

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MAGEN DAVID ADOM

Mr. FRIST. For 75 years, the Magen David Adom has served as Israel's emergency relief service.

Founded in 1930 by seven Israeli doctors and a one-room emergency medical service, the MDA has grown to play a major role working alongside the Israeli Army Medical Corps in times of war and peace.

Twelve hundred employees and more than 10,000 volunteers have helped countless disaster, accident, and terrorism victims within Israel's borders.

And on battlefields and disaster areas around the world, the relief service has distinguished itself with consummate caring, professionalism and bravery.

Even the United States has been a beneficiary of the MDA's humanitarian efforts.

Most recently, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina MDA Israel launched an emergency mission named "United Brotherhood" to collect donations, funds, clothing and other equipment for the New Orleans survivors who were left homeless.

Despite their indisputably noble work, for nearly 60 years the organization has been excluded from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The reason? The Israeli agency has been excluded for 60 years because of its decision to retain its own protective symbol rather than adopt the Red Cross or the Red Crescent.

Finally, this month, the impasse was broken.

An overwhelming majority of the state-parties to the Geneva Conventions approved a new protective symbol—a "Red Crystal"—to allow the relief agency to operate as a member of the global humanitarian movement.

Within Israel's territory, the agency will still use the Red Star of David.

Around the world, it will use the Red Crystal Protective Symbol, with the option of also displaying its traditional logo if the host country permits.

Aside from a few remaining formalities, the Israeli emergency service will, finally, at long last, take its place as a full member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

I would have liked to have seen straightforward international recognition of the traditional symbol. But the new Red Crystal is a worthy and fair compromise.

I commend the International Committee of the Red Cross and the American Red Cross for their efforts to bring this vital and life saving organization into the fold.

And I applaud the Magen David Adom for their compassionate and honorable work inspired by faith and carried out everyday with extraordinary courage.

AVIAN FLU

Mr. FRIST. In the 20th century, three influenza pandemics. The worst of the three, the 1918 Spanish flu, killed over half-a-million Americans and more than 40 million worldwide.

Secretary Leavitt warns that if past is prologue, the world is overdue for another flu pandemic.

The avian flu spreading from East Asia to Romania and Turkey looks and acts more like the virus of 1918 than of any of its more moderate cousins.

If it achieves the final step of human-to-human transmission, the consequences could be catastrophic both in loss of human life and economic meltdown.

Recently, the Congressional Budget Office released a study which I had specifically requested on the economic impact of a flu pandemic. The CBO predicts that the American economy could suffer a \$675 billion setback, a 5-percent loss in GDP, in the year a pandemic might hit.

The clock is ticking, and we need to act now.

We need to put the wheels in motion so that when and if the avian flu hits, America is prepared.

If we don't, and an avian flu epidemic comes to our shores, we will rightly be blamed for failing to do our best to protect the American people. The finger will be pointing straight at the Congress.

What we need in order to be prepared is a six-pronged approach.

We need communication, surveillance, antivirals, vaccines, research, and stockpiling and surge capacity.

This may sound like a lot of moving parts, but between our researchers, entrepreneurs, and public health experts, we have the intellect, the ingenuity, and the knowledge to get the job done.

My duty as an elected official and as a doctor is to see this through to make sure that we are adequately prepared and we can look our constituents in the eye and tell them we have done everything we can to be prepared.

Our economy, our country, and our lives are depending on it.

The President has laid out a comprehensive plan. It is our job, now, to set aside sufficient resources to tackle this looming threat.

I urge my colleagues to set aside their partisan differences and pull together to protect the American people.

The flu virus won't know who is Republican and who is Democrat, but the people who suffer will know who didn't get the job done.

We don't need to panic, but we do need to be prepared.

We need to act, and that is what we intend to do.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. FRIST. On Monday, Afghanistan's first democratically elected Parliament in more than 30 years convened before the eyes of the world. It

was an emotional moment and one of great pride for the Afghan people.

As President Karzai told his audience of 351 new parliament members, with Vice President DICK CHENEY and his wife Lynne listening in the front row, "This dear Afghanistan has risen again from the ashes."

Here in the United States, we are full of hope for the Afghan people and we share in their joy.

They have suffered a long and difficult journey.

Twenty years of civil war. Nearly another decade of total repression.

But they have finally reached the shores of freedom, and the future spread out before them is one of hope, progress, and limitless possibility.

We are proud to count Afghanistan as a free country, a fellow democracy, and a friend of the United States of America.

This past year has been one of extraordinary events in the Middle East.

We have seen amazing images of people celebrating their newfound liberty—cheering, dancing and singing in the streets that they, too, are now free.

From the cedar revolution in Lebanon to the historic elections in Iraq, the winds of democratic change are blowing across Arab lands.

A new report by the highly respected human rights group Freedom House finds genuine stirrings of democratic progress: local elections in Saudi Arabia; women's new voting rights in Kuwait; improved elections in Egypt and the Palestinian territories.

The organization's director of research notes that, "Many people predicted that American policy in Iraq and elsewhere would set back the cause of freedom. This year's results suggest that hasn't been the case."

Indeed, I would go further to say that President Bush, our brave men and women in uniform, our coalition partners, and courageous citizens across the Middle East deserve tremendous credit for advancing the cause of freedom.

That freedom is bringing hope and optimism to millions of people long oppressed.

Last week's ABC News poll found that Iraqis believe their lives are going well, and nearly two-thirds expect things to improve in the year ahead.

Average Iraqi household incomes have skyrocketed by 60 percent in the last 20 months. Iraqis are quickly joining the swift current of modern life with cell phones and the Internet, cars, washing machines, and satellite dishes.

Another new poll in Pakistan found that in that Muslim country, public opinion toward the United States has dramatically improved.

Favorable opinion toward the United States has more than doubled since May to nearly half of those polled, while support for al-Qaida has plunged to its lowest level since 9/11.

Times are changing, and they are changing for the better.

It is true, we still face a terrorist enemy who targets innocent civilians

with bombings and beheadings, who dreams of inflicting massive violence on the American people.

These same enemies sent suicide bombers to murder innocent Jordanians only a few weeks ago. They despise freedom, and they are bending every effort to derail the democratic process.

But they will not succeed.

I am confident that America and her allies will prevail. I am confident that we will defeat the terrorist enemy and bury its twisted aims.

And all the while, we will continue to stand behind Iraq, Afghanistan and all champions of freedom as they work to secure the blessings of liberty.

RETIREMENT OF MR. ROBERT J. SHUE

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I rise to pay tribute to Robert J. Shue, a senior official in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Comptroller, who in early January, 2006, will retire from a distinguished career spanning 37 years of exemplary service to America.

Mr. Shue began his career serving over 13 years in the Bureau of Economic Analysis in the Department of Commerce. He joined the Department of Defense in 1982 and quickly became a highly valuable member of the Secretary of Defense's staff.

During his 23 years in the Comptroller's office, Mr. Shue was a highly respected leader and expert on the Defense Department budget and a wide range of related matters. He played a critical role in the formulation, approval, and execution of defense budgets that produced a much-needed strengthening of America's defense posture and enabled our military to fulfill its many demanding commitments.

Mr. Shue developed and led a diverse staff of analysts and liaison officers and made his office the Defense Department's primary leader in tracking and resolving high-level budget issues. He meticulously tracked numerous and complex actions affecting the funding available to the Department. He was a pivotal leader in presenting and justifying each new budget to the Congress and the American public.

Mr. Shue was vital to the Department's analysis of congressional action on Defense Department funding and to devising strategies to influence that action. He skillfully led staff in achieving and sustaining a highly productive relationship with congressional oversight committees. This resulted in accurate and constructive information flow between Congress and the Department, helping each meet its responsibilities more successfully.

Mr. Shue produced substantial top-quality analysis on complex economic, fiscal, and budget topics for the Secretary of Defense and other senior DoD leaders. He also improved support for these leaders by initiating important management reforms that saved staff

time and improved the quality of decision making data.

For his extraordinary achievements, Mr. Shue received the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Service. He earned the deep respect of leaders throughout the Department of Defense, in the Office of Management and Budget, and with Congress's defense oversight committees. These leaders benefited enormously from his exceptional knowledge and dedication. Mr. Shue's service has substantially helped our Nation's leaders make the wisest possible allocation of its defense resources in order to ensure America's future security.

Throughout his distinguished career, Mr. Shue has had the resolute support of his wife, Suzi, and his three children. He has earned the deep gratitude of the American people. I wish Mr. Shue and his family all the best in the coming years.

GIVE OUR VETERANS THE CARE THEY'VE EARNED

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, it has been 3 weeks since President Bush signed into law the 2006 spending bill providing funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Unfortunately, his signature was accompanied by a glaring asterisk. Instead of approving the full amount of funding that Congress provided for veterans health care, the President bottled up \$1.2 billion in emergency funding that the VA urgently needs to make ends meet.

Congress added the emergency money to the bill after discovering that the President's 2006 budget request for the VA was woefully inadequate, compounding a series of errors in funding assumptions by the administration that led to a massive shortfall in VA funding in fiscal year 2005.

The \$1.2 billion in emergency funding was not some kind of optional Christmas bonus for America's veterans. It is money that the VA needs to cover the baseline cost of veterans health care programs. But that money cannot be released to the VA until the President signs on the dotted line and designates it as an emergency. Unless and until the President acts, the money will simply languish in the Treasury, benefiting nobody while jeopardizing the VA's ability to meet the needs of veterans. Make no mistake about it: without this money, the VA will experience another shortfall in funding in 2006, and veterans will suffer the consequences of diminished services and longer waiting times for health care.

So why is the President sitting on this money? When Congress passed the VA funding bill, I wrote to the President urging him to release the emergency funding at the same time, thus assuring veterans that health care services will continue uninterrupted for the next year. But for some reason, the President has chosen not to release the emergency money. Instead of sending the VA the full amount of funding

that Congress appropriated for veterans health care in 2006—a total of \$22.5 billion—the President has chosen to hold \$1.2 billion hostage at the White House.

What possible reason could the President have for refusing to relinquish this money to the VA? Does he expect America's veterans to beg for the money? Could he possibly fail to understand the importance of fully funding the VA health care program? Or could he have somehow forgotten the chaos last summer when the VA revealed that it had at least a \$1 billion shortfall in health care funding for 2005, and was facing another gaping shortfall in 2006?

What kind of a signal does this send to our Nation's veterans, and to our men and women fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Congress has worked diligently over the past 6 months to clean up the budget mess in the VA. As a result of amendments that I spearheaded in the Appropriations Committee and on the floor, the Senate seized the initiative to provide emergency funding to cover the shortfall that occurred in 2005 and to head off another shortfall in 2006. The administration, by contrast, had to be dragged to the table and only grudgingly owned up to the catastrophic consequences of its sloppy and inept budget estimates.

Congress has acted. Now the ball is in the President's court, and the clock is ticking. Mr. President, I again call on the President to immediately release the \$1.2 billion in emergency funding for veterans' health care that Congress has provided.

MILITARY AID TO INDONESIA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, just 1 month ago, this Congress approved the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, of 2006. President Bush signed the bill into law on November 14. The act contains strong language concerning the political and military situation in Indonesia.

Congress requested from the administration evidence of genuine progress in military reform, the protection of human rights, and accountability for crimes against humanity. It asked for such evidence before the administration made available to Indonesia any funds appropriated under the Foreign Appropriations Act for the Foreign Military Financing Program and before it issued any licenses for the export of lethal defense articles for the Indonesian Armed Forces.

Congress also gave the administration the authority to waive these conditions when it is in the interests of national security to do so, as it usually does when placing these kinds of conditions on this or any administration.

To measure the desired improvements in military reform, we asked the State Department to certify that, No. 1, the Indonesian Government is prosecuting and punishing, in a manner