

awaited freedom, it is important that we remember men like these who paid for that freedom with their blood.

Before our troops so bravely put their lives on the line, there was no such freedom in Iraq. Iraqi citizens were subject to the cruel and brutal whims of a mad dictator. They lived every moment in the oppressive grip of a regime whose power knew no limits. They lived in fear with rape, torture, and murder always in their minds.

Because LCpl Blair, SFC Rehn, SGT Robbins, and SP Oaks were willing to lay down their lives for freedom, many citizens of Iraq are awaking to a new day, and the world is now a safer place.

As we watch the final days of Saddam Hussein's evil regime unfold, let us never forget that the freedom we enjoy every day in America is bought at a price.

LCpl Blair, SFC Rehn, SGT Robbins, and SP Oaks did not die in vain. They died so that many others could live freely. And for that sacrifice, we are forever indebted. Our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families today and with the troops who are still fighting to liberate Iraq.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, it is with great sadness, but greater pride, that I rise today to recognize a true warrior and Colorado native who gave of the ultimate sacrifice. SFC Randall Rehn, of Niwot, CO, served with honor and distinction.

Sergeant Rehn was killed during one of the most significant events of this war. His vehicle was destroyed during the fight to take Saddam International Airport. It is because of sacrifices such as Sergeant Rehn's, a tyrant and his oppressive regime will be defeated.

While I grieve for the loss of Sergeant Rehn, my pride and respect abound. I know that Colorado, as Gov. Bill Owens said, "has gained a hero." My prayers go out to the family of this fallen hero and hope they know this country honors Sergeant Rehn's sacrifice and recognizes their loss.

Mr. President, I wish to salute a fallen soldier of the great State of Colorado. Capt. Russell Rippetoe gave the greatest sacrifice in the service of his country and for the freedom of his fellow Americans.

Captain Rippetoe joined an Army ROTC unit while he attended Metro State College in Denver. He entered the Army's elite Ranger unit and served in Afghanistan before being deployed to Iraq. Captain Rippetoe continued his family's proud tradition of serving his country. His father retired as a lieutenant colonel.

I think his family said it best when they said, "Russell loved this nation and America has lost a true American hero." I want to echo that sentiment by saying that Colorado has lost a warrior, a great citizen, and a son.

Mr. President, I also stand today to acknowledge a true hero. Colorado said farewell to one of its own. Marine Cpl Randall Rosacker was laid to rest, as

he requested, in a Colorado veterans graveyard with full military honors.

Corporal Rosacker served this great Nation proudly in Afghanistan and gave the ultimate sacrifice in the war with Iraq. He was killed in a firefight early in the war, but paved the way to future success on the battlefield. His service to the country will always be remembered and appreciated.

Corporal Rosacker was born in Alamosa and still has strong Colorado roots with grandparents and great-grandparents still residing in Colorado. My prayers go out to the family of this fallen hero and hope they know this country honors Corporal Rosacker's sacrifice and recognizes their loss. Today I ask the Senate to recognize this great American as Colorado has.

And I ask we recognize one of the heroes of the war in Iraq. LCpl Thomas Slocum of Thornton, CO, was killed in action while defending the principles of freedom and justice against a brutal dictator's regime.

Corporal Slocum's unit was ambushed by a group of Iraqis who cowardly indicated they were surrendering and then opened fire. He was a brave and patriotic son of Colorado. He will be remembered by all as "proud to be a marine." He believed in what he was doing over there.

Though any loss of life is tragic, we as Americans can hold our heads high because of the sacrifices of our servicemen such as Thomas Slocum. My prayers go out to the family of this fallen hero and hope they know this country honors Corporal Slocum's sacrifice and recognizes their loss.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to SP James Kiehl, who gave his life for his country as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and to express my deepest sympathy to his family. SP Kiehl was part of the 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company, which was ambushed in southern Iraq. While we still don't know for sure what happened that day, U.S. forces later recovered his body during an operation in which they rescued another member of James's company, PFC Jessica Lynch. My prayers are with James's father in Comfort, TX and James's wife, Jill, Des Moines, IA. Since James left their home in Texas to go to war, Jill has been staying with her parents in Iowa where she is expecting their first child. I can only imagine how difficult this time must be for her. Although their child will never meet James, the child can take comfort knowing that SP Kiehl died a hero and a patriot.

James Kiehl will be missed by a great many people who were a part of his life. I know I join all Iowans in expressing my support for Jill in her time of loss. Just as she will keep James's memory alive, it is our duty to recognize and remember James's sacrifice. In fact, I understand that James Kiehl spoke to his father about his military service saying that he did not want to raise his son in a world of terrorism; and so his service has helped to make

us all safer. We must not forget those who have paid the immeasurably high price in the name of freedom. Liberty-loving Americans like James Kiehl deserve our unending gratitude.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, what is the parliamentary status of the Senate as we speak?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate has no business pending.

Mr. REID. We hate to admit that is the way it is. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

SENATE SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we have had in our cloakroom numerous phone calls. I have spoken to a number of Senators. We have military funerals going on around the country people wish to attend. We have two Senators now in attendance at a military funeral. We need to move on with the business of the Senate. We are here, ready to go.

The reason I say this is that throughout the day I will get inquiries from Senators about why can't we move along more quickly. We are going to ask that our member of the Budget Committee go forward with his statement on the budget. If there is no one here from the other side, that would be unfair. But I hope we can get to this soon because if we use all 10 hours on the budget alone, we are not going to finish until approximately 10:15 tonight—I am sorry, 8:15 tonight. There will be a lot of concern about that.

We still have the supplemental. We are going to conference at 10:30. We have a lot of work to do. I am disappointed that we are not on the budget now. Senator CONRAD is ready to go. As I have said two times already in my brief discussion, we are having a lot of inquiries about people wanting to go home for the work period that we have scheduled.

We hope everybody understands that 10 minutes this morning is 10 minutes lost this afternoon. Airplanes need to be made.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I inquire of the distinguished leader, on our side, we are quite anxious to act on the nomination of MG Steven Blum to become the National Guard Commander. All 50 States are involved. The Armed Services Committee unanimously voted him out yesterday.

Mr. REID. We will be happy to look at that. Maybe if we get on the budget—if it is cleared—we can get off the

budget for a short time and clear that. I think we need to get the time running on the budget.

Mr. WARNER. I thank the assistant leader. He represents so many guardsmen who are now fighting valiantly. I thank the Senator.

Mr. REID. Some of whom, from Nevada, have been killed in combat in the war in Iraq.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

FISCAL YEAR 2004 BUDGET— CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H. Con. Res 95, the concurrent budget resolution for fiscal year 2004.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the budget resolution conference report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Committee of Conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res 95), establishing the Congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2004, and setting forth appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2003 and 2005 through 2013, having met, have agreed that the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate, and agree to the same with an amendment, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask the Budget Committee chairman if he will yield for a question.

Mr. NICKLES. Certainly.

Mr. REID. As I said a few minutes ago, on our side there is real angst as to when we might finish this budget conference report. We have 5 hours on our side. At this stage, we have the intention of using most all of that time. I am wondering, from your perspective, how much of your time are you going to use? It is important for people who are bouncing around the country.

Mr. NICKLES. Did the Senator say they have the intention of yielding most of their time?

Mr. REID. Using the time.

Mr. NICKLES. I am happy to work with my colleagues to find a mutually agreed upon time for debate and for final passage. We have up to 10 hours, as my colleague knows. That would have us voting at 8 o'clock tonight. I hope we can reduce that. I will work with colleagues on both sides to make it mutually agreeable.

Mr. REID. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, for the information of our colleagues, I urge our colleagues to stay in town today on this particular Friday before an April Easter recess. We have a vote on the Senate budget conference report, which we are now debating. We have a vote on

the urgent DOD request, the war supplemental. That will be voted on today. I expect we will also have a vote on debt limit extension. Maybe that can be done by voice, maybe not. I urge colleagues to be here today.

Those are the three very important issues to be resolved today. We will try to work with all of our colleagues to expedite consideration of all three measures, and I will be happy to accommodate and yield time and work with people. We need to pass all three bills. I look forward to working with all involved Senators to come to the conclusion of all three bills.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if I may direct a question to the chairman, we are willing to work in any way possible to get the budget passed and the supplemental passed.

I think the Senator should be forewarned that I doubt very seriously if there will be a debt extension passed today. We spoke at some length a week ago with the majority leader. We will be happy to work with the leader on a freestanding bill. We need a day on that, but that doesn't mean 30 minutes or an hour. We have a number of people who have indicated to us that they want to offer amendments on the budget extension.

The majority leader is quoted in the press as saying he thinks we can do the supplemental and the budget resolution, but he doesn't think we can do the debt limit. I want the chairman to know we agree with the majority leader.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of my colleague and friend from Nevada. I will bump that up to a higher level between the majority leader, minority leader, and my friends. It was my understanding it needs to be done this week before we left. I have not consulted with Treasury—the Secretary of the Treasury in the last week or so. It was my understanding it really needed to pass before the April break. Maybe that is not the case. It may be my friend from Nevada and others have done their tax returns and paid such enormous taxes that we are in great shape. There is usually an April bump in revenues. That is my main concern. We don't like being in the situation where we are borrowing funds from civil service retirements and so on, which has happened in the past, and may be happening now. I will be happy to bump that up to the majority and minority leaders. It was my understanding it needed to be done prior to our leaving for this break.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, very briefly, if I may, I think every time a debt limit extension has come before the Congress, I have voted for it. I believe we have debts and we should pay them. I will likely vote for this one. But there are some people who don't think as I do and they want some time to talk on this.

The majority leader has the commitment of Senator DASCHLE and myself

and Senator CONRAD that we will work with them to get the debt limit extension passed. We need a little bit of time to do that.

Just on a personal note, I have been checking my banking on line every morning to see if my return is back. I am expecting that money to come back soon. It has been 4 weeks now and it is not here. I am a little disappointed.

Mr. NICKLES. I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, as we begin the debate on the budget for fiscal year 2004, I will make a couple of comments. One, I compliment my colleague, Chairman NUSSLE, in the House. It has been a pleasure to work with him.

Passing a budget is never easy. I have been critical in the past, such as when last year we did not get a budget passed, but I have a better appreciation for how difficult it is. Particularly when we have a great big number of 51 on our side, it is not an easy job. So I compliment Chairman NUSSLE and thank him for his work and cooperation.

We had many hours working together trying to formulate a budget that would pass both the House and the Senate. It is a great deal easier said than done. We have come forward with a budget this year that accomplishes a lot of major objectives. We balance the budget. We balance the budget in 9 years, not 10. When we brought it before the Senate, it was balanced in 10 years, in 2013. Now we balance it by the year 2012.

It is a budget that allows and encourages growing the economy. The economy has not been growing. Frankly, we will never balance the budget if the economy is not growing. This budget allows and provides for a growth package.

This is a budget that will help us win the war on terrorism. We fully fund the President's request for national defense and homeland defense.

It includes the war supplemental that Congress is going to pass tonight. The Senate passed it a week ago, and we will end up passing it as well today. It fully funds homeland security and the President's request.

It also is a budget that allows us to modernize Medicare. We did not get that done last Congress. We should have, but we did not. Almost everybody says they are in favor of it, but because we did not have a budget, we did not have protection on the floor. We did not even have markup in the committee. We did spend some time on it on the floor, but we were not successful. This is a bill that says we will