

Senator MURRAY has fought the good fight, and she will win that fight today. In fact, it is going to be interesting to see many from the other side of the aisle who were critical of her call for more money for the VA rushing to provide even greater sums so they can argue that they are on the side of the VA and the veterans.

This is the way it should end. This debate should end with Senator MURRAY's leadership creating a bipartisan coalition for the Veterans' Administration. This should have been a bipartisan issue from the start. She was a lonely voice and faced a lot of criticism for a long time. Today, she will be vindicated. More importantly, the veterans will receive the quality health care which they deserve. That means the newly returning veterans of Fallujah and Baghdad, many suffering terrible wounds in battle and some facing invisible wounds of post-traumatic stress disorder, will have a chance for the kind of treatment they deserve at the Veterans' Administration.

The administration, when it comes to the Veterans' Administration as well as waging the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, has not anticipated the real costs of war. We can do better. We owe these men and women who are fighting these battles and those who have fought in past wars not only our thoughts and prayers, we owe them our resources so they can wage this war successfully, come home safely, and return to their families and their lives.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mrs. MURRAY. How much time is left on our side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is approximately 11½ minutes remaining.

Mrs. MURRAY. Would the Presiding Officer indicate when 1 minute remains.

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

VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION SHORTFALL

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise this morning to again talk about the situation facing our veterans. I thank my colleague from Illinois for his dedication to this issue and his tremendous work and support as we have tried to raise this issue for a number of months.

So all of my colleagues know, I came to the floor of the Senate early this year to talk about the situation facing those soldiers who have worked so honorably for this country in past wars and for those who are returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan today and the need to keep the promise that we gave to all of them that when they return we will provide them with the health care they need.

When I was in my State earlier this year, in January, I met with a number of the service organizations and the military to talk about reintegration,

to talk about what happens to our soldiers when they return home, to make sure they have the services available to them, and to make sure they are taken care of. Many in those meetings were deeply concerned that we would not have the facilities available for them. They told me of already long waiting lines at our veterans clinics and our VA hospitals. They told me of soldiers who could not get appointments for as many as 6 months or 3 years. They told me of a looming budget crisis.

When I heard that, I talked to other organizations across the country and realized that we were, indeed, facing a tremendous shortfall at the VA. That is why in the Committee on the Budget I offered an amendment to increase the funding for VA. It was rejected by those on the majority side by an almost party-line vote. That is why, throughout the appropriations process and then on the emergency supplemental, I continued to come to the Senate to say that this is a looming crisis that we need to deal with.

In the Senate, I offered an amendment for \$1.98 billion for an emergency supplemental, saying this is critical. Our soldiers are not getting the care they need. I was defeated on that amendment on an almost party-line vote because of the letter sent by the Secretary of VA to KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON, the Senator who is the chairman of the Subcommittee on Military Construction, saying they do not indicate a dire emergency. He said:

I can assure you that the VA does not need emergency supplemental funds in fiscal year 2005 to continue to provide the timely quality service that is always our goal.

Based on that letter, many on the other side voted against my amendment because they believed the Secretary was being honest with them. Well, I continue to raise this specter saying we are going to face a crisis. Even several weeks ago, in a Committee on Veterans' Affairs hearing, the Secretary of the VA came before our committee and once again said there is no budget crisis.

Well, last Thursday, finally the truth came out. The VA told us they were well over \$1 billion short in funding for this year. What was their solution? Their solution was to go back into this year's appropriations that have already been approved by this body, for which we already have the money flowing to construction and maintenance projects throughout the country—these are projects for seismic upgrades in our VA facilities, for asbestos abatement, for hazardous waste cleanup, for clinics that are being built where contracts are already let—and the VA is saying: We are going to take money away from those projects.

We cannot allow that to happen. These contracts are already being let. These facilities already need the maintenance. It has already been deferred for 2 years. We cannot go back to our States and tell these clinics: Gee, sorry. There was a mistake made at

the VA. They didn't do the calculations correctly. You are not going to get the services.

That is not the promise we made to our men and women when we sent them overseas. We said we will be there. We said we will be there. That is a promise we need to keep now, as we face this budget crisis.

We looked at the VA and said, "How could you make such a mistake?" particularly when I was raising the specter of this for the past 6 months and knew from the ground, knew from looking at the VA's own numbers, that they were going to be facing this crisis.

Yesterday, Secretary Nicholson came before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and said they had assumed that only 25,000 veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan would seek care at the VA in this fiscal year. Instead, what they have seen is 103,000 veterans already—already. And, as we know, many are still there, many more are to go, many more to be returning.

So the Committee on Veterans' Affairs was basing their calculations on 2002 numbers rather than saying, as we all know, that we are at war, that over a million men and women have been sent to Iraq and Afghanistan. They are in what the generals call a 360-degree war, meaning there are intense times for each one of those soldiers, 24/7, knowing, when they return, they will need help for mental health care and post-traumatic stress disorder. The VA never took that into account. They never looked at the world of what was happening and said: We are going to have increased costs for Veterans Affairs because we have more veterans returning.

So I find it appalling that the VA, the VA Secretary, and those who are required to be giving us honest numbers failed to look past their own desks and recognize what all of us throughout the country know; that is, we have a high number of veterans returning who need both physical care and mental health care. It is our job to appropriate the money to take care of them.

So where are we today? Senator BYRD and I and others on this side are offering an amendment on the Interior appropriations bill that we will be debating later this afternoon to add, again, \$1.42 billion as an emergency supplemental to provide the funding for this year. I am very proud of the Members of this Senate who have stood time and again to say we need to be there for our soldiers who are returning from war, and we need to do it responsibly.

Senator CRAIG, the chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, told me, when we were on the floor debating this during the supplemental, when he used Secretary Nicholson's letter to justify voting no against my amendment, that if he was proved wrong, he would be out here to work with me to provide the funds.

I commend Senator CRAIG and Senator KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON for coming to the plate now and saying we need to

deal with this, this year. They will be offering a second-degree amendment to my amendment this afternoon to add \$80 million so we can provide the funds for this year. I am happy to join with them in making sure this body adopts that amendment, as well as the underlying Murray amendment, to the Interior bill so we can deal with this crisis today.

That is the responsible thing to do. The irresponsible thing to do is to say we can take care of this by moving the budget numbers; we can take care of this with budget gimmicks; we can ignore this; we can paper this over.

We have done that already for far too long. I commend my colleagues on the other side for now joining with us to say we need an emergency supplemental to provide the dollars for our veterans when they return home to make sure the facilities are there. No gimmicks, no just talking about it; we are going to do the right thing in the Senate body.

We now have to follow that through. We will have to make sure the House of Representatives comes to the table in negotiations and works with us to get this done. And I call on the President and the White House now to recognize this crisis, as well, and to not gloss over it, not to paper it over but to work with us to pass an emergency supplemental.

Every one of us is going to go home for the Fourth of July recess. Every one of us is either going to be in parades or talk to veterans or be out there making sure the country knows we are so proud of the men and women who are serving us regardless of how we voted on the war. Every Member of this body and every citizen in this country is proud of our soldiers and the work they have done for us.

We can show them that we keep our promises, today on the floor of the Senate, by passing the Murray amendment and the second-degree amendment that is going to be offered by the Senators from the other side to keep that commitment. We then have the responsibility to make sure the House of Representatives works with us to pass this as well and that the White House takes it on as a priority.

I listened to the President of the United States, last night, address this country. I listened to his impassioned plea to stay the course. What I did not hear was the President calling on the American public to make the sacrifice that is necessary in war. That sacrifice includes making sure we keep the promise to the men and women we are asking to serve in the war overseas, by being there to provide the health care services they will need when they come home and not in facilities that are falling down or crumbling, not with equipment that is failing, not with shortages and lines, but with real care and not just for the veterans who are returning home today but for the veterans who served us in prior conflicts.

Today, we are seeing an increase in the number of veterans in our VA fa-

cilities because—no surprise—the veterans from the Vietnam war are now reaching the age where they need additional health care dollars. Those figures have to be taken into account at the VA. They cannot bury their heads in the sand and look at reports from 10 years ago. They need to be real about what the costs are today. When we pass this amendment, we will hopefully get the President to work with us on an emergency supplemental to provide those funds. I will work with any Senator on this floor to make sure our Committee on Veterans' Affairs looks at the real numbers we need so we can project into the future the real costs and make sure we are doing the right thing on this end of Pennsylvania Avenue, to make sure we are providing the funds that our service men and women need.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator does have a minute remaining.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, last night, when I listened to the President of the United States, he called on the American public—he called on all of us—asking our young men and women to consider service to our country overseas. Part of that commitment is not just asking them to serve but being there for them.

He also called on all of us to put our flags up on the Fourth of July and to be proud as Americans and to honor those who are serving us and to tell them we are proud of them by raising our flags.

The other thing we can do is adopt this amendment on the supplemental and get the White House to agree with us to make it an emergency to provide the services that are necessary. We will raise our flags, we will honor our veterans, we will be proud of our soldiers, but we will also be there to take care of them when they come home.

That is what the Murray amendment will do today. I am proud to join with Senator CRAIG, Senator HUTCHISON, and others from the other side to do what is right. I call on the other Members of Congress, as well as the White House, to join us in this effort.

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

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I want to start this morning by finishing something that Senator MURRAY just talked about and say that today the Veterans' Administration is going to step to the plate, along with Members of the Senate.

Senator MURRAY has been so helpful in working out some agreements that will allow us to pour another \$1.5 bil-

lion into the veterans programs. We will talk more about that later today. But Senator SANTORUM, Senator KYL, Senator CRAIG, myself, Senator MURRAY, Senator BYRD, and Senator ROCKEFELLER have come together as a united front to assure that veterans who are coming back from this war in Iraq and Afghanistan are not short-changed. This is the way we should work with the administration and the Senate.

IRAQ

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I do want to start our morning business time to talk about the President's speech last night, when he was talking to those wonderful soldiers at Fort Bragg, NC, and laying out for the American people not only the victories and the successes we are having in Iraq but also talking about the hard pull that we are making, that those soldiers are making.

I thought the President's candor was refreshing. He did not say: This is all hunky-dory. He said this is a long, hard road. He said: In the beginning, I said it would be. It has certainly proven to be. I think he was candid about exactly where we are, that we have had some great successes, and we have had some setbacks. Certainly, the vote of the Iraqi people was a huge success. That has set the stage for the next phase of trying to secure Iraq and making a difference in the Middle East.

When people talk about what is happening in Iraq, I do not think we hear enough about how much better off the Iraqi people are today. Oh, yes, it is hard to see suicide bombers taking innocent lives. It is. But remember how many innocent lives were taken by Saddam Hussein.

When Saddam Hussein was taking innocent lives, there was no hope for those people. There was no way out. Today innocent lives are being taken, but they are not being taken in vain. They are being taken in a cause for freedom that will end in democracy for Iraq. That is what the President laid out last night. The President has taken the Iraqi people from a despot who was torturing and killing innocent people—sometimes for sport—and is turning Iraq into a country that is trying to get its own feet on the ground and establish the roots of democracy.

When I look at some of the improvements that are being made in Iraq that I hear about from our armed services personnel returning from Iraq—and I have been to Iraq, but I always like to talk to the people who have been there most recently—when I talk to the young men and women on their R&R leave in the middle of their term, then I see that there are roads being built. The oil industry is being repaired. The electricity grids are being restored and improved. Schools are being opened. The Iraqis see Americans teaching in the schools and providing medical care, rebuilding their infrastructure. Within