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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KEN SALAZAR, a Senator from the State of Colorado.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord God, at a time when people expect much from their leaders, give these public servants the wisdom to do the work of legislation, administration, and justice for the common good. When criticism comes from those who expect miracles and look for weakness, give to the Members of the Senate, their families, and staffs the grace of patience and love. Help them to be compassionate and forgiving toward the critics who would tear down and destroy. Give them courage to live above hostility and to be faithful to their tasks when circumstances are discouraging and negative. Lord, brace them in Your strength against the enervating effects of frustration and futility as You infuse them with confidence in Your providential power. Bless them, Lord, with love, laughter, and life. We offer this prayer in the spirit of Him who came to set us free. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KEN SALAZAR led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, November 15, 2007.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KEN SALAZAR, a Senator from the State of Colorado, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. SALAZAR thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

VETERANS SPENDING

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, if the majority leader is not coming out, I will use a little of my leader time.

Americans were shocked earlier this year to learn about the conditions at Walter Reed Medical Center, and Members of Congress were right to seize the moment by pledging to veterans they would do everything they could to give them what they need. As Speaker PELOSI put it, in the military, we always say: In battle, we will never leave a soldier in the battlefield; and we say when they come home, we will not abandon them, so we should have the best possible opportunities for them when they do come home.

The veterans spending bill gave Speaker PELOSI and the rest of the Democrats in Congress an opportunity to make good on that pledge. So far, that opportunity has been squandered. The veterans bill was ready more than 2 months ago. It had overwhelming bipartisan support in both Chambers. The House version passed in June by a vote of 409 to 2, the Senate version passed in September by a vote of 92 to 1, and the President has been ready to

sign it for weeks. What is the holdup? Democrats must have decided somehow it works to their advantage to hold onto this bill for political leverage. We know this because they attached it to a bill the President said he would reject, and which he did reject, and now it is back on the shelf and veterans are still waiting. Americans need to know what is going on. The majority is holding onto this bill which contains money for critical new programs for veterans returning from battle.

There is still time to change course and we must. So I call on the majority to end this game. The fiscal year has come and gone without acting on this bill. Veterans Day passed without enacting the bill. Now is the time to take it off the shelf, blow the dust off, and get it to the President's desk for his signature before the Thanksgiving recess.

The majority's strategy on this bill is meant to put pressure on President Bush, but all it is doing is putting pressure on our already strained VA and delaying critical help to veterans and their families. Troops are finally coming home from Iraq. They deserve better than this when they get here, remove their uniforms, and return to our communities.

At this moment, two very good and worthy goals stand before us: funding our veterans and getting funding for our troops in harm's way. We promised them we would do this with both the Gregg and Murray amendments earlier this year. We can achieve it before the recess. Republicans are ready. I would call on the Democrats to join us in achieving these good things before the recess.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SERGEANT MATTHEW L. DECKARD

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today because a son of Kentucky has fallen. I am speaking of SGT Matthew L. Deckard of Elizabethtown, KY. He was 29 years old.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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On September 16, 2005, Sergeant Deckard was driving an M1A1 Abrams tank during patrol operations in Baghdad when an improvised explosive device set by terrorists detonated near another tank in his patrol, killing two soldiers and wounding two others.

Sergeant Deckard heroically left the shelter—left the shelter—of his M1A1 Abrams to help tend to his fallen and wounded comrades. Shortly after returning to his own tank, a second device exploded, this time tragically taking Sergeant Deckard's life.

For his courage and bravery as a soldier, Sergeant Deckard received numerous medals and awards, including the Bronze Star Medal and two Purple Hearts. His family saw him laid to rest in Harlan, KY, with full military honors.

Sergeant Deckard—Matt to his family and friends—was in that tank because he wanted to be there. More specifically, he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his stepfather, Glenn Gill, a retired U.S. Army staff sergeant and former tanker himself.

Matt was “learning about the M1 tank before he ever went into the Army,” Mr. Gill says.

When the M1 Abrams tank was still new in the early 1980s, Mr. Gill would receive the tank's training manuals. Young Matt often borrowed them to read. He borrowed them so often that when Mr. Gill couldn't find one of his manuals, he knew right where to look.

Matt grew up in Elizabethtown, and he also spent several years of his childhood at Fort Knox, KY, where his stepfather was stationed. A “normal country boy,” as his stepfather describes him, he grew up hunting, fishing and learning to work on cars.

Matt graduated from Elizabethtown High School in 1994, and in December of that year married his high school sweetheart, Angela. Then in January 1995, Matt fulfilled his lifelong goal and joined the U.S. Army.

Matt took his training at Fort Knox, did a tour of duty in South Korea, and was assigned to the 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, GA.

Matt and Angela were blessed with three children, and Matt's family was the pride of his life. Daughter Makayla was his “princess,” elder son Matthew Noah his “little man,” and younger son Austin the baby of the family. Matt loved to take his kids fishing or to the beach.

Family came first whenever Matt had time away from work. “We had date nights, just me and him,” says his wife, Angela. “We had movie nights with the kids. When he came home for R&R, or just any time he came home from work, he would just jump for joy that they were right there with him. It made his night, every night.”

Matt was deployed to Iraq twice. The first time, he was originally sent to Kuwait in November 2002, later moving into Iraq and staying there until Au-

gust 2003. He was among the first American troops to enter Baghdad in the liberation of that country from dictatorship in 2003.

Matt's second Iraq deployment began in January 2005. An experienced soldier with 10 years of service, he spent his time where he had always wanted to—around tanks. He served as a driver, gunner, and loader.

“Matt was in the Army as a career soldier and to make a better life for his family,” Mr. Gill says. “Definitely, he loved it. . . . That was his ambition.”

The family he left behind is in my thoughts and prayers today as I recount Matt's story. I wish to recognize his wife, Angela, his mother and stepfather, Cassie and Glenn Gill, his daughter, Makayla, his sons, Matthew Noah and Austin, his brother, Michael Deckard, his sister, Michelle Best, and other beloved family members and friends.

Today, in the Elizabethtown Memorial Gardens cemetery in Elizabethtown, KY, there is a monument to Sergeant Deckard. His family designed it, had it built, and with help from friends, paid for it to be erected in tribute to their lost husband, son, brother, and father.

Matt's family held a dedication ceremony for this monument on February 3 of this year. A color guard team from Fort Knox raised the flags, and the local American Legion post performed the wreath-laying ceremony.

Flying underneath the American flag, Matt's stepfather, Glenn, has raised the Armed Forces Memorial Tribute flag, so we will never forget the brave men and women in uniform who have given their lives for this Nation.

On the monument, Matt's face is boldly etched into a slab of black granite. Next to that perches a bronze eagle. Underneath the eagle are the words, “Freedom is not free.”

The loss of Sergeant Deckard proves that true. His family and friends all have paid a very heavy price.

Nothing we can say here today can ease their terrible loss. But we can remind them that Matt lived to fulfill—in the words of his stepfather, whose career path he followed—his life's ambition.

And we can reassure them that America will forever honor and remember SGT Matthew L. Deckard's sacrifice.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to a period of morning business for 60 minutes, with Senators permitted to speak for up to

10 minutes, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Senator from Wisconsin, Mr. FEINGOLD, recognized first for 15 minutes and with Republicans controlling the next 30 minutes, and the majority controlling the final 15 minutes.

The Senator from Wisconsin.

IRAQ

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I ask the Chair to notify me when I have 1 minute left on my time, and I thank the Chair; and I, of course, join the Republican leader in paying tribute to all the members of our Armed Forces, those who continue to serve, those who have completed their service, and particularly those whom we have lost and their families.

But the Senate still needs to address Iraq. The American people voted a year ago to end the war and we haven't followed through. We need to address this issue and to end this misguided war now, before more Americans are injured and killed.

The bridge fund passed yesterday by the House isn't good enough. The goal for redeployment doesn't cut it. We need a binding deadline, which means we need to pass the Feingold-Reid bill.

Despite recent reports of a downturn in violence in Iraq, violence remains at unacceptable levels. 2007 has already been declared the bloodiest year since the war in Iraq started, and that is with almost 2 months still to go. Those counts don't bring in the number of Iraqis killed. On a relatively quiet day earlier this week, with no reported coalition tragedies, at least 33 Iraqis were killed and an equal number wounded in violence around the country. We can't say violence is down when violence around the country remains so high, when so many Americans are being killed and when so many Iraqis are afraid to walk the streets.

The underlying reality is we are working with both sides of the Iraqi civil war and deepening our dependence on former insurgents and militia-infiltrated security forces.

Meanwhile, the situation in the North and South is precarious at best. Unrest in these areas threatens the security of our supply lines.

The most recent National Intelligence Estimate largely attributed the decline in violence—particularly in Baghdad—to population displacements. Baghdad is now predominantly Shi'ite. While the purpose of the surge was to foster reconciliation, the reality is that the number of Iraqis displaced by the conflict doubled since the start of the surge, adding to millions already pushed out of their homes from 2003 to 2006.

Meanwhile, we have put our troops outside the forward operating bases in more dangerous territory for the purpose of policing the Iraqi civil war. When they are out in those joint security stations, they have to spend half