

homes suitable for occupancy. Currently, a disabled veteran must at least partly own his or her residence to receive VA housing assistance grants to perform necessary residence modifications, such as installing wheelchair ramps or railings. However, many younger veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have not yet had the opportunity to become homeowners. Being ineligible for VA funding assistance to modify their homes, these veterans and their families often are compelled to either shoulder the costs of retrofitting their residences or face extended stays in VA medical facilities.

Section 101 of S. 1235 will establish a 5-year pilot program to allow severely disabled veterans who live temporarily with family to receive up to \$10,000 in adaptive housing assistance; less severely disabled veterans could receive a maximum of \$2,000. This grant money will help ensure that all disabled veterans—regardless of whether they own property—are able to leave hospitals and return home as quickly as possible.

Also, mindful that these individuals will likely purchase their own residence, the bill will allow disabled veterans to receive two additional specially adaptive housing grants to be used for homes that they own in the future. Severely disabled veterans could receive a total of \$50,000 to modify residences; less severely disabled veterans would be eligible for a total of \$10,000. Only one of the three total grants could be used for a temporary residence, such as a family-owned home.

America's veterans have made enormous sacrifices to protect our Nation and the ideals for which it stands. Our country owes a special obligation to those men and women who have become disabled as a result of their service. Under no circumstances should these American heroes be divided into groups of "haves" and "have nots."

This Nation must do no less than to ensure that all disabled veterans are returned to the normalcy of home life as quickly and comfortably as possible. The common sense changes put forth in section 101 of S. 1235 do just that, and I urge my colleagues in the Senate to send this bill to President Bush to sign in to law in time, fittingly, for Memorial Day.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, as ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I urge my colleagues to support our current servicemembers, veterans, and their families by supporting the pending measure, the final agreement on the Veterans' Housing Opportunity and Benefits Improvement Act of 2006. This is a vital and timely piece of legislation that has already passed the House of Representatives. With Senate passage today and the President's signature it will quickly become public law.

Mr. President, this measure, which I shall refer to as the "Compromise Agreement," will improve and expand a wide variety of veterans benefits and programs, including, among others,

housing benefits for Native American veterans and severely disabled servicemembers; insurance benefits for certain disabled veterans; compensation benefits for former prisoners of war; and programs that provide assistance to homeless veterans.

This legislation is appropriate at a time when our servicemembers are in harm's way. We must always remember the sacrifices that our servicemembers, both past and present, have made on behalf of this great Nation and we must do our part to respond to their service by improving and expanding veterans benefits.

In 1992, I authored the legislation that established a pilot program to make direct housing loans to Native American veterans for homes on tribal lands. As of the end of April, VA had made 504 loans to this group of veterans. Under this program, VA offers loan guarantees that protect lenders against loss up to the amount of the guaranty if the borrower fails to repay the loan. Prior to the enactment of this law, Native American veterans residing on tribal lands were unable to qualify for VA home loan benefits. With the Native American Veteran Housing Loan Program indigenous peoples residing on trust lands are now able to use this very important VA benefit. I am pleased that the Compromise Agreement contains a provision derived from legislation I offered, S. 917, that would make this pilot program, which was set to expire on December 31, 2008, permanent.

The Compromise Agreement also extends, from 1 to 2 years, the amount of time a disabled servicemember has to convert his or her Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance coverage into Veterans' Group Life Insurance coverage. This change is being made so that veterans may concentrate on recovering from their injuries or conditions, and not on meeting deadlines for life insurance conversion.

Under current law, former prisoners of war have to been held for a minimum of 30 days before they can benefit from a presumption that certain diseases are linked to their service. The Compromise Agreement also would add heart disease and stroke to presumptive conditions for service-connection for former prisoners of war.

Homelessness among veterans is a critical problem. It is particularly troubling to me that an estimated 56 percent of today's homeless veterans are minorities. The homeless rate in my home state of Hawaii has nearly doubled since early 2000, with the majority of Hawaii's new homeless being Native Hawaiians. The city of Honolulu has a tremendous problem with affordable housing, increasing the possibility of becoming homeless for those who already struggle to make ends meet. The Compromise Agreement would reauthorize through fiscal year 2009 the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs, which are the only Federal programs dedicated wholly to providing

employment services to homeless veterans.

Also included in the Compromise Agreement is my provision that would make a technical change to the specially adapted housing grant program. Last session, the law that allows severely disabled members of the Armed Forces to receive specially adapted housing grants from VA, while still on active duty, was inadvertently repealed. My provision would correct this and restore the grant to its original intent.

In conclusion, I thank Senator CRAIG and the benefits staff on the majority for their work on this comprehensive bill, especially Jon Towers, Amanda Meredith, and Lupe Wissel and, on the Democratic staff Dahlia Melendrez, Pat Driscoll, and Noe Kalipi for their hard work on this legislation.

Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation on behalf of America's veterans and their families.

Mr. FRIST. I ask unanimous consent the Senate concur in the House amendments, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and any statements related to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

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

MEASURE READ THE FIRST
TIME—S. 3064

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk, and I ask for its first reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the title of the bill for the first time.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 3064) to express the policy of the United States regarding the United States relationship with Native Hawaiians and to provide a process for the recognition by the United States of the Native Hawaiian governing entity.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I now ask for its second reading, and in order to place the bill on the calendar under rule XIV, I object to my own request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will receive its second reading on the next legislative day.

ORDERS FOR FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2006

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it stand in adjournment until 8:45 a.m. on Friday, May 26. I further ask consent that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved, and the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of Executive Calendar No. 632, the Kavanaugh nomination; provided further that all time during the adjournment of the Senate count under rule XXII.

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

PROGRAM

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, tomorrow, we will be in session at 8:45 in the morning, and we expect to proceed to a vote on the Kavanaugh nomination, to be followed by a vote on the Hayden nomination, and a cloture vote on the Kempthorne nomination. Thus, Senators can expect three votes very early tomorrow morning. Those votes should begin shortly after we convene at 8:45 a.m. I thank my colleagues for their work on the immigration bill that we passed earlier today.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in adjournment under the previous order, following the remarks of Senator OBAMA for 10 minutes, Senator LEVIN for 30 minutes, and then Senator SCHUMER.

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

The Senator from Illinois.

NOMINATION OF GENERAL MICHAEL HAYDEN

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, let me start by saying that the nomination of General Hayden is a difficult one for me. I generally, as a rule, believe the President should be able to appoint members of his Cabinet, of his staff, to positions such as the one General Hayden is nominated for without undue obstruction from Congress.

General Hayden is extremely well qualified for this position. Having previously served as head of the National Security Agency and as Deputy Director of National Intelligence under John Negroponte, he has 30 years of experience in intelligence and national security matters. And he was nearly universally praised during his confirmation to Deputy DNI.

There are several members of the Intelligence Committee, including Senator LEVIN, who I hold in great esteem, who believe General Hayden has consistently displayed the sort of independence that would make him a fine CIA Director.

Unfortunately, General Hayden is being nominated under troubling circumstances, as the architect and chief defender of a program of wiretapping and collection of phone records outside of FISA oversight. This is a program that is still accountable to no one and no law.

Now, there is no one in Congress who does not want President Bush to have every tool at his disposal to prevent terrorist attacks—including the use of a surveillance program. Every single American—Democrat and Republican and Independent—who remembers the

images of falling towers and needless death would gladly support increased surveillance in order to prevent another attack.

But over the last 6 months, Americans have learned that the National Security Agency has been spying on Americans without judicial approval. We learned about this not from the administration, not from the regular workings of the Senate Intelligence Committee, but from the New York Times and USA Today. Every time a revelation came out, President Bush refused to answer questions from Congress.

This is part of a general stance by this administration that it can operate without restraint. President Bush is interpreting article II of the Constitution as giving him authority with no bounds. The Attorney General and a handful of scholars agree with this view, and I do not doubt the sincerity with which the President and his lawyers believe in their constitutional interpretation. However, the overwhelming weight of legal authority is against the President on this one. This is not how our Constitution is designed, to give the President unbounded authority without any checks or balances.

We do not expect the President to give the American people every detail about a classified surveillance program, but we do expect him to place such a program within the rule of law and to allow members of the other two coequal branches of Government—Congress and the judiciary—to have the ability to monitor and oversee such a program. Our Constitution and our right to privacy as Americans require as much.

Unfortunately, we were never given the chance to make that examination. Time and again, President Bush has refused to come clean to Congress. Why is it that 14 of 16 members of the Intelligence Committee were kept in the dark for 4½ years? The only reason that some Senators are now being briefed is because the story was made public in the newspapers. Without that information, it is impossible to make the decisions that allow us to balance the need to fight terrorism while still upholding the rule of law and privacy protections that make this country great.

Every democracy is tested when it is faced with a serious threat. As a nation, we have had to find the right balance between privacy and security, between executive authority to face threats and uncontrolled power. What protects us, and what distinguishes us, are the procedures we put in place to protect that balance; namely, judicial warrants and congressional review. These are not arbitrary ideas. They are not new ideas. These are the safeguards that make sure surveillance has not gone too far, that somebody is watching the watchers.

The exact details of these safeguards are not etched in stone. They can be re-

evaluated, and should be reevaluated, from time to time. The last time we had a major overhaul of the intelligence apparatus was 30 years ago in the aftermath of Watergate. After those dark days, the White House worked in a collaborative way with Congress through the Church Committee to study the issue, revise intelligence laws, and set up a system of checks and balances. It worked then, and it could work now. But, unfortunately, thus far, this administration has made no effort to reach out to Congress and tailor FISA to fit the program that has been put in place.

I have no doubt that General Hayden will be confirmed. But I am going to reluctantly vote against him to send a signal to this administration that even in these circumstances, even in these trying times, President Bush is not above the law. No President is above the law. I am voting against Mr. Hayden in the hope that he will be more humble before the great weight of responsibility that he has not only to protect our lives but to protect our democracy.

Americans fought a Revolution in part over the right to be free from unreasonable searches—to ensure that our Government could not come knocking in the middle of the night for no reason. We need to find a way forward to make sure we can stop terrorists while protecting the privacy and liberty of innocent Americans. We have to find a way to give the President the power he needs to protect us, while making sure he does not abuse that power. It is possible to do that. We have done it before. We could do it again.

Mr. President, I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for 5 minutes before the Senator from Michigan speaks—he has graciously agreed to allow me to do that—and then he be given as much time as he needs.

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

Mr. SCHUMER. Thank you, Mr. President. I want to first, again, thank Senator CARL LEVIN, who I know has been graciously acceding all night. So he will be the last person to speak here, but I very much appreciate it. And I know all of my colleagues do.

NOMINATION OF BRETT KAVANAUGH

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the DC Circuit Court of Appeals.

This court is too important, its jurisdiction too broad, and its decisions too final, for a lifetime seat to be entrusted to someone with such limited nonpartisan experience—even someone as bright as Mr. Kavanaugh clearly is.