

responders, a very important, top priority for homeland security.

We must do all that work now, this year, before Christmas, before we leave. The way we get this work done is to have these important votes. Every Member of the Senate will be free to vote for or against. Every Member of the Senate will be free to vote as their conscience deems they should on all of these procedural matters.

Again, Senator REID has voted for all these procedures in the past. Let's be clear about that. So I urge us to put the politics aside, to not make this yet another Washington partisan political fight. Far too much is at stake for us to do that. Far too much in my State of Louisiana. Far too much in the devastated State of Mississippi and Alabama and Florida, with Wilma, and Texas with Rita, and southwest Louisiana with Rita.

If there is ever a time for us to look at the substance and the national good and not Washington politics, it is now. That is what people sent us here to do, not play these partisan games. I urge everyone to put that substance first, to put the American people first, to put the people of the devastated regions of the gulf coast first and have these votes and pass this crucial package of relief.

Let me be clear. ANWR is directly related to this relief because significant revenues from ANWR would go to the devastated region for crucial needs in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, and Florida. That is very much a part of this hurricane package.

Let me close as I began, by thanking the chairman of Appropriations, Senator COCHRAN, and Senator STEVENS, the chairman of the committee on which I am proud to serve, the Commerce Committee, for their vital leadership, for their vital work. But for them, we would not be in this moment of huge opportunity to meet the crucial needs of the still suffering citizens of the gulf coast.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

HURRICANE RELIEF

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I commend the distinguished Senator from Louisiana for his eloquent statement about the importance of this legislation. He has been a true leader in this effort to craft a bill that will provide money now, needed desperately by the victims of these disasters in the Gulf Coast States. He and his colleague, Ms. LANDRIEU, have been very active, as all Senators know, in describing in detail the dilemma that is faced by local governments, municipal governments, and county and parish governments in the region. Our State governments have been stressed beyond imagination in terms of trying to make resources available to help save lives, to help rescue victims, to help communities that are struggling to repair and replace

damaged and destroyed infrastructure such as water and sewer systems, highways and roads and bridges. The list is almost endless of the challenges that have been faced by the people of this region.

But the Senator from Louisiana has been, more than anybody I know, on a daily basis working his heart out and trying his best to be sure that we respond in the way that we should as a Federal Government, to provide the assistance needed for a full and real recovery from these disasters.

I also think about my colleague, Senator LOTT from Mississippi, and Congressman TAYLOR in the House, who both lost their houses and suffered real, serious personal losses as a result of Hurricane Katrina. They have been tirelessly and constantly in touch with the situation as victims of this disaster but at the same time lending their energies, their imagination, their know-how, their leadership to provide guidance and suggestions all along the way.

This is not the last bill we are going to see on the subject of disaster assistance, but it is the most important because it provides real money at once. It is made available immediately upon passage for distribution to those who need the help the most. And it is urgent.

If we delay and get tangled up in a lot of parliamentary maneuvering, criticism, second-guessing, and partisan infighting, whatever kind of resistance to this important appropriations bill, it will be a disgrace. It will be a disgrace to the Congress and an injustice to the victims of this disaster.

There are a lot of people we could talk about this morning—State government leaders. Our Governor, Haley Barbour, has been up here for days answering questions, providing information, making suggestions of alternatives that would be appropriate for the Federal Government to undertake to help the recovery, and identifying ways State governments can share in the responsibility. The Community Development Block Grant Program is one of the suggestions Governor Barbour made as a conduit for funds to help rebuild communities and help landowners who have been harmed and who were outside the flood plain, didn't have flood insurance, yet they were flooded and didn't have coverage to pay for those losses and those damages. He is looking for ways to help everybody who needs help and who deserves help from their Government.

This bill provides this substantial amount of money and commitment from our Government at a time when it is truly needed. I am hopeful the Senate will act with dispatch and send this conference report to the President for his signature.

Leadership in the House and in the Appropriations Committee, the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, has also been very important and crucial to this undertaking. The Speaker of the House, personally, and the whip,

Roy Blunt from Missouri, have been personally engaged in trying to find ways to reach an accommodation with the Senate and with the States affected. They have done a wonderful job. It has culminated in the presentation of this conference report.

The Congressman from California, JERRY LEWIS, chairman of the full committee in the other body, and Congressman BILL YOUNG from Florida, who has had experiences with other disasters in the past, have been very helpful in remembering how we responded to past challenges—Hurricane Dennis, I recall—and there are others that Florida has experienced. But everybody coming together and doing their best to sort through the challenges, identify ways to help, has culminated in the presentation to the Senate of this conference report. I am hopeful we will respond.

As Senator VITTER said, everybody has an opportunity to vote to help us recover. We hope you will. It is a bipartisan effort. Democrats and Republicans have both been involved, from both sides of the aisle here in the Senate and in the House as well.

We hope we will act quickly in response to the suggestions made by leadership here in the Senate and approve this conference report. We are deeply grateful to all who have been helpful, who have come up here, stayed and talked and explained what the facts are, who testified before committees.

We have reviewed all the facts. We know what the situation is. Now it is time to act, and act is what the Senate should do now.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

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

THE APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, in the past in this body, I have been highly critical of some of the things that have gone on in the appropriations process. But I want to say the chairman of the Appropriations Committee in this body, with the appropriations package we are going to look at today, or whenever we get to it, has done a phenomenal job. I think the American people need to know this is the type of leadership we have been looking for for a long time.

All of the additional spending for the victims of the hurricane, for LIHEAP, for all of the additional things we are going to be doing, has been paid for not on the backs of our children and our grandchildren but in fact by making hard decisions on what to trim.

A lot of resistance is probably going to come with this, and the reason people are uncomfortable with it is because we are trimming the size of the

Federal Government at the same time we have neighbors on the gulf coast who need help, and those who are unfortunate with their heating bills this year need help.

I want to have in the RECORD that both Senator STEVENS on the Defense appropriations bill and Senator COCHRAN I believe have done a fantastic job, and they have set a benchmark for where we need to go next year in terms of any new programs we need to be paying for by making reductions in other programs. What it is doing is securing the future for our children and our grandchildren.

My hat is off to them. I think they have done a great job. We have looked over the bill since last evening, since the numbers came through. We are very pleased. There are no gimmicks, no games being played with the numbers. Hard choices have been delineated in this bill which will require hard votes but for the right reasons. And for the next two generations, I thank them for their hard work on this bill.

With that, I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise today to express great concern about the process, about what has been happening as it relates to the Defense appropriations bill. I have supported every appropriations bill for our troops since coming here to the Senate, and before in the House. I am deeply concerned about what I see in terms of abuse of the process, abuse of power involved in this debate on a bill that is critical for our troops, a bill that without the controversial provisions I believe would have overwhelming, positive, if not unanimous, support from this Chamber.

I want to start by reading a portion of a letter from five distinguished retired generals from the Marines, the Army, and the Navy, that speaks to this in a way that I think we should all be listening to. This is a letter to our leaders in the Senate:

We are very concerned that the FY2006 Defense Appropriations Bill may be further delayed by attaching a controversial non-defense legislative provision to the defense appropriations conference report.

We know that you share our overarching concern for the welfare and needs of our troops. With 160,000 troops fighting in Iraq, another 18,000 in Afghanistan, and tens of thousands more around the world defending this country, Congress must finish its work and provide them the resources they need to do their job.

We believe that any effort to attach controversial legislative language authorizing

drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the defense appropriations conference report will jeopardize Congress' ability to provide our troops and their families the resources they need in a timely fashion.

It goes on from there.

Mr. President, I would not agree more. I ask unanimous consent that the full text of this letter be printed in the RECORD.

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

DECEMBER 17, 2005.

Hon. BILL FRIST,
Majority Leader,
Hon. HARRY REID,
Minority Leader,
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC

DEAR SENATOR FRIST AND SENATOR REID: We are very concerned that the FY2006 Defense Appropriations Bill may be further delayed by attaching a controversial non-defense legislative provision to the defense appropriations conference report.

We know that you share our overarching concern for the welfare and needs of our troops. With 160,000 troops fighting in Iraq, another 18,000 in Afghanistan, and tens of thousands more around the world defending this country, Congress must finish its work and provide them the resources they need to do their job.

We believe that any effort to attach controversial legislative language authorizing drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to the defense appropriations conference report will jeopardize Congress' ability to provide our troops and their families the resources they need in a timely fashion.

The passion and energy of the debate about drilling in ANWR is well known, and a testament to vibrant debate in our democracy. But it is not helpful to attach such a controversial non-defense legislative issue to a defense appropriations bill. It only invites delay for our troops as Congress debates an important but controversial non-defense issue on a vital bill providing critical funding for our nation's security.

We urge you to keep ANWR off the defense appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

JOSEPH P. HOAR,
General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.).

ANTHONY C. ZINNI,
General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.).

CLAUDIA J. KENNEDY,
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army (Ret.).

LEE F. GUNN,
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.).

STEPHEN A. CHENEY,
Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.).

Ms. STABENOW. Now is the time—past time. There is no reason for us to be here today on this Defense bill. This could have been done. We could have made it very clear that the dollars are there—critical dollars are there—for our troops, if it were not for an effort to subvert the process and the rules of the Senate and the efforts that have gone on to put things into this Defense bill that should not be there.

Now, I am one who does not support drilling in ANWR. I have never voted for that. There is no relationship, in my mind, to energy independence or national security, as we look at the small amount of reserves that are there versus the tradeoff in terms of our environment and the commitment we have made as it relates to our envi-

ronment. But regardless of that, that deserves a separate debate. We have had that debate on the floor of this Senate. We have had it a number of times.

People have a right to have that debate and to be able to cast their votes concerning that issue, but it should not be included in a bill to support our troops, the men and women who are serving right now around the world. They deserve better than that. We can do better than that. I would hope we could clean up this bill, get those provisions out of there that have been put in for political purposes because they have not been able to pass in other ways, and be able to strictly focus on a bill to support our men and women in the armed services.

What are some of the things in this underlying bill?

Well, it provides a 3.1-percent across-the-board pay raise for military personnel. I support that. I am sure my colleagues on both sides of the aisle do, as well.

It provides an increase for basic housing allowance to eliminate out-of-pocket housing expenses for military personnel. It is critical.

It provides \$142 million for body armor and personal protection equipment. How many times have we heard concerns regarding this? This \$142 million is important. It needs to get passed now. It should not be part of a political struggle that has been going on in the Senate, in the House, and with the administration.

The bill would provide \$12 million to provide treatment for soldiers with head and blast injuries who are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Again, on the equipment end, it would provide \$1.4 billion for the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Task Force.

It provides \$170 million for up-armed HMMWVs and another \$464 million for humvee recapitalization.

It provides \$293 million for Army night vision equipment.

It provides \$1 billion to address equipment shortfalls for the Guard and Reserve. I can tell you, having talked with so many of our Guard and reservists, and having been there when they have left and been there when they have come home, we owe them a budget that will address the equipment shortfalls.

We also owe them efforts to support their families and the needs of their families as they have been deployed and redeployed and redeployed into Iraq and Afghanistan and around the world.

We are past time to get this done. There is no reason we should see the maneuvers going on that have gotten in the way of passing this bill.

There is no reason. I hope they do not succeed. These maneuvers should not succeed. I hope we will say no and that we will then pass quickly the bill that has been worked on in good faith by so many.