

passage because there are a lot of people around here who have these different commodities, and they all vote for each other, and, as a result, they build up enough votes to pass this bill. That is the way the farm bill always works. But that is no reason why we should not have a chance to debate it, to address some of these issues, such as baby doctors in rural communities and farm communities, such as the need for firefighters to have adequate bargaining rights, such as the need for people who are getting foreclosed on not getting hit with an IRS bill, such as the need to have proper accounting on this bill for what they are actually spending, such as the need for not setting up a \$5 billion walking-around money fund, such as the need for the new commodities programs for asparagus, chickpeas, and camellia. We should have amendments to address all these issues. That is what the process of the Senate is all about. But it is being denied here. The result of that denial is that those of us who happen to believe the Senate should function as a place where things are amended and discussed and aired and heard are going to have to resist this bill. So the majority seems to want to kill this bill, which is unfortunate, because in the end, this bill should at least get a fair hearing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. GREGG. Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina has 7½ minutes.

KEEPING PROMISES

Mr. DEMINT. Mr. President, I think we came into this year very hopeful in a lot of ways. The Republicans lost the majority, and in some ways I think that is a good thing. We lost our discipline on spending, and for many years our Democratic colleagues were more than happy to help us and even try to one-up us during the period we were in the majority.

Our last act as the majority, though, was a good one. We were able to stop last year's omnibus bill and force Congress to move ahead under a continuing resolution that only had about 2,000 earmarks—wasteful earmarks. This year, the majority unfortunately has expanded that back to about 6,000, which is disappointing because we entered the year with a lot of promises from the new majority, a lot of hopes about things that would change. Our Democratic colleagues ran on cleaning up the culture of corruption and getting rid of a lot of wasteful earmarks.

I, for one, wanted to help. In fact, one of the first things I did this year was introduce NANCY PELOSI's, Speaker PELOSI's, earmark transparency bill in the Senate. Unfortunately, the new majority decided it wasn't right the way they did it and filled it full of loopholes, and we have been fighting

all year to try to continue to disclose a lot of this wasteful spending.

Now, as I said, as we end the year, instead of the 2,000 earmarks we were at last year, we are going to 6,000 plus. We are also way over budget. The amount we have over budget this year will translate over the next 10 years to about \$300 billion in additional spending. That is a lot of money for anyone to even conceive of, but just so Americans will know, that amount would allow us to continue the tax relief we have had for the last several years for another 10 years without spending any additional money as a government. That tax relief affects every American. Instead, because we haven't acted, because we haven't kept our promises, next year millions of Americans, middle-class Americans will experience a new tax that they have never experienced before, and a lot of them don't know it is coming.

The disappointment, I guess, as we end this year is there are so many needs as a nation that we haven't acted on. Instead, we have spent the year with 40 resolutions on Iraq. We have tried to expand Government health care, holding children hostage to moving to more Government-controlled health care. The 40 Iraq resolutions were all done holding our troops hostage and the funding for our troops and the weapons and the armament they need to succeed. We spent the year on things such as trying to eliminate the secret ballot for workers when folks are trying to unionize them. Workers have always had the freedom to vote secretly and not be coerced or intimidated, but we have held workers hostage this year.

We have all of these new wasteful earmarks. Americans have heard about them, whether it is a hippie museum or monuments to different Members of Congress, billion-dollar parks at the expense of our veterans funds. We have balled that all up as we go into the end of the year \$300 billion over budget for the next 10 years with wasteful earmarks, including monuments to ourselves. I think we have done something even worse than the wasteful spending because we have tied to this wasteful spending ball at the end of the year the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society. We have tied the children to it. We have said they need more health care. We have tied our troops to it, and we are holding them hostage. Instead of giving them the money they need over the next several months, we are tying them up and holding them hostage.

Our veterans, we filled the Veterans bill with wasteful earmarks, and we are holding our veterans hostage. We have basically made human shields out of the most vulnerable Americans, and we are challenging Members of the Senate and Members of the House: Vote for this bill that is billions over budget, that contains billions of wasteful earmarks. You either vote for this bill or you are voting against children and

veterans and seniors and voting against our troops. This is no way to run the most important Government in the world.

So we end the year with a lot of broken promises. We have not helped Americans buy health insurance; in fact, we have made it harder. We haven't cut spending; we have raised it. We have increased the number of earmarks from last year. All we have done is talk. While our troops are succeeding in Iraq, we are trying to cut their funding. Instead of broken promises, we need to focus on the promises we need to keep.

We have promised Americans since the beginning of our Constitution that we are going to protect them. That is our main purpose. We need to keep our promises to seniors because we have taken their money all their lives and promised them Social Security and Medicare will be there. We need to keep those promises. We need to keep the promise of making freedom work for everyone and not to use the problems in our society as an excuse to replace freedom with more Government, which is what we are in the process of doing at every turn in Washington.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak, and I hope we can end the year in a more bipartisan fashion and work on reducing the amount of spending, the wasteful earmarks, and try to focus our efforts on the real priorities of this country that affect real Americans and not to hold our people hostage to this wasteful spending. We have just another month or so to finish our business, and I hope we finish it with some honor and dignity in a way that the American people would regain some trust in this Senate and in this Congress.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant 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.

The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

GETTING RESULTS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I come to the floor because it is amazing to listen to my friends on the other side of the aisle lament what they view are things not getting done when, in fact, we are getting things done. The truth is, we have been operating this year with an extraordinary slowness on the other side of the aisle because, first of all, they have participated in 52 filibusters since the beginning of the year—52 filibusters, maybe 53 by the end of the week, every week now. This is unprecedented. It never happened before. It never happened before; to see the minority in the Senate obstruct,

obstruct, obstruct with 52 different filibusters, trying to stop us from getting the people's business done.

I find it so interesting and amazing when my colleagues lament that not more of the appropriations process is done. As the Presiding Officer knows, our colleagues, the previous majority, didn't do a budget at all last year—at all. We are moving through the process. Despite the continual slowdowns, the efforts to stop us from proceeding, we are moving ahead. But last year, our colleagues, who lament so passionately and who come to the floor every day, didn't even pass a budget. We came in in January to a new majority and had to clean up the mess, literally. There was no budget. We had to pass a budget just to get us through the end of the year, to be able to keep services for the American people going, and we did that. We did that.

Also, during that process we put in place a few things along the way that we clearly put at the top of the list in terms of appropriations: Additional money for our veterans, clearly a priority for us; a Pell grant for our low-income students trying to go to college to have the American dream. We are now at a point where we have the budget, the appropriations process that we are working on for next year. We have seen nothing but efforts to slow that down, to veto it.

Yesterday the President vetoed the part of the budget that focuses on health care, education for our people, health research into new cures for cancer. It focuses on diabetes and Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, all of the areas where we hope to make breakthroughs to be able to save lives. The President vetoed that.

The President says the slight increase for restoring cuts that the President and the Republicans have made in the last several years, in our efforts to restore those funds to get the priorities right and put us back on track for middle-class families, was too much. Eleven billion dollars invested in America is too much. Twelve billion dollars a month on a war—putting our men and women in the middle of harm's way in a civil war every day—is OK, and it is not paid for. The most important thing is we are losing lives, but it is outrageous that we are seeing \$12 billion a month being spent.

The President vetoed an investment in America yesterday that was less than 1 month in Iraq—an investment in our families, in our seniors, in our children, and in the future in terms of education and opportunity and research. He vetoed a bill that was, in fact, an effort to invest in America.

I have to say, despite 52 filibusters, we are, as Democrats, working with colleagues, obviously. We don't get anything done unless it is on a bipartisan basis. We know that, and we do it every day. But the truth is, our majority is getting results for middle-class Americans every day. I am proud we have placed veterans at the top of our

budget. We, for the first time, have listened. We, the new majority, have listened to the veterans of this country, the veterans organizations. We took their budget called the Independent Budget—the veterans budget—and made it our own so we would make sure our veterans were fully funded. We have addressed the concerns about Walter Reed and what happens when our veterans come home and get caught between the military health system and the VA system.

Mr. President, I believe you are about to give me a high sign on the time. I ask unanimous consent for an additional 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator is recognized for an additional 10 minutes.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I am very proud of the fact that one of the first things we did this year in addition to supporting our veterans was to pass the first minimum wage increase in 10 years for working Americans. An awful lot of those are moms with two children, three children, working one job, two jobs, three jobs, trying to hold things together for their family, working hard every day. I am proud we have passed that. I am proud we have also focused on middle-class Americans and the American dream of college and the opportunity to be able to get the skills that young people and people going back to school can receive in order to be able to work hard and be successful in our new global economy. We have passed the largest student financial aid program since the GI bill. I am very proud we have done that. We are getting results for middle-class Americans every day.

On a bipartisan basis, we have also passed the America COMPETES Act, which redirects critical resources into math and science and technology for education as well as for research. I am very proud of the fact that despite the need to pass the 9/11 Commission recommendations, we have done that. Again, one of the early efforts by the new Democratic majority was to pass the 9/11 Commission recommendations to focus on critical needs, such as making radios work, so the police officers and firefighters in America can actually talk to each other and not be put in the same situation as they were on 9/11 where they were running into buildings they should have been running out of because they did not have the communications equipment that worked. We have focused on real security. We have focused, through the appropriations that we have passed, on our troops and their families, and I am very proud of that. We have also focused on important and long overdue and neglected water resources projects.

And it is wonderful to see that not only was it passed on a bipartisan basis, but when the President vetoed the bill, we joined together to say yes to protecting our waters, when the

President said no. So we are getting things done. We are getting things done every single day.

We are putting the priorities of the American people first. In our budget, we have said veterans are at the top of the list, education funding opportunity is at the top of the list, and we also place children's health insurance at the top of the list. In this area, we have worked together in a wonderful bipartisan way. People are to be congratulated on both sides of the aisle for working together on children's health insurance.

The President again said no. He has vetoed the bill. We are working hard, and we have the votes in the Senate to override the veto. We are working hard to get House Republican colleagues to join us so we can invest and cover 10 million children with health insurance.

This is another example of where we have been pushing forward, changing the direction of this Congress, focusing on middle-class Americans, getting things done—trying to get things done over the objection of the President. Again, I have to go back to the whole question of the funding of the war: \$12 billion a month on this war—not paid for. To cover 10 million children in America with health insurance, it is \$7 billion a year, and it is in our budget. We have fully paid for that.

What kind of priorities has the President set, when he will veto children's health insurance and yet continue to ask for more and more dollars for this war? Everything we do around here is values and priorities, based on what we think is important, what we think the people who have sent us here think is important. The majority of Americans are saying this country is going in the wrong direction, that while people find themselves worried about whether they will have a job or whether it is going to go overseas or whether they will lose pay, lose income, while their health insurance premium goes up—if they even have health insurance—their gas prices go up, and college tuition is going up. They may find themselves in the situation where they cannot sell their homes due to the mortgage crisis or in a situation of foreclosure or in a sales situation where they are losing dollars.

Middle-class Americans look around them and see a world, under this administration, for the last 6 years, of failed policies and priorities—a world that doesn't work for Americans, losing opportunities rather than gaining them, working harder and harder but seeing the American dream slip away for themselves and their families.

We, as the new majority of the Senate, understand this, we get it. We are laser focused on what makes a difference to the American people every day. We are focused, and we will be coming forward with efforts to help with the mortgage crisis. I have legislation we will be bringing forward to make sure that when you lose your home to foreclosure or a short sale, you don't get a tax bill on top of that,

which will happen now if your financial institution gives you any kind of a break on refinancing. You end up, with the value of the difference, paying taxes on it. We are going to make sure that doesn't happen. We are laser focused on getting the children's health insurance bill done, focusing on the right kind of trade policy that is fair for Americans—American workers and businesses. We are focused on strengthening our country, opportunity, valuing work, focusing on the things people care about every single day. When we get up in the morning and we are focused on what we want for our children and grandchildren, in order to be able to have a wonderful life, those are the things we have been bringing forward every single day. We will continue to do that.

We are getting things done for middle-class America. That is our focus. We are getting things done. But I have to say, in conclusion, that this has not been easy. We have had 52 filibusters—which is unheard of in the Senate—in less than a year—52 filibusters that require us to get 60 votes to stop, including, I might add, on the war. We have a majority of Members of this body who want to end this strategy on the war, who have been willing to say we want to put a deadline on what is happening there and refocus on what will truly keep us safe. We have a majority of Members—an overwhelming majority—who supported Senator WEBB's effort on troop readiness, to say to our troops who are being deployed, redeployed, and redeployed, we should follow the traditional policies of the military; if you have 12 or 15 months in combat in theater, you should get the same at home for rest, retraining, and the opportunity to see your family.

We have the majority of Members who have voted to change this policy in Iraq, get us out of a civil war, bring our troops home, to have troop readiness policies that make sense; but we have had 52 filibusters, which is too many, stopping us from changing this war.

This can go to 53, 54—we know it will keep going through the next year. But so will our focus. We are not going to stop. We are focused on getting things done. We are getting results for middle-class Americans, and we are going to continue to do that every single day.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. 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. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

VETERANS SUICIDES

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I wish to take a few minutes this morning to

talk about a subject that has tragically received far too little attention, and that is the number of veterans who take their lives because our Nation has failed them.

In a breakthrough report last night, CBS News revealed that far more veterans commit suicide than has previously been reported by the Defense Department and the VA. CBS, in fact, found that in 2005, at least 6,256 veterans took their lives. That is a rate that is twice that of other Americans.

CBS also found that veterans who are aged 20 to 24—those most likely to have served in the war on terror—are taking their lives at a rate that is estimated to be between two and four times higher than nonveterans in the same age group.

CBS should be commended for pushing past this administration's stonewalling and digging to get those numbers. The administration told the network that even the VA hadn't counted the nationwide numbers.

Those findings are sad, they are horrifying, and they should be preventable. Frankly, they are a reflection of something that many of my colleagues and I have said over and over. They reflect an administration that has failed to plan, failed to own up to its responsibilities, and failed even to complete statistics on the impact of this war on our veterans. From inadequate funding to a lack of mental health professionals to a failure to help our servicemembers make the transition from battlefield back to the homefront, this administration has dropped the ball.

The Defense Department and the VA, in particular, must own up to the true cost of this war and do a better job to ensure that our heroes are not lost when they come home.

We in Congress are taking steps to try to understand and care for the mental health wounds our troops are experiencing, but we clearly have to do more. If those numbers CBS is reporting do not wake up America, I fear nothing will. It is time for all of us to wake up to the reality and the consequences of this war. It is time to wake up our neighbors and our communities. It is time to wake up our employers and our schools and ask if we are doing enough for our veterans. It is time to wake up the White House and demand better care for our veterans, those men and women who have sacrificed for all of us.

As I stand here and speak today, a generation of servicemembers is falling through the cracks because of our failure to provide for them, and that is shameful.

Five years ago, when the President asked us to go to war in Iraq, he talked to us about weapons of mass destruction, he talked about al-Qaida, he talked about the mission to fight the war on terror, but he never talked about policing a civil war. He never talked about the stress of living months without a break and constantly waiting for the next attack. He

has never talked about, in my opinion, taking care of those men and women who have served us honorably when they finally come home.

In the past, our servicemembers were always given a rest, time to relax, time to regroup for battle. But we are today waging this war with an all-volunteer military. Some men and women are now serving their second, third, fourth, and now even fifth tour of duty. They are stretched to the breaking point. Too many of them are sustaining traumatic brain injuries. Too many are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. A third of our servicemembers are coming home with mental health conditions, and when they finally do come home, they struggle with the memories of battle. In their nightmares, they see their friends being blown apart. Some of them are turning to drugs and alcohol to numb themselves from the pain they are in.

The sad truth is that all too often the system we have set up to provide care for them does not help them, and we do not find out how much pain they are in until, obviously, it is too late.

I have taken the time to talk with these servicemembers. I have taken the time to talk with their families. I have heard their stories, and I wish to share a few with my colleagues today that illustrate, I believe, why it is so critical that we take action. These are young men and women. They are in their early twenties. They are young men and women who have served our country. They are someone's son, brother, sister, wife, best friend. Losing them is shameful.

Let me tell my colleagues about a young veteran named Justin Bailey. Justin joined the Marine Corps when he was 18, a few months after he graduated from high school. He was about to separate from the Marines in 2003 when his service was involuntarily extended because of the war in Iraq.

Justin went to Iraq. He was injured, and he returned home in pain and suffering from PTSD. He underwent several surgeries, and over a 2-year time period was prescribed a slew of medications, including hydrocortisone, xanax, and methadone, and he became addicted.

Justin slipped through the cracks. Despite seeking help for his addiction, he was allowed to self-medicate. Despite warnings from the FDA, he was prescribed drugs that were inconsistent with the treatment of PTSD. Justin tried to find help, but after 6 weeks in a VA program for addicts with PTSD, he never once saw a psychiatrist.

Justin's parents had assumed that he would get proper supervision in the VA program, but he didn't. This past January, Justin took too many pills and he died of an overdose.

The next young man I wish to tell my colleagues about is Joshua Omvig. Josh, I am told, was an eager soldier who dreamed of being a police officer. He insisted on graduating from high school early so he could join the military and begin his career. He was sent