not have to fight for the care and support they were promised.

On this day—and every day that I am given the honor of representing them—I will stand up and fight for Washington's veterans and the freedom and security they have given us through their sacrifices in war and peace.

I hope we keep our promise.

Thank you, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, how much time remains on the Democratic side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Sixteen minutes 30 seconds.

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 10 minutes.

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

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I rise today in honor of Veterans Day, our



national day of remembrance established to solemnly honor the sacrifices of American men and women who have served in military actions in behalf of our country.

We recognize these men and women for preserving our liberty, freedoms and democratic way of life. For me, as a first-year Senator representing the men and women of Arkansas, this is an especially noteworthy Veterans Day. Since September 11th, numerous Arkansans have engaged in our battle against terrorism, serving in Afghanistan and other points abroad. This fall, over 3,000 men and women of Arkansas, members of our 39th Infantry Brigade of the Arkansas National Guard, are preparing to travel to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Every day my prayers include the brave men and women of Arkansas who serve, and have served, in our armed forces. I pray that every single one of our brave Americans in uniform will return safely home to the loving arms of their families.

Sadly, many of our veterans have not returned safely home. Many of our veterans have paid the ultimate price, sacrificing their lives on the altar of freedom. We must never forget their sacrifices. We must never forget the cost of freedom paid by our veterans.

As he gazed on the battlefield at Gettysburg in 1863, Abraham Lincoln uttered, "The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."

I am in a similar situation today, unable to articulate anything which even comes close to capturing the debt of gratitude each and every one of us owes our veterans. No words can capture my gratitude, or the gratitude of Arkansans, towards our veterans.

Yet, as I mentioned, Veterans Day is a day of remembrance. This is a day to honor and remember those who have served in our armed service. Last week, I had the distinct pleasure and unique opportunity to talk with Johnnie "Chick" Matthews. Chick, at 102 years old, is Arkansas's oldest living veteran.

Mr. Johnnie "Chick" Matthews, a resident of Greenbrier, Arkansas, first answered the call to duty to serve this country in 1917. That was 86 years ago.

He was given the nickname Chick because he enlisted into the United States Army when he was only 16 years old. He was the youngest at his training facility at Camp Pike, AR.

His mother was a widow with mouths to feed and he realized that he needed to help shoulder the financial responsibilities of caring for his mother and brothers.

He went to Little Rock to enlist in the Army. He lied about his age. The recruiter said: We are not sure we believe you, so go home and get your mother to sign this document. When he went back home, he was scared to take

it to his mother because he was afraid she would not sign the age waiver so he went to a neighbor woman and said: Mother hurt her hand and she cannot sign this. Can you sign this on her behalf? She did, and he was enlisted in the U.S. Army.

At the age of 16, he was the youngest soldier in his unit, probably one of the youngest in the Army. But when it was all said and done, as he ended his military career, Chick had completed 46 years of military service spanning World War I through Vietnam. That is truly remarkable. In addition, he served in four branches—the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and the Merchant Marine.

When I talked to Chick, I was entertained and captivated by his stories, but most of all I was impressed by his sense of duty. In fact, when I asked him if he would recommend military service to others, he said: If they would let me in, I would be there tomorrow morning to sign up.

In addition to Chick Matthews, I recognize another veteran who is a bit younger, but no less committed, to his country and to the State of Arkansas. Randy Massanelli is a native Arkansan who dutifully served in the U.S. Army for 15 years. While in the Army, he rose to the rank of major and served in Desert Storm where he was awarded the Bronze Star. Now he serves as my State director in Little Rock. I am grateful for the knowledge, experience, and perspective he brings to the office as I work to do what is best, not just for veterans and the troops around the country and around the world, but also for the people of Arkansas.

I have known Randy since we were both at the University of Arkansas as undergraduates. I thank him today. He has shown me time and time again what true devotion to his country really is. I am lucky to have him on my team and I am proud to call him a friend. I honor him today as a great veteran.

Last, I want to recognize another veteran on my staff, Wayne Palmer, who also served in Desert Storm. Wayne is a tremendous asset to my office. I thank him for his service to our country.

Arkansans throughout the years have followed Chick's, Wayne's, and Randy's lead. I am proud to boast about my State's tradition of military service. As veterans continue to risk life and limb for us, I will work as hard as I can to make sure they are taken care of before, during, and after their mission is completed.

In the coming days, we will vote on the Defense authorization conference report. As a conferee, I was proud to work on this legislation, which includes a 3.7 percent across-the-board military pay increase, expands TRICARE coverage for the Guard and Reserve personnel and their families, and provides benefits and programs to improve the overall quality of the pay for our service men and women.

This legislation also authorizes disabled military retirees to collect their retirement pay and disability compensation, otherwise known as concurrent receipt. This measure would benefit millions of Americans who have served our country for years but have been prohibited from receiving both retirement compensation and VA disability benefits.

Correcting this inequity for our veterans is long overdue—in fact, 110 years overdue. I made a promise to take care of our service men and women who put their lives on the line for our country. This provision indicates Congress's intention to finally honor its word.

I am also looking forward to debating the VA/HUD appropriations bill where I have an understanding we will be looking to add \$1.3 billion to veterans health care. We cannot discount the importance of this funding, especially as more veterans come home from Afghanistan and Iraq and the global world on terrorism. We must ensure that the Veterans' Administration has the resources it needs to look after those men and women who look after us.

Mostly, this Veterans Day fills me with a sense of security and pride because of my faith in the ability and skills of our men and women in uniform. This faith nourishes my hope for a peaceful future for my children and the children of Arkansas.

I know our men and women in uniform are the most capable fighting force on Earth. I know these individuals will willingly endure personal sacrifice and danger to defend our democratic values, just as our veterans of yesteryear endured personal sacrifice and danger to provide us the freedom and democracy we enjoy today. I know our Armed Forces will be victorious in their mission.

On this Veterans Day, I extend my gratitude and the gratitude of every Arkansan to our veterans and their families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I ask what the allocation of time is.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There are 7 minutes 54 seconds on the Democratic side and 5 minutes on the Republican side.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, let me ask the Democratic Senator in the Chamber if that is enough time for them to finish. We need to be through at 12:15.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Texas for making the inquiry. The fact is I need about 10 minutes and the Senator from North Dakota needs 5 minutes. If that could be accommodated on an equal exchange basis, I suggest we ask unanimous consent to do so.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. How much more would that extend the time on the other side? How much more time would

that give us if we equally divided that, our 5 minutes plus the extra?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That would be an extra 8 minutes on the Democratic side and a total of 28 minutes.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, if this is a unanimous consent request for more time, I would like to accommodate my colleagues. I have come to the floor with the expectation to speak at noon, which it is now, on the Syria Accountability Act, and actually I had some time on veterans as well. I have other commitments, such as, to go to the White House for the bill signing ceremony with the President.

So I am glad to accommodate my colleagues, but if it is going to run for 28 more minutes, that is going to preclude my speaking on the Syria Accountability Act.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I do not think we need 28 minutes. I was going to ask for 5 minutes for the Senator from Alabama, which we have left on our side. I think if you wanted—

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Fifteen.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Fifteen?

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Right. I appreciate the fact the Senator from Pennsylvania has other obligations, but this is Veterans Day. I want to talk about veterans. I think we have that particular obligation since we are here today and we are not in our home States, able to visit veterans, visit cemeteries, and talk to people about veterans.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the request?

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, reserving—

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, if I could ask a unanimous consent request and see if this is what people want: that there be 15 minutes divided on the Democratic side as they wish and 5 minutes to the Senator from Alabama, for a total of 20 minutes from now. Is that an acceptable unanimous consent request to all on the floor?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I ask that I be reminded at the 9-minute mark, if I have gotten that far, please, that I have 1 minute remaining.

I was in Newark yesterday, at our cathedral there, attending the funeral of SGT Joel Perez. Sergeant Perez had been deployed to Iraq as part of the Army's 2nd Battalion, 5th Field Artillery Regiment. He died on November 2 when the Chinook helicopter he was in was shot down. An article appeared in the New York Times on Sunday, and it listed the 16 soldiers, including Sergeant Perez, the 16 young people who perished on behalf of our country, our interests, our liberty.

The names of those who died along with Joel Perez when that Chinook heli-

copter was shot down are: Daniel A. Bader, Ernest G. Bucklew, Steven D. Conover, Anthony D. D'Agostino, Paul F. Fisher, Darius T. Jennings, Karina S. Lau, Keelan L. Moss, Brian H. Penisten, Ross A. Pennanen, Brian D. Slavenas, Bruce A. Smith, Frances M. Vega, Paul Anthony Velazquez, and Joe N. Wilson.

We salute their bravery and their courage and their sacrifice.

Sergeant Perez was on that helicopter because he had been granted leave to come home to celebrate his third wedding anniversary. And now he has come home, in a flag-draped casket. Yesterday was his third anniversary and his funeral. He was 25 years old. He leaves behind his wife Milagros, an infant daughter Jaileen, his mother Luisa and father Edwin, and three brothers, Elvin, Michael, and Leo.

As I said at the funeral yesterday, it is a sobering moment when you see the reality of a life that has passed so quickly. All you have to do is look at the date of his birth—1978—and the date of his death—2003—they are much too close together.

Sergeant Perez is the ninth New Jersey resident killed in Iraq. The other eight are: Army SP Simeon Hunte, who was 23 years old, of Newark; Army 2LT Richard Torres, who was 25 years old, of Passaic; Army SFC Gladimir Philippe, who was 37 years old, of Roselle; Army SP Kyle A. Griffin, who was 20, of Emerson; Army SP Narson B. Sullivan, who was 21, of North Brunswick; Army SP Gil Mercado, who was 25, of Paterson, my home town; Army SSG Terry W. Hemingway, who was 39, of Willingboro; and Army SP Michael Edward Curtin, who was 23, of Howell.

I feel a special kinship to these young people because they were from my State. I also feel a special kinship because I am a veteran. I enlisted when I was 18 years old, right out of high school. I served in Europe during World War II.

Today is Veterans Day. It has been nearly 50 years since President Eisenhower signed a bill into law making November 11 Veterans Day.

The history of Veterans Day goes back even further, to 1918, when an armistice between the Allied and Central Powers brought World War I to an end at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

On November 11, 1920, the British interred an unidentified British soldier in Westminster Abbey to commemorate the Armistice. The French interred an unidentified French soldier under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

In 1921, an American soldier's remains were disinterred in France and sent on the transatlantic voyage to Washington, D.C., where they lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda for three days. Then, at 11:00 a.m. on November 11, the remains of this Unknown Soldier were buried at Arlington National Cemetery beneath a marble block which reads, "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God."

Since the founding of our country, nearly 50 million men and women have answered the call of duty. There are about 25 million veterans alive today.

Right now, we have 130,000 troops in Iraq, another 10,000 in Kuwait, and 10,000 in Afghanistan. Other Americans are serving in South Korea, in Bosnia and Kosovo, and in every other corner of the globe.

We owe our veterans and the brave young men and women who currently serve in our military more than we can calculate. It is very tough duty. I know that from personal experience. That is why I deeply regret that the Senate is in session today. I do not ever recall the Senate being in session on Veterans Day before. Frankly, I think it is disrespectful to veterans across America and to the veterans in this body for the Senate to be in session today.

Why are we doing it? Why are we here? Well, we are told that we have a full agenda and that we have very few days left to get our work done—work that was supposed to be done six weeks ago. But how are we going to spend the precious few days before we hope to adjourn? We are going to take 30 hours of that time to debate a handful of highly controversial judges whose nominations Democrats object to.

I feel compelled to put this chart up on the floor for everyone to see because it is kind of a scorecard that shows the Clinton years and how many nominees were confirmed in those years and the dozens of nominees who were blocked by the Republicans. Then we can see how many of President Bush's nominees have been confirmed and how many have been blocked by Democrats.

Democrats are objecting to a total of four nominees who have neither the experience nor the temperament to be confirmed to lifetime positions in the federal judiciary. Four nominees have been blocked, 2 percent of the total. And we are being told that we cannot afford the time today to be at home with our veterans or go to the cemeteries or go to the veterans hospitals so that we can pay our respects to those who have served or are serving this country. We cannot be with our veterans today because we have to spend 30 hours starting tomorrow to talk about four nominees.

So, in all candor, I have to say that I am upset by our being here. It is not the question of another day's work—we can do the work—but that the majority could not find time to permit Senators to be in their States with their constituents, especially veterans, with the families who have lost loved ones in Iraq or Afghanistan or Beirut or Vietnam or Korea or so many other places.

When I look at the reason why we are here today, it rings hollow, as far as I am concerned. I regret that we are here. This is the day we should meet with veterans groups. This is the day when we remember the sacrifice that so many have made on our behalf. This is the day we ought to be thinking about how we respond to our need for

additional troops in Iraq. This is the day we ought to think about what it is our brave young service men and women should come home to when they have fulfilled their duty: adequate health care and jobs and opportunity.

What kind of a message do we send to our veterans and to those who currently serve in our military? What kind of message do we send to the young men and women we are trying to recruit? Today is a solemn day deliberately set aside to pay tribute to our veterans, and the Senate is in session because we have to spend a day and a half starting tomorrow talking about four judges.

I want the veterans across the country and the young men and women currently in harm's way to know they are appreciated, to know that some of the misery they are going through now is understood. How do you do that? Ideally, you do that by taking the time necessary to go and greet them personally. You do it by making sure veterans' benefits are adequate. You do it by making sure the medical care will be there, and the educational opportunities. That is the appropriate way to show our veterans that we appreciate them. We are not going to show it by working here today when, in fact, the veterans back home would like to see us back home.

Be that as it may, we are stuck here today. So I want to take this opportunity to say in the most heartfelt way possible that I appreciate our veterans. And I salute the brave young men and women who currently serve, especially those who serve in the Reserves and the National Guard. I appreciate the enormous, enormous sacrifice that many of them are making now that we are asking them to serve a year or more at a time, taking them away from their families, their communities, and their jobs. Today reminds us of just how much we have to be thankful for.

Mr. President, I yield the remainder of the time we have to our friend from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. The Senator from Texas just inquired whether the Senator from Alabama might go next. I understand I have 5 minutes remaining; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Six and a half minutes.

Mr. DORGAN. I would be happy to have the Senator from Alabama finish his remarks which are 5 minutes. I will take 5 minutes, and then we will finish.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. I thank the Senator from North Dakota and appreciate his courtesy. I don't think veterans are going to be unhappy we are here working today. They might have been happy to see the scene yesterday when we should have been able to make progress on a number of things, and we had the assistant Democratic leader speaking 8 hours plus and reading from a book about cactus and rabbits. They might be unhappy about that.

We have soldiers in the field this very day at risk, carrying out the policy of this Senate, this Congress, that we passed by over a three-fourths vote. We ought to be here talking about our country and doing some of the country's business.

In fact, I was in Walter Reed Hospital this morning. I had the honor to meet with the service men and women who have been injured, some fairly seriously, in the service of their country.

I met with Sergeant Larry Gill who grew up in Mobile, AL, went to Murphy High School where my daughter went. I knew his father, Lieutenant James Gill, in the Mobile police department, a great officer. Larry Gill had a severe injury to his lower leg. He has been there over a month now. It is getting better. He was so optimistic. It was so wonderful to see his wife Leah who is a school teacher at Murphy High School, and his two children, Sean and Ryan, and be able to talk with them and see the positive attitude he had, the commitment to serving his country. It was so inspiring. Larry Gill in 1983 was a young Marine serving in Beirut, Lebanon when that embassy was attacked, guarding the embassy as a marine, as he was often called upon to do. He was knocked unconscious and had to be dug out from the rubble of the attack. He was a victim of terrorism in 1983. Now he comes back as part of our war on terrorism and is injured again.

As he said, he thought he ought to start collecting baseball cards rather than Purple Hearts. That just is an example of his spirit.

At the time he was injured, he was part of a National Guard unit from Alabama, the 1165th MP company. SPC Chris Harris and SGT Richard Barns and SPC4 Jose Garcia were injured.

I see Senator LAUTENBERG here. SPC4 Garcia, from New Jersey, was assigned to the unit. He was injured, and he refused to go home; said, no, he wanted to stay with his unit, as did Specialist Harris. Both had flesh wounds that could have caused them to be removed from the theater. They said, no, they wanted to stay with their troops. That is the kind of character and courage we have out there today. It is a pleasure to see them.

I also visited PFC Chris Busby from Valley Head, AL, a town of 600. He was injured in Baghdad. He was in an uparmored Humvee. That is important because we have been trying to make sure every uparmored Humvee possible is there because it is much more resistant to attack than regular Humvees. His foot was out the door as he was speaking and a mortar round hit. He said had he not been in an uparmored Humvee, he may well have been far more seriously injured, if not killed. His arm and leg which were outside the door were both severely injured.

Asking how he happened to join, he said: Well, it was after September 11. I thought I ought to serve my country.

He is 20 years old. His father was there. His father served 7 years as an

MP. His brother is in Germany. He is also an MP. That is the kind of great, rock-solid Americans who preserve, protect, and defend our country on a daily basis. I am so proud of them. They serve us so well.

Just a little over a week ago I had the burden of calling Mrs. Roxy Bell. Her son, Aubrey Bell, 33, a sergeant with the 214th MP Company, National Guard Company from the Alabama National Guard, was killed in a firefight through an improvised explosive device in Baghdad at the Al Bayra police station where he was working. Sergeant Bell was part of the 214th MP company from Baldwin County, AL. I had the pleasure to visit with them when I was in Iraq in August. I had supper with them. I talked to them. They talked about patrolling the streets of Baghdad with the Iraqi police who had been brought on, which is exactly what we need to do to stabilize that country, bring on more Iraqi police. They were so positive, had such extraordinarily good morale. I was exceedingly proud of them. It was most painful to have to call and talk to his mother at the loss of her fine son who lost his life serving his country.

All of us need to remember that. We have sent those young men and women out. They are serving at our direction. They are placing their lives on the line for us on a daily basis.

We ask God's blessing and protection be with each one of them and that we are given the wisdom to help guide them in the application of their abilities and their lives in an effective way.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, how much time remains?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Six and a half minutes.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, in April of this year I was in Italy. I had stopped at an American military cemetery about 15, 20 minutes outside of Florence. On a beautiful morning, the sun was shining on the graves of 5,000 American soldiers who left their homes, left their families, and answered the call to serve their country and gave their lives during the Second World War. Their final resting place is now a cemetery, a beautifully kept military cemetery maintained by the Battlefield Monuments Commission of our country south of Florence.

I was thinking of that prose that says: When the night is full of knives and the lightning is seen and the drums are heard, the patriots are always there, ready to fight and ready to die, if necessary, to defend their country. Those patriots have given the ultimate sacrifice all across the world in defense of freedom here.

I was thinking this morning of a telephone call last week. I called a German hospital in which Brandon Olson was resting. He had just been wounded in Iraq. I called him in the hospital and I called his mother. Brandon Olson's mother called him on Thursday. On

Friday he had his foot amputated. She called him prior to surgery. When I talked to her, she told me her son was under heavy medication. She could tell when she called him that he was in pain and his voice was weak.

This mother told her son, lying in the German hospital: You don't have to talk. I just want to hear you breathe.

It is a mother, concerned about her son, who left this small town of Hazen, ND to answer the call of his country. That is Brandon Olson. But it was also Brandon Ericson and Jason Frey, young men and women, in this case three North Dakotans, who lost their lives fighting in Iraq.

Finally, I believe, after some long period, this country is reaching out to its veterans and finally understanding its requirement, its obligation to say thank you—thank you for your sacrifice and thank you for honoring our country.

This morning in the newspaper in our largest city, Fargo, ND, they pointed out that:

The planeload of civilian passengers in a metropolitan airport terminal a couple of weeks back who stood and cheered in unison when asked by United Airlines to give up their seats on an overbooked flight and take a later flight so that soldiers headed home on 14-day leaves from Iraq could get there a few hours earlier. Every soldier got a seat on that airplane.

They all got on that flight because other passengers gave up their seats. That is what is happening in this country today as we face danger, difficulty, and challenges as a nation in Iraq and Afghanistan, and danger from terrorists around the world. Our country is saying to those who wear our uniform: Thank you. We owe you a great debt, one which we may never be able to repay, but we recognize your sacrifice and commitment to our country.

As I looked at those gravesites south of Florence, Italy, in that beautiful cemetery on that April morning, I thought of John McCrae's wonderful poem "In Flanders Fields." He wrote:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short day ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

It reminds us again—especially today, on Veterans Day—all across America that the liberty we enjoy, the freedom we take for granted was paid for by the blood of patriots, and every American family has been touched by those patriots who have given the ultimate sacrifice. Every American community can and should recognize today those who live up the block or down

the block or on the farm, who went all across this world and have fought valiantly for America's freedom, and have come home to live quietly among neighbors, never talking much about their service to our country.

But that service is what has made this the wonderful country it is. There is no place like it on Earth. There is no place quite as free as the United States of America, and that freedom has not been achieved without great sacrifice by young men and women. When America sends its sons and daughters to war, when America asks its sons and daughters to fight, then we must resolve to do everything we can to make that a successful fight on behalf of America's freedom.

Today, we honor wonderful veterans who have served this country for many decades.

I yield the floor.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, today, Veterans Day, we honor America's veterans. It is to serve as 85 years of recognition after armistice was declared on November 11, at 11 a.m., in 1918. We pay tribute to our veterans today, but I suggest to my colleagues and fellow Americans we ought to pay more tribute to veterans every day.

The first veteran I knew was my father, Harry Specter, who was a veteran of World War I. My father had come to the United States as an immigrant, at the age of 18, in 1911. The Czar in control of Russia at the time wanted to send my father, among many others, to Siberia. My father chose instead to come to America. He literally walked across Europe, barely a ruble in his pocket, and traveled at the bottom of the boat to the United States to make a new life for himself. He did not know at that time that he had a round-trip ticket to France, not to Paris and the Folies Bergeres with the dancing girls, but to the Argonne Forest where he was wounded in action.

My father carried shrapnel in his legs until the day he died. The U.S. Government promised the veterans of World War I a \$500 bonus and, as has been the case so frequently with the U.S. Government, the promise was broken. The veterans then mounted a march on Washington in 1932 to seek redress, exercising their constitutional right to petition their Government, and also in petitioning their Government, to have the Government fulfill the promise the Government had made to pay the veterans a \$500 bonus.

Today, when there is a demonstration in Washington, the red carpet is rolled out. On that day, in 1932, the cavalry was rolled out with drawn sabers, led by MAJ George C. Patton. In command was the Chief of Staff of the Army, Douglas MacArthur. There is a famous picture of General MacArthur, with his aide de camp, MAJ Dwight Eisenhower. On that day, veterans were killed. It is one of the blackest days in American history.

That was the way the U.S. Government responded to the pleas of the

World War I veterans who were asking only for what they had been promised—their \$500 bonus. In a sense, in a metaphor, I have been on my way to Washington ever since to get my father's bonus. I have not gotten it yet, so I am still here and running for reelection.

When we honor the veterans today, we ought to make note of the fact that the medical services that are available to veterans are, realistically viewed, insufficient. We are about to take up, in the course of the next several days, the appropriations bill for veterans. We are endeavoring to get an additional \$1.3 billion to help on veterans medical benefits.

I have the honor to chair the Veterans Affairs Committee in the Senate. Later today, I will join President Bush at the White House for a bill-signing ceremony, where we are creating additional veteran cemeteries across America, so that the families of veterans can be near their departed loved ones and can pay tribute without traveling long distances.

At the present time, families of veterans who live in southeastern Pennsylvania have to travel about 100 miles to Indiantown Gap, to Annville, to pay respects, where veterans are now interred, buried, from the southeastern part of the State. After a great deal of effort, going back about 6 years, I am paying tribute to former Congressman John Fox, who worked with me initially to introduce the legislation that was finally passed by both Houses of Congress. JIM GERLACH is the current sponsor in the House of Representatives—Congressman GERLACH—and there will be a bill-signing ceremony today where President Bush will affix a signature and we will at least have done that for veterans.

There are many issues pending to take care of America's veterans. We are currently in the Veterans Affairs Committee reviewing a proposal by the Department of Veterans Affairs to alter the hospital accommodations across America. We are determined to see to it that any changes which are made benefit rather than hurt veterans.

Mr. President, on the subject of the proposals which are now pending, I am very much concerned, as chairman of the committee, for the entire Nation about what will happen to many of the facilities which are under review—facilities in New York, facilities in California, facilities across the country, and one very hotly contested facility in Waco, TX. I am concerned about what will happen in Pittsburgh where there are proposals to close Highland Drive. If that is done, there has to be an adequate accommodation so that the facilities are at least equal to, if not better than what is currently available. There are concerns about Butler, PA, Erie, PA, and across my State. A new facility is due in Lebanon.

So on this day when we are concerned about veterans, when we pay honor to them, we ought to remember

that the veterans have created the climate of freedom. When we pause and remember the veterans on Armistice Day of 1918, remember that it is a continuum of veterans who have served America since the Revolutionary War. My brother served in World War II, as did my brother-in-law in the South Pacific. I was in the service during the Korean war and served stateside.

We now have many aging veterans from World War II and the Korean war who need more accommodations. We have veterans from Vietnam and the gulf war and from Iraq. As we pay tribute to the veterans for what they have done for America, America should reciprocate and see to it that the needs of veterans are adequately responded to.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I wish to say a few words about Veterans Day, the day we honor millions who have served in our Armed Forces. We give thanks to those who risk their lives and, frankly, who are risking their lives as we speak. They have done it and they are doing it now out of love of country.

We also mourn those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our Nation. As American casualties mount in Iraq, Veterans Day takes on a very special meaning. Many in our country have lost loved ones in Iraq, and every day we all pray for the safe return of our men and women in uniform.

In my home State of California, we have lost 73 from California or based in California. The burden is heavy for their relatives—mothers, dads, children, friends. Yet we know they went over there, in many cases, following their families in a rich military tradition and, in some cases, because they wanted to stand up and be counted for their country.

They have courage and dignity. It is our responsibility to only send them into harm's way when we know what we are doing; to only send them into harm's way when we have a plan; to only send them into harm's way when we have an exit strategy, and these are issues we will continue to work on because some of us, I am afraid, do not see that plan and do not see that exit strategy.

I wish to say on a personal note that November 11 is also my birthday. I say that because as a child, I was so proud I was born on what was called Armistice Day because Armistice Day reflected a day of peace, the end of a war, the end of the war to end all wars, which World War I was known as. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be. There were more wars. In 1954, Congress changed the name of Armistice Day to Veterans Day to pay homage to all of our veterans.

I regret I am not able to spend today with veterans in my State. I really had wanted to do that, but I do appreciate this opportunity to pay tribute to them on the floor of the Senate.

One more point on veterans. Earlier today I introduced legislation to help

our future veterans by reimbursing States and localities that continue to pay their government employees who are Guard and reservists—such as policeman and firefighters—when they are called to active duty. This legislation will go a long way to help the families of these Guard men and women and reservists make ends meet.

In many cases, the local and State governments are paying their salaries and are falling behind. It seems to me that is the least we can do, is reimburse for those funds. I hope others will join me in this legislation. By the way, many of our States and counties and cities are already doing this, and their budgets are hurting.

This is a war that was, in fact, voted on here and executed by the President. Therefore, it seems to me the least we can do is reimburse local agencies who are putting out the funding.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, November 11, Veterans Day, is the day of reverence for American veterans. It is the day of the year set aside to honor the people who have defended our country, our way of life, and our freedom. It is the day that allows us to pause to recognize their patriotism, their love of country, their willingness to serve, and their willingness to sacrifice.

Just last year, President Bush called Veterans Day the day that we "show our gratitude to the veterans of the United States Armed Forces"—a day when "we honor veterans and we honor their families, and we offer the thanks of a grateful Nation."

The very origins of this day are both historic and symbolic. It began at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month—that is, 11/11/11—of 1918 when the allied powers signed a cease-fire agreement with the central powers, thus bringing to an end the 4-year bloody nightmare known as World War I.

The next year, the United States set aside November 11 as Armistice Day to remember and honor the sacrifices that men and women made during World War I.

In 1926, a congressional resolution officially named November 11 Armistice Day. Twelve years later, in 1938, Congress made Armistice Day a national holiday.

In 1954, following World War II and the Korean war, Congress made November 11 a day to honor veterans of all wars, and therefore changed the name of this most important day to Veterans Day. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the President of the United States at the time, asked Americans to use this day to "remember the sacrifices of all those who fought so valiantly on the seas, in the air, and on foreign shores, to preserve our heritage of freedom." In the first Presidential "Veterans Day Proclamation," President Eisenhower proclaimed:

It is my earnest hope that all veterans, their organizations, and the entire citizenry will join hands to insure proper and widespread observance of this day.

Just how important and symbolic this day had become to the American people and, especially, our veterans, was demonstrated in the reaction to the Uniform Holiday bill of 1968. This legislation was part of an overall plan to make holidays part of a 3-day weekend, which would, in turn, encourage travel, recreational and cultural activities, and stimulate greater industrial and commercial activity. In so doing, this legislation changed the observance of Veterans Day from November 11 to the fourth Monday in October.

Seldom in all of my 51 years in Congress has Congress so misjudged the feelings of the American people. American veterans in particular, and Americans in general, demanded that the observance of Veterans Day be restored as November 11. It was all right to monkey around with Columbus Day, we learned, and even the birthday of the father of our country. But we should have never touched November 11.

According to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, November 11 has a special meaning to veterans of all wars and is a part of American history. Of all the days in the year, the one day which has the most significance to those citizens who made an extra sacrifice in the national interest by their service in the Armed Forces is November 11.

Many States simply continued to celebrate November 11 as Veterans Day.

Immediately, Members of Congress introduced legislation to redesignate November 11 as Veterans Day. My former colleague in this Chamber, Senator Robert Dole, who himself was a World War II veteran and was destined to become a majority leader of the Senate and a nominee of the Republican Party for Vice President and President, proposed such legislation. He called November 11 a "legal holiday that provides a unique and fitting day of recognition for our American veterans." It is the day, Senator Dole declared, when the Nation pays "tribute and homage to the men and women who have given so much in their quest for world peace and freedom."

By 1975, 42 States, including my own State of West Virginia, had returned to the practice of celebrating Veterans Day on November 11. In that year, Congress approved legislation to return the annual observance of Veterans Day to November 11. President Gerald R. Ford signed the bill, stating:

It has become apparent that the commemoration of this day on November 11 is a matter of historic and patriotic significance to a great many of our citizens. It is a practice deeply and firmly rooted in our customs and traditions.

More recently, when legislative ideas were circulating through Congress to bolster voter participation in Federal elections, at least one proposal centered on designating Veterans Day as the national election day. In response to that proposal, my office was flooded with phone calls from veterans, saying: "Please don't take away our special day."

Mr. President, November 11 is their special day. It is for this reason that during the years in which it was my privilege to serve as the majority leader of the U.S. Senate, I was always determined that this legislative body would not be in session on this most important and symbolic date. I always wanted to make sure that my colleagues and I had the opportunity to take part in the many ceremonies that take place on this day in honor of the courage and the sacrifice of America's veterans. I always wanted to make sure that this Chamber paid proper homage to the men and women to whom we owe so much.

Writing about the thousands of soldiers who lost their lives during the bloody battle at Antietam, Civil War historian, Bruce Catton, pointed out that these men did not die for a few feet of a cornfield or a rocky hill; they died that this country might be permitted to go on, and that it might be permitted to fulfill the great hope of our Founding Fathers.

So may it be said of most every person who has worn our Nation's uniform. These people served and they sacrificed to permit this country to go on to fulfill the great hope of our Founding Fathers. And it is proper and it is right that we take one day a year to pay our most profound respect to the men and the women who have worn our Nation's uniform, and to thank them.

I thank them and we here in the Senate thank them on this day for what they have given, for what they have sacrificed, and for their love of country.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is now closed.

The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

#### SYRIA ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, on behalf of the majority leader, I call up the Syria Accountability Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will state the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1828) to halt Syrian support for terrorism, end its occupation of Lebanon, stop its development of weapons of mass destruction, cease its illegal importation of Iraqi oil and illegal shipments of weapons and other military items to Iraq, and by so doing hold Syria accountable for the serious international security problems it has caused in the Middle East, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time for debate is limited to 90 minutes, with 30 minutes under the control of the Senator from Indiana, Mr. LUGAR, or his designee, 30 minutes under the control of the Senator from Delaware, Mr. BIDEN, or his designee, and 30 min-

utes under the control of the Senator from Pennsylvania, Mr. SPECTER.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, there is before the Senate the so-called Syrian Accountability Act, which imposes sanctions on Syria. It recites a long list of circumstances where the Syrians have not taken sufficient action to fight terrorism, and then it calls for Syria to take corrective action, and in the absence of that corrective action, authorizes the imposition of economic sanctions, and it leaves with the President of the United States the authority to waive those sanctions if it is in the national interest.

Sanctions are imposed by Congress with some frequency. At first blush, this appears to be a straightforward affirmative vote, but I believe the matter is more complicated than that, and I have come to that view after having traveled to Syria almost every year since 1984, and after having had considerable contact with the Syrian Government. After considering the matter at some length, I have decided that I will vote in favor of the Syrian Accountability Act because the problems of terrorism are so serious and because I believe that Syria needs to do more.

The bill itself has a long recitation of background circumstances, but the events today in Iraq, where our fighting men and women are being subjected to terrorist attacks, casualties and fatalities, and where the people of Iraq are being subjected as victims of terrorism, I believe it is a fair demand that more be done. That would include more by Syria.

There are, according to reliable reports, official statements of the U.S. Government that terrorists are infiltrating into Syria, coming from Syria into Iraq. More has to be done on that subject.

It has to be noted that Syria has responded with a number of affirmative actions to be of assistance to the United States in our war on terrorists. The officials of the State Department have acknowledged that after September 11, 2001, that information was provided by Syria on al-Qaeda, which saved U.S. lives.

It is also to be acknowledged there has been some improvement on the Syrian-Iraqi border, but clearly not enough. There were reports just this morning from the State Department about the porous Syrian border and terrorists coming into Iraq, again exposing U.S. personnel and the Iraqis themselves to terrorist attack.

It ought to be noted that Syria did join in the unanimous resolution, U.N. Resolution 1511, and that when Secretary of State Powell traveled to Syria in April of 2002, there was some helpful action taken by the Syrian Government on the southern border of Lebanon. But when Secretary of State Powell went to Syria in May of 2003 and urged the Syrian Government to oust the terrorists from Damascus, that request was not acted upon. Recently, Israel moved against terrorist

training camps within a few miles of Damascus.

While all of these matters are subjected to controversy, and there are disputes by the Syrian Government, I believe the balance of the evidence supports the conclusion that those were training camps.

I believe it is important that the U.S. Government continues in its efforts to negotiate with Syria to try to improve the situation, and that we ought to be mindful that there are opportunities to have frank discussions with the Syrian officials which have led to some beneficial results and which ought to be pursued.

I urge my colleagues in the U.S. Congress, pursuant to our duties, for example, on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee on which I serve, or on the Foreign Relations Committee, to travel to Syria to engage the Syrian leaders because I think it can be productive. I make reference to my own experience in that regard.

I made my first trip to Syria in 1984. As I have said, I have been to Syria almost every year since. I first met President Bashar al-Assad in January of 1988 and found him to be willing to listen and willing to have a dialog. My conversation at that time with President Assad lasted for some 4 hours and 35 minutes, talking about a wide range of issues—the Israeli-Syrian relations, the Iran-Iraq war, which was still in progress at that time, U.S.-Syrian relations, the situations with the Jews in Syria. At that time, working with then Congressman Solarz, I urged President Assad to allow the Jews to have free immigration out of Syria. There were many Jewish women in Syria who could not find husbands of the Jewish faith. President Assad said to me, in one of our meetings, he would release any Jewish woman where somebody came from the United States—there were large Syrian-Jewish groupings in the United States—to come to claim a bride, and anyone who wanted to marry a woman in Syria who was Jewish, if a suitor came, the woman would be released.

I reported back to a number of Jewish-Syrian enclaves in the United States. Nothing much happened about that. Finally, a few years later, President Assad granted free rights for the Jews to leave Syria at their choice, something he had resisted, but something which he finally was persuaded to do.

During the course of the discussions I had with President Assad, I urged him to participate in discussions with Israel. At first, he took the position he would not be a party to any discussions which were sponsored just by the United States but only if they were sponsored by all five of the permanent members of the Security Council.

Finally, President Assad made a change and sent representatives to Madrid in 1991 to participate in those discussions. When Prime Minister Netanyahu was elected in 1996, Prime