

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 2 more minutes.

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

Mr. CORNYN. I would ask that 2 more minutes be added to our time; otherwise, I have no objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, 2 minutes will be added to the Republicans' time as well.

Mr. HARKIN. Again, the House indicated they would take it up. It languished here. It passed the Senate, as I said, by unanimous consent three times already. Again, it is time to keep the promise that Congress made to 30 million Americans in 1996. I would hope we would not block the Realtime Writers Act, and let it go through, and with unanimous consent, as it has done three times in the Senate before. I would ask those who have a hold on the bill, are they saying that 100 Senators before, who let this legislation go through, didn't know what they were doing? We all have staffs, and we all pay attention to what legislation goes through here. I think it is indicative of the support we had on both sides of the aisle that the Realtime Writers Act, as I said, passed by unanimous consent three times in the past.

I wanted to talk about these bills because again I think they are both widely supported. We have worked out agreements with people in the past, and I don't think there is any real, legitimate reason to keep a hold on these bills and not let them pass.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate take up and pass Calendar No. 326, S. 1183, the Christopher and Dana Reeve Paralysis Act, and Calendar No. 291, S. 675, the Training for Realtime Writers Act.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I object to both, and I will give my reasons why during our time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, as part of my closing remarks, in case an objection was raised to the Training for Realtime Writers Act, I want to say this is something that can be done already by the administration, but I would point out that they have not done it in 10 years, either Democratic or Republican Presidents. Quite frankly, they are not focusing on it. They have said they can do it as part of their high-growth job training initiative, but they haven't done it. That is the point of the legislation. They have not done this.

And for those interested in earmarks around here, 90 percent of the money in the high-growth job training—

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

Mr. HARKIN. Well, I want to close with 30 seconds, by saying that 90 percent—

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

Mr. HARKIN. Ninety percent of the money is noncompetitive. Over \$235

million over 6 years has gone out in noncompetitive grants, and not one penny for real-time writers.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, may I ask how much time remains on this side of the aisle in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 90 minutes 16 seconds.

Mr. CORNYN. I would ask, Mr. President, that the Senator from Oklahoma, Senator COBURN, be recognized for up to 10 minutes, followed by myself, followed by the Senator from Georgia, Senator ISAKSON, and then the Senator from Idaho, Senator CRAIG, for the first 40 minutes of our time.

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

The Senator from Oklahoma.

DISCONTINUING BUSINESS AS USUAL

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, this morning we have heard about a lot of good causes and a lot of good bills. But what we have been asked to do is to pass bills without any debate, without the opportunity to amend, and we just heard a Senator say we could agree to a UC and not have to vote on it. Agreeing to a UC is the same as voting yes. The fact is, we have had plenty of time to bring up all these bills, put them on the floor, debate them and have great debates so the American people become informed, and offer amendments.

I will say for many of these bills, I am the Senator objecting. Senator HARKIN knows I am objecting to the two bills he just raised.

The point is, our debt is rising \$1 million a minute. When you authorize \$100 million for the Realtime Writers Act, what you are saying is, I intend to get the money out of the appropriations process to develop training for something that the market should already be inducing through increased wages. If in fact there is a shortage, why is the market not taking care of it? Is it because the pay is too low? Maybe the pay ought to be higher. Maybe people ought to go into it. Instead we are going to inject \$100 million of American taxpayers' money into something that will be solved through the market. If it is not, then the pay is entirely too low and the market will eventually adjust to it. But to say we are going to authorize something with no intent to ever spend, that is not the intent of an authorization. The intent of an authorization is to spend more money.

At \$1.3 billion a day, we are going into debt, and it is not our debt. We are transferring it to our children and our grandchildren. To come down here and want to authorize and spend and pass without debate and pass without amendment multitudes of bills with no debate is to say, in other words, take it or leave it. And if you want to amend it or you want to have a chance to vote on it, tough luck; we are going to do it without you. It is called "UC."

The fact is, we find ourselves \$9 trillion in debt now. The fact is, our chil-

dren are facing \$79 trillion worth of unfunded mandates. It is time that we change the business in the Senate. To come down and claim you want to just authorize but not spend is a hoax because you would not be authorizing unless you do spend.

The other thing the American people ought to know is, out of the over \$1 trillion in discretionary budget that we spend right now, \$280 billion of it is not authorized. The appropriators totally ignore the authorizers. When it comes to appropriations, they appropriate whatever they want. So it doesn't have to be authorized to get it done. They will appropriate it if they want to do it. They don't pay any attention to authorization.

When we have \$8 trillion worth of authorized programs now, to say we cannot eliminate some program that is not being funded to be able to make room for one that should be funded, and to say we should not have to do that, that doesn't pass the commonsense test with the American public.

I understand that is irritating and bristling to the way we have done things in the past. I apologize if at times I am irritable and irritating, but I think the future generations are worth it. I do not think we can continue doing business as usual. So we have seen an ALS bill come down. The CDC doesn't want the ALS bill, the registry, and the reason is they can already do it. If we are going to do an ALS bill, we ought to do it for all neurologic diseases in terms of a registry, not just one. What we have decided is a celebrity or an interest group can come and we will place a priority there. Regardless of what the science says, regardless of what the basic science and the pure science says in terms of guiding us where to go on diseases, we will just respond. We will create a new program, and we will tell NIH where they have to go, or CDC where they have to go when science doesn't guide them there.

If we are going to do that, if we really think as a body we ought to be going the disease-specific direction, then why don't we do it all? Why don't we say we will do the peer-reviewed science on all the programs at NIH? Since we are going to pick the ones that have a cause behind them, why don't we do them all. Why don't we let the lobbyists tell us which ones should be first? Of course, we wouldn't do that because we know the scientists at CDC and the scientists at NIH make decisions, not on popularity, not on politics, but on the raw science that will give us the best benefit for the most people.

We look good when we do those things. We do satisfy a yearning for those who are handicapped or paralyzed or have breast cancer or have colon cancer. But if we are going to do a registry for ALS, why aren't we doing one for diabetes? We aren't we doing one for multiple myeloma? Why? Why aren't we doing those things? If we are going to pick one, if we are going to do

a neurological disease, let's do it for all of them. It shows the shallowness of what we are trying to do. Our hearts are big, but we are not looking at the big picture.

The FHA we discussed. The component in the FHA that I object to is, we have a study in the FHA bill that the GAO is mandated to do on reverse mortgages. But at the same time, regardless of what the study shows, we lift the cap. All I have asked for from the authors of the bill is to keep the cap where it is until we get the GAO study back so we know what we are doing, rather than responding to a clamoring which we have no basis, in fact, to know is the accurate thing to do; otherwise, we wouldn't be asking for the study in the first place. It is a simple request.

Instead, we come to the Senate floor and try to make us, those who object, seem unreasonable when we say common sense would say if we have a study in the bill to tell us where to go, but we are already ignoring what the results of that study may or may not be, to question that we should not have a debate about that, that we should not have an ability to amend that, we should just blindly say yes, that is not what the Senate tradition is. This is a body that is supposed to be about debate.

In the past 31 days the Senate has been in session 15 days. We have had 10 votes in 15 days, and we have had 8 days without any votes at all. All these bills could have been on the floor and had accurate debate. I would have lost most of my amendments, based on the historical record of my amendments, but the American people would have benefited from the debate about those bills. Instead, we are made to look as if we don't care if we want to try to improve a bill because we will not agree to blindly accept a bill to go through. We are made to say we don't care about people who are losing their mortgages because we think there are some commonsense changes to a bill? That isn't quite right.

You hear the reference that people vote or the committee voted or that there wasn't an amendment. The fact is, on voice votes if you do not vote, you are not recorded because there is not a recorded vote. But that doesn't mean you agree to bring the bill to the floor. We all know that.

The fact is, and you have heard me say it many times in this body, if you are born today you inherit \$400,000 worth of unfunded liabilities. There is a lot of things we do wrong on our side of the aisle, I will admit that, and have done wrong on our side of the aisle, both in the tenor of how we approach things and in how we characterize things. But the best way to right what we are doing wrong is start doing it right. The fact is, it is no legacy that we should leave to the next two generations that they are born into the world with a stone around their neck. The culture and methodology the Senate—I

asked the President of the Senate a moment ago: What does unanimous consent mean when we bring up these bills? It is the rules of the Senate, I was told. The rules of the Senate are, you get no opportunity to amend.

I ask unanimous consent for an additional 3 minutes for me.

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

Mr. COBURN. You get no opportunity to debate, you get no opportunity to amend, you have no opportunity to vote. So, if you truly object to a bill or a component of a bill you are told: Stuff it. What you think about it doesn't matter, let alone the very real loss of the American people not hearing a full debate about these issues.

We have plenty of time to debate them. We have quorum calls much too much. We should have two or three bills on the floor at the same time. I am willing to debate and lose, but I am not willing to give consent I disagree with and imply to the people I represent, in my oath to the Constitution, that it doesn't matter. It does matter. It matters immensely.

The future is at risk. We are on an unsustainable course, and we are seeing some of that played out in the mortgage market today. We are seeing some of that played out with the value of the dollar today. We are seeing some of that played out in the confidence of the American people, not only in the future and what they see, but in how they view us. We do, in fact, have an obligation to secure the future, and we do, in fact, have an obligation to make tough choices, priorities. Those priorities ought to be framed in the light of what the everyday American family has to do to frame their priorities.

Instead, what we have the habit of is not making any priorities at all because we take it all. We don't choose. We choose to do it all, knowing that the consequences of that choice bear on two generations from us. We will long be gone, but the legacy we leave will deny the very essence of this country. The essence of this country is one generation sacrificing for the future, for the next. The legacy we are leaving is exactly the opposite.

So I beg some patience on the part of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that, in fact, if we disagree on a bill going by UC, it doesn't necessarily mean we disagree with the intent. It does mean that we think it can be improved or we think it can be held more accountable or, as the case of the SBA bills I am holding now, one of them is atrocious in terms of the money it is losing for the American people. Yet we are supposed to agree with those bills without amending or voting or debating.

I will be back to talk later in our time, and at the present time I yield.

Mr. CORNYN. If the Senator will yield for a quick question?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. I wanted to ask the distinguished Senator, earlier before he was able to come to the floor, there was a unanimous consent request offered with regard to the ALS registry, and I, on his behalf, lodged an objection, although I have no personal objection. I just want to ask the distinguished Senator from Oklahoma if it is his understanding it was on his behalf?

Mr. COBURN. Absolutely. There is no question. I thank you for covering for me in that regard.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I understand why we find ourselves in this terrible posture today and why some people are calling this Congress the broken Congress, the dysfunctional Congress. If you look at the chart that was alluded to a moment ago about the last 31 days of the Senate, we have had 15 days of the last 31 days actually in session. We have had 10 rollcall votes. We have had 10 rollcall votes in the last 31 days. As a matter of fact, we should be having rollcall votes now on the farm bill, which is the bill I thought was before the Senate. But, instead, our colleagues from the other side of the aisle decided to put on this show for the American people to try to portray themselves as passing legislation, although they knew it could not be done in the manner in which they proposed—while we should be passing the farm bill.

Let me talk for a moment about the opportunities that they have squandered by their mismanagement of the calendar over this last year. I asked the Senator from Illinois, Mr. DURBIN, if he would agree to a unanimous consent request, and also the majority leader, to help fund our troops who are in harm's way during a time of war. They objected to that.

As a matter of fact, Republicans attempted to call up the Veterans appropriations bill before the Veterans Day holiday, and the Democrats objected to bringing up that bill. Just to be clear, this is the appropriations bill that funds veterans affairs and military construction and is important not only to keeping our commitments to our veterans but to maintaining a decent quality of life for the families who are left behind while their loved one is in harm's way in Iraq or Afghanistan and other dangerous places across the world.

Our colleagues on the other side of the aisle blocked that appropriations bill like they blocked the emergency funding for the troops that is needed in order to avoid the 100,000 notices to civilian employees of the Department of Defense that they are going to be laid off. They are going to get those notices before Christmas that they are going to be laid off by mid-February unless Congress does the job it should have done a long time ago. That is not even to mention—which I will mention—the funding necessary for the Department of Defense to operate in Iraq and Afghanistan to root out al-Qaida and other foreign fighters, Islamic extremists who are trying to kill American

soldiers and who, if given an opportunity to reorganize themselves in Iraq, would use that as another launching pad to carry out murderous attacks against Americans and our allies.

Just to be clear, the Senator from Illinois, Mr. DURBIN, asked me about a meeting where the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State were present. I explained, as I have just explained here today, what the situation would be like if we failed to act, and as a result of their objection, we are not acting on a timely basis.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter from the Deputy Secretary of Defense to the Republican leader that is dated December 7, 2007, signed by Gordon England to the Honorable MITCH McCONNELL.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE,
Washington, DC, December 7, 2007.

Hon. MITCH McCONNELL,
Republican Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. LEADER, 10 U.S.C. 1597(e) provides that the Department of Defense "... may not implement any involuntary reduction or furlough of civilian positions ... until the expiration of the 45-day period beginning on the date on which the Secretary submits to Congress a report setting forth the reasons why such reduction or furloughs are required . . .". In accordance with this statutory requirement, I am providing a report on potential furloughs within the Department of the Army, the Marine Corps, and the Combatant Commands.

As you are aware, the FY 08 DoD Appropriations Act did not provide funds to the Department for the Global War on Terror (GWOT). In my November 8, 2007 letter to the Senate and House Appropriations Committee leadership, I emphasized that without this critical funding, the Department would have no choice but to deplete key appropriations accounts in order to sustain essential military operations around the world.

Without GWOT funding, only operations and maintenance (O&M) funds in the base budget are available to cover war-related costs. O&M funds also cover salary costs for a large number of Army and Marine Corps civilian employees.

The Army and Marine Corps currently estimate that the fiscal demand on O&M funds to cover both normal operating and GWOT costs will result in depletion of the Army's O&M funds by about mid-February and the Marine Corps O&M funds by about mid-March 2008. As a result, Army civilian employees, who are paid from Army O&M accounts and Marine Corps civilian employees, paid from Marine Corp O&M accounts, will at those times be subject to furlough. Affected employees are located throughout the United States and overseas.

The furlough will negatively affect our ability to execute base operations and training activities. More importantly, it will affect the critical support our civilian employees provide to our warfighters—support which is key to our current operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Accordingly, the Department will issue potential furlough information to about 100,000 affected civilian employees next week. Specific furlough notices will be issued in mid-January. The Department will also be notifying appropriate labor organizations.

While these actions will be detrimental to the nation, there are no other viable alter-

natives without additional Congressional funding. Your support in providing these needed funds would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as the letter makes clear, while the Department of Defense has the ability to fund the troops in the field until mid-February—around March for the Marine Corps—this comes at great expense to those in the Department of Defense, both in and out of uniform. The only reason the Department of Defense can basically rob Peter to pay Paul in terms of paying its bills is because other activities will not be funded, to include training, repair of equipment, and salaries. This letter makes clear that under the current law, furlough notices must soon be issued, potentially right around the time Christmas hits.

This is not any way to run the business of our Nation. Unfortunately, because of the way our colleagues have led the Senate, we have squandered a tremendous opportunity to solve the problems the American people sent us here to solve.

We have had 66 votes on cloture motions—in other words, efforts to force legislation down the throat of the minority without an opportunity for debate or amendment. That is a guaranteed recipe for failure. As everyone in this body knows, under the rules of the Senate, neither the majority nor the minority can have their own way without bipartisan cooperation. That is the way to get things done. But, rather than get things done for the American people, what we have seen is a "my way or the highway" approach on the part of the leadership on the other side of the aisle. That is the reason we have had 63 votes, 63 votes so far this session, on the war in Iraq, with various attempts on the other side of the aisle either to attach strings to that money or to impose arbitrary deadlines on our commanders in the field or what I would submit is basically to insist on surrender dates.

These are the same folks who called the surge a failure before it even started. They have said they supported the troops but yet, when it comes time to show their support by making sure they have the funding for the equipment and the training, to pay salaries, and to maintain a decent quality of life for their loved ones who are left behind, instead of acting on that stated support for the troops, have failed to act.

I know the other side of the aisle has given us a copy of various unanimous consent requests to give us fair notice of their intention to ask for unanimous consent, and we have done the same.

On behalf of this side of the aisle, I would ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2363, which is funding for military construction and veterans affairs.

I further ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be laid

upon the table and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, on behalf of the majority leader, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I am disappointed to hear the objection. This is the same Veterans appropriations bill and Military Construction bill that was passed this summer by the Senate and this summer as well by the House. Why is it that it has been delayed all this time? This is funding for the very veterans who have sacrificed so much and given so much in the service to this country who are being told: No, we are going to hold that money back because essentially you are part of our political plans to put together a huge Omnibus appropriations at the end of the year and try to force the President and the minority to accept bloated Washington spending, when, in fact, there is no objection to passage of that Veterans bill or Military Construction bill, and it should be passed today by unanimous consent without further delay.

Mr. President, I have one other unanimous consent request I would like to offer. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3997, a bill to provide tax relief for our troops. I further ask that the amendment at the desk, which is the text of S. 2340 and provides for full funding of our troops, emergency funding for our troops, be agreed to and that the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, on behalf of the majority leader, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I regret the obstruction on the part of the majority. This provision, the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Tax Relief Act, would ensure that our military members are treated fairly under our own tax laws. It would make clear that combat pay can be treated as income for purposes of qualifying for the earned-income tax credit. It would also make improvements to the rules for mortgage bonds for veterans, clarify rules regarding survivor and disability payments, and continue to provide pay and benefits to National Guard and Reserve members called to Active Duty. I have already mentioned the component of it that would provide full funding on an emergency basis to our troops who are currently fighting and, unfortunately, some being wounded and dying in service to their country and protection of our freedoms, which has now been objected to once again.

I will finish my remarks for this period where I started and say that we have squandered our opportunities to govern. The only way you can govern

in the Congress is by building a governing coalition, Democrats working with Republicans to try to solve the Nation's problems. When one side or the other tries to jam their agenda down the throat of the other side, it does not work, and exhibit A is the dismal record of this broken Congress during this last year.

I see why our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are getting nervous, why their desperation to pass legislation is beginning to show, because they realize they had the opportunity to lead, they realize they had the opportunity to govern, but they have squandered that opportunity. So now, in the last week and a half before the Christmas recess, they are out here trying to act as if the minority has obstructed them, when, in fact, if they had only met us halfway and worked with us to solve some of the big issues that confront our country in a bipartisan and constructive way, we would have met them halfway and we would have solved many of those problems.

Mr. GREGG. Would the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. CORNYN. I will.

Mr. GREGG. I was wondering, is it not true that in this Congress, none of the appropriations bills, which is the business of actually operating the Government—appropriations bills being the bills which fund things like education, things like health care, things like taking care of roads—none of the appropriations bills have passed the Congress in time to meet the fiscal year?

Mr. CORNYN. The distinguished Senator from New Hampshire is exactly correct. My recollection is only 1 out of the 12 appropriations bills has actually been signed by the President, and that was after the fiscal year ended, meaning that essentially Congress is doing what no business, what no family could get away with; that is, basically to pay the bills on a timely basis. So it is another example of this broken Congress and squandered opportunity to work together to do our basic duty.

Unfortunately, I think what we have seen now is an unfortunate game being played out where, rather than pass those bills on an individual basis, there is going to be an attempt to roll them into a giant Omnibus appropriations bill, which someone observed the other day is Latin for "hold on to your wallet." The President has insisted that he is going to hold the line, as he well should, on wasteful Washington spending which would require tax increases on the American people at a time when the economy is entering into a flat period. It is exactly the wrong time—if there is ever a right time—to raise taxes.

Mr. GREGG. Would the Senator yield for an additional question through the chair.

Mr. CORNYN. I would.

Mr. GREGG. The Senator has pointed out that we passed none of the obligations for operating the Government

prior to the beginning of the fiscal year. As the Senator pointed out, we have only passed 1 of those bills out of the 12. We are now almost 3 months into the fiscal year. That happens to be the worst record in the history of the Congress, I believe.

That dysfunction of this Congress was not necessary, was it? Did we not vote I think almost 60 times on issues involving Iraq, on repetitive issues involving Iraq, to the point where the Democratic leaders have essentially said: We are going to ignore the operation of the day-to-day business of the Government in order to call up 60 votes, many of which were simply political votes, and use up the entire calendar of the Congress in order to make political points, when they knew they were not going to be able to do a great deal in this area other than what they should do, which is fund the troops in the field?

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, the Senator from New Hampshire is absolutely correct.

I would further say in response to his question, you know there is a marked contrast to the tone that was set at the very beginning of this Congress with the new majority in charge. The Senator from Illinois, Mr. DURBIN, who was on the floor earlier, said:

I think the people across America said to us in this last election, we want you to compromise, we want you to find solutions, we do not want you to play to a draw with nothing to show for it.

Well, that is in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD on January 4, 2007. I agreed with that statement then. But, as I say, it stands in marked contrast to what we have seem demonstrated this last year.

The Senator from New York, Mr. SCHUMER, who was on the floor earlier, on that same date said:

All too often we in Washington get lost in the world of Washington, the focus on getting something done, something done for the American people gets lost.

Well, I wish they had heeded their own advice because what we have to show for this last year is very little, indeed. Failing to take care of our most basic responsibilities, as the Senator from New Hampshire has pointed out, to fund the Government on a timely basis—the fact is, we find ourselves in a terrible position now, with just a few days remaining until the Christmas break to get that work done.

Mr. GREGG. If the Senator would yield further for a question?

Mr. CORNYN. I would.

Mr. GREGG. My first two questions were sort of to lay the predicate for this question, which is that the other side of the aisle has spent a lot of time saying the minority is obstructing, the Republicans are obstructing. Yet was it not by conscious choice that they decided to create a legislative calendar which was totally dominated by their desire to make political points over the issue of how the war in Iraq was proceeding rather than to take up the ap-

propriations bills, which are the proper order of the Congress, one of the first responsibilities of the Congress? The Republican side of the aisle has not resisted going to appropriations bills; it has been the other side of the aisle which has refused to bring them up.

So this allegation of obstruction is really a bit of a straw dog, is it not? Are they not in the position of basically having created the problem and then trying to claim the problem is created by us when, in fact, the problem was created by the fact that they refused to take up the business of the Government, and now, in the 11th hour 49th minute, they have decided to turn to the business of the Government and they have chaos on their hands as a result of their own management?

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I agree again with the statement made and respond in the affirmative to the question propounded by the Senator from New Hampshire. This Congress has spent 11 months holding Iraq political votes that have had no chance of becoming law.

We have had 63 votes thus far this session. In the meantime, while the majority has been fiddling, the business of the American people has not been done. I think about the issues besides those of national security that cry out for solutions, things such as border security and immigration reform. Couldn't we have used some of this time more constructively to solve one of the biggest domestic issues confronting the country today? How about energy policy? We have an energy bill that raises taxes on domestic producers and encourages our dependence on foreign oil, when we could have worked together to pass an energy policy that would have prepared us for the future. We have not done that. Health care, which is a tremendous concern of my constituents in Texas and elsewhere, we could have acted to deal with the health care access cost and quality crisis in this country, but we have not.

I know there are other colleagues who wish to speak.

I reserve the remainder of my time and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I wish to follow up on the exchange between the Senator from New Hampshire and the Senator from Texas in a different context. I am sure the theatrics of this morning are entertaining for a few. But for me, they are illustrative of how a broken Congress has real ramifications for the people of the State of Georgia. I hold this seat in the Senate because a majority of Georgians sent me here to vote on their behalf and act on their behalf. But the way in which this session has been managed, the way in which certain pieces of legislation have been managed, the way in which we even are debating this morning in 3 hours of morning business when we should be on the farm bill is causing

pain and suffering to the people I represent. I wish to put meat on those bones.

First, I wish to talk about the veterans bill mentioned by the distinguished Senator from Texas, a bill nobody here really objected to but some objected to and kept it from coming to the floor. It still has not come. It has been objected to this morning. What is the ramification of that on Georgians? The VA hospital in Atlanta, GA, on Claremont Road is a great VA hospital that has been there for years. It has been in terrible need of repair. Three years ago, the Congress authorized and appropriated the money to remodel all the floors of the VA hospital in Atlanta, where today hundreds of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom, all the way back to the Korean war, are being attended to. In the last 3 years, three of those floors were redone, but they didn't get the other three done, and they are waiting to be done.

The money, \$20.552 million, is in the bank, but the authorization that was passed 3 years ago has expired. As the Chair knows, we don't appropriate without an authorization. We are not supposed to. And if we don't have an authorization, the money is frozen. The ramifications of holding the veterans bill to real Americans, real Georgians, real heroes who served this country in uniform is that those floors set to be remodeled in a hospital for veterans sit there unremodeled. The new equipment, new technology, everything that is in there for veterans is held. The money is in the bank, already appropriated. All we to have do is the authorization. It is in a bill nobody objects to when you talk to them. But continuously it is objected to on the floor of the Senate.

I wish to talk about the ramifications of messaging. There is a new technique we are using now. Instead of sending back a conference report to which a point of order can be raised—I know that is technical jargon—you send a message. You either have to vote up or down. You don't have a chance to amend or to make a point of order. Let's take the Energy bill going back and forth akin to a ping-pong ball. Most recently it came to us as a message, unamendable and no point of order, and we can't debate the dirty little secret that the renewable portfolio standard in the Energy bill benefits certain parts of the United States and is punitive to others. I happen to represent one of those States to which it is punitive. How punitive is it? It is so punitive that by 2020 it will have cost the ratepayers in the State of Georgia to the Southern Company and to the EMCs in our State \$8.2 billion. So the tactic being used does not allow me to make that point on the floor or make a point of order or bring it to debate but asks all of us to agree to a proposition that would impose that much damage on the people I represent. That is the ramification of a broken Congress on real people, real Georgians.

I understand the omnibus bill is coming to us as a message as well. There is an amendment in the omnibus bill which is punitive to the State of Georgia. It has been put in outside the process of the committee system and outside the process of debate. I am not going to have a chance to even raise a point of order on that particular amendment. In fact, as the Senator from New Hampshire observed, we didn't pass but one appropriations bill by the time the new fiscal year took place. We have been going back and forth because, instead, we spent most of the year debating 62 separate votes on whether to withdraw our troops from Iraq. In fact, I find it sad that in the 6 months that debate has been going on, the surge has worked by everybody's definition. Progress in Iraq has been of a tremendous advantage. The men and women who have sacrificed and accomplished it and are fighting there today are looking at us playing games with the money to fund the military. It is not only wrong, it is sad. It is time we had an appropriations process that worked in the Senate, not one that is broken.

It is time we looked at ideas such as Senator DOMENICI's biennial budget, where you appropriate in odd-numbered years and you do oversight in even-numbered years. Wouldn't it be fun to see an even-numbered year election for Congress or President where the debate wasn't on what I was going to appropriate to make you happy but instead the savings I was going to find to make our country run better? Senator DOMENICI, who is leaving us at the end of next year, has a great proposition. It ought to go. We ought to be appropriating money by the time the fiscal year starts.

The real effect on real Georgians with the process now is that in December of 2007, in the first quarter of the fiscal year 2008, we have Government appropriations policy based on an appropriations bill passed in 2006. The body of knowledge doubles every 7 years. We are still 2 years behind on our appropriations process. Why? Because of the dilatory tactics, because of thematic debates, and all because one side wants to leverage against another, to the detriment of real people.

Lastly, I wish to talk about the real damage of a broken Congress on the appointment process. In today's Executive Calendar, there is a list of any number of appointees to any number of positions in the Government—judicial appointees, Department of Homeland Security appointees, Tennessee Valley Authority appointees, hazardous and chemical waste oversight board appointees. All those appointees have come out of committee; some of them from the committee I am on, Environment and Public Works. They have testified before the committee. They have been subjected to questions. They have been thoroughly vetted, and they have been voted out of committee; in the case of EPW, voted out unanimously.

Last Thursday, there was a move to pass this list, still on the calendar, by unanimous consent. Remember, all these appointees have gone through the committee process. They have been vetted. They have been voted on. They have testified. They have subjected themselves to all the questions we could possibly ask. Yet there was an objection last week. So what is the pain and suffering to the American people? In those four States where judges were asked to be approved, they continue to have a backlog of criminal cases, a backlog of critical cases.

To me and the Members of this body who represent areas that are served by the Tennessee Valley Authority, Congress finally fixed the TVA 2 years ago, got it under new management, into a good system, ran it like a business, appointed a significant board, and now it is time to reappoint three of those members or reappoint two and add one new one from Georgia, I might add. What happens? Somebody says: I object. We are objecting to the American people's business, are objecting to the progress of what this Government was set up to do.

The broken Congress of 2008 has real consequences, not for me but for the people of my State. I will stay until Christmas or New Year's and repeat what I have said until somebody throws the light switch and understands the games we are playing don't affect us; they affect the people who sent us. In the case of the four examples I have given, they affect them negatively.

To that point, I would like to make two unanimous consent requests. The first one is going to be with regard to the TVA board. I wish to repeat one thing I said. They all were approved unanimously. Two of them are reappointments. They are all fine people. TVA has reduced its debt under new management. Congress worked hard to pass this 2 years ago. It is time to have these people seated and working.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 404, 405, and 406; these are three nominations to be members of the board of directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority. I ask consent that these pending nominations be confirmed en bloc, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action. I finally ask consent that the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, on behalf of majority leader, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations to the judiciary: No. 373, John Tinder to the U.S. Circuit Court for the 7th Circuit;

No. 392, Amul Thapar, to be U.S. district judge for the Eastern District of Kentucky; No. 395, Joseph Laplante, to be U.S. district judge for the District of New Hampshire; and No. 396, Thomas Schroeder, to be U.S. district judge for the Middle District of North Carolina.

I ask consent that these pending nominations be confirmed en bloc, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action. I further ask that the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mrs. MURRAY. On behalf of the majority leader, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. ISAKSON. I understand the Senator from Washington is acting on behalf of her leader. I respect that. But the point I have tried to make in my speech I want to end with. These are seven individuals, four of whom in the judiciary in four States could be processing criminal cases, taking appeals, making the justice system of the United States work. We all know the backlog in the courts. The Presiding Officer is a distinguished attorney. I have heard him talk about that very question. Then the three that were objected to on the Tennessee Valley Authority were approved unanimously. All we are saying to one of the biggest providers of electrical energy in the United States of America that was reformed by this Senate less than 18 months ago is: You are not important enough for us to approve what has already been passed by unanimous consent in committee.

I submit that a broken Congress has real consequences. This Congress is broken, and the consequences are negative on the people of my State of Georgia and the people of the United States.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASEY). The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Georgia and the Senator from Texas for their leadership. With that leadership comes a very clear voice about the problems this current Congress is facing. They are problems that are historic in character. I was once in the majority. It was the minority who said: We can do better and, therefore, we should run the Congress. In the last election, the American people listened and they changed the Congress. While I was chairing the Veterans' Affairs Committee at that time, we lost the Congress—we, the Republicans—by a reality of dropping to 32 percent in the minds of Americans as to an effective and responsible Congress. The minority played on that. They became the majority. They took over the leadership. They made a great deal of promises. Here we are in the eleventh and a half hour headed toward the twelfth hour of this session of Congress. They have not accomplished it. They have dropped

below 11 percent in favorable rating among the American people.

The American people do want to see us get along. At the same time, they want their Government to function in a timely and responsible way. That is exactly what this Congress has failed to do.

I come to the floor to speak about two issues specifically. The assistant majority leader came to the floor earlier today and asked unanimous consent that S. 1233 and S. 1315 be allowed to come to the floor under unanimous consent or to come to the floor with debate and final passage. The reason he had to do that was before the Thanksgiving recess, I came to the floor and objected to the movement of those bills. The Senator from Oklahoma also now objects to the movement of those bills. I think it is very important that not only does the record bear why we objected but the American people clearly understand why we are objecting, because these are veterans bills.

These are bills that deal with critical needs of America's veterans. I was once chairman and ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I am not going to suggest that I need to add credentials to my record as supporting America's veterans. My responsibility is to make sure the services to our veterans get delivered in a responsible and timely way, that the truly needy service-connected and poor veteran gets served, and that the needs of those coming in out of Afghanistan and Iraq, who then become veterans out of our active service, are met in an immediate way. That is the responsibility of this Congress. It is not to keep adding and adding and adding new programs that may or may not be necessary and adding and adding and adding billions of dollars that anyone in service to veterans can say is at best questionable. It is for those reasons that I objected to those bills.

Now, let me break down why because there are some very real issues here.

S. 1233 is an important piece of legislation that a majority of those of us who supported the legislation to begin with agreed to. It is called the Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury and Health Programs Improvement Act of 2007. Any bill with that title would capture your imagination. One of the great concerns we have today is the traumatic brain injuries our men and women in service are coming out of Iraq with, especially because of the types of bombs that are being used over there. Oftentimes, this kind of injury does not show up in a veteran until he or she becomes a veteran.

If you look down through the priorities of that bill, you look at increased veterans' travel benefits—yes, rural veterans coming to veterans centers to be served; a major medical facilities project; adding to the expanded services of veterans health care; professional scholarship programs; extended time for preferred care; help for low-income veterans; traumatic brain injury

program enhancement; assisted-living pilot program enhancement—all of those very valuable and very meaningful, strongly supported by the Veterans' Affairs Committee and strongly supported by this Senate.

But what happened at the last minute was that a Senator on the other side added a new program. They said: We are going to allow Priority 8 veterans to become eligible for the full service of health care under the veterans health care system. What is a Priority 8 veteran? A Priority 8 veteran is one who has no service-connected disability or injury or health care concern. Did they serve? Yes, they served. Did they sustain any injury or physical needs as a result of their service? No. Are they at the poverty level or below? No. They are above it. And in most instances—in fact, in a high percentage of them—through their own employment, they have health care.

So for a good number of years, because of costs, we who watch the veterans issues and Presidents and Secretaries of the VA have said we will not serve them. They will not be eligible for the full benefits. This President, President Bush, said: I will make them eligible, but they need to pay a small fee, a couple hundred bucks a year, to have access to the greatest health care program in the world. The minority at that time, the Democrats, said: No. They get it free of charge or they don't get it.

Well, all of a sudden into this very valuable bill they parachuted Priority 8 veterans. What does that do? Well, if you go talk to the Secretary of the Veterans' Administration, they are going to tell you that it might cause a substantial problem. Why? Because all of a sudden in this health care system there could be 1.3 million more Americans eligible for health care—not planned for, not anticipated, not budgeted for, but parachuted in, I have to believe all in the name of trying to show a concern for veterans and to demonstrate that maybe we are a little more sensitive than the other side.

What does that mean? Well, it also means the potential of between \$1.2 billion more expended in 2008 and up to \$8.8 billion more by 2012. Did they fund it? No. Have they stuck it in the bill? Yes. Are they trying to create a priority? Yes. Are they trying to create a new expenditure? Yes. And I said: No. Let's serve our poor and our needy and our disabled first and our traumatically brain injured and our post-traumatic stress syndrome veterans. Let's serve them now. Let's put money into the bill to do that.

So the Senator from Texas talked about the VA-MILCON bill that is right at the desk right now, sent out by the ranking minority member of the VA-MILCON Subcommittee, on which I serve, of Appropriations, Senator HUTCHISON. We are trying to get a vote on it. That bill—that bill alone—has nearly \$8 billion worth of new spending in it for veterans. That is a near 17.5-

to 18-percent increase over last year. I believe it can be said, other than defense, to be the largest increase in a budget of all of Government for this year. But the money I am talking about, the new money for Priority 8, is not even in that one. All of this new money for veterans needs that is in the bill that we are being told cannot be passed, that we keep trying to get a vote on, does not even include the \$1.5 billion to \$8 billion necessary to fund this new program for veterans who are not needy, who are not service connected, and who have not been eligible for a good number of years.

That is why we are saying no. You take Priority 8 out of this, and the Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury and Health Programs Improvement Act, S. 1233, could pass, and it would pass on a voice vote because the Senate—Democrats and Republicans—have always supported our veterans. But we will not nor will I allow us to get caught in the game of first you argue on the other side that we have a war nobody likes and a President who is not managing it well, and then on the other side you are saying we are not taking care of our veterans. I reject that, and I reject it totally for these reasons.

While I was chair and ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and throughout the Bush administration, we have increased the funding for veterans on an annualized basis anywhere from 10 to 12 percent. When I talk about the appropriations bill that is at the desk for veterans being a historically large increase, well, the one the year before was a historically large increase. We have never ducked our responsibility to veterans. But we must prioritize, and we must focus on the truly needy, and we must focus on those who are coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan and traumatic brain injury and all of those who continue to suffer today. That is the first bill, and it will continue to be objected to until they take out those kinds of add-ons.

Let's talk about the second bill. The second bill is S. 1315. Now, that is an interesting bill because if you look at it on its face value, you say: Yes, that makes some sense. We are going to give a veterans' benefit enhancement to a certain class of veteran. Let me tell you who that veteran is.

The bill includes roughly \$900 million in new entitlement spending on an array of veterans' benefits, but what is interesting is, it is moving money away from poor, elderly, disabled and wartime U.S. veterans. It is taking effectively \$2,000 annually from our veterans and moving it over to a veteran who does not even live in the United States and is not a citizen of the United States—a Filipino veteran.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has used 10 minutes.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 3 additional minutes.

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

Mr. CRAIG. Why I object to this—and I call this bill the "Robin Hood in reverse" bill—is quite simple. If any of you have watched the Ken Burns PBS series "The War," there is one whole segment of that about the war in the Philippines and the Filipinos who came forward to fight with Americans and even serve in American uniforms in defense of their land and ours during World War II. They did not become American citizens. They were Filipinos, and they have always received benefits. But this bill now reaches in and takes money away from our veterans, our poor veterans, because of a court case and is giving it to them.

Here is my problem. First of all, they do not live in this country, and they are not U.S. citizens. They are currently receiving benefits. But for the average U.S. veteran, their benefits, right now under law, cannot exceed \$10,929 a year. That is roughly 24 percent of the average U.S. household income. But this benefit which is in this bill gives to a veteran—a non-U.S. citizen, living in the Philippines—100 percent of the average household income in the Philippines. They are taking that money away from our veterans to do it. That is the "Robin Hood in reverse" effect. At least Robin Hood, when he took money, left it in Nottingham. He spread it out amongst his own. Here we are taking money from our own and sending it all the way to the Philippines.

Now, let me say, and let me be very clear, Americans have treated Filipino veterans fairly. After the war, the United States provided \$620 million—or \$6.7 billion in today's dollars—to repair the Philippines. The United States provided \$22.5 million—\$196 million in today's dollars—for equipment and construction. We have a hospital in the Philippines, and Filipino veterans legally residing in the United States—in the United States—are fully eligible for all VA veterans' benefits based on their level of service. Survivors of Filipino veterans who died as a result of their service are eligible for educational assistance and all kinds of programs.

That is why I object. First of all, because we are taking money away from ours, but also because we have been more than generous since that war ended to our comrades, the Filipinos, who fought side by side with American men and women, who were in the Philippines at the time, after we were able to reclaim the Philippine Islands. So we have done wonderfully by them, and we have been very supportive of providing them with programs.

Remember, the average U.S. veterans' benefit—24 percent of U.S. average household income—is limited. Yet we are taking that money away from them now, giving it to Filipino veterans who are non-U.S. citizens, and increasing their benefit to over 100 percent of the average household income in the Philippines. U.S. dollars spent in the Philippines at that amount lifts—

there is no question about it—lifts that Filipino dramatically. The question is, Is it fair? Is it equitable? My answer is, It is not. I offered to say, yes, we can bump them a little bit, but let's take the rest of this money and put it into educational benefits for our veterans coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan. The answer in the committee was no.

So that is why these bills are in trouble on the floor. They have loaded them up. They are too heavy. The tires are blowing out from under the trucks of these bills simply because too much is too much. In the instance of this, Disabled American Veterans—that great organization which is a loud spokesperson for our veterans—is saying: Whoa, wait a moment here. Enough is enough, and this is too much. They themselves oppose this legislation as it is currently written.

So here we have a funding bill on the floor with a 17.5- to 18-percent increase over last year's funding for veterans, and we are not allowed to vote on it. We have funding at the highest level ever for America's veterans, as we should and as we must, but these bills take us well beyond it in an unfunded environment or in one instance reaching in the pocket of our poor and disabled veteran and taking that money out and putting it into the pocket of a veteran living in the Philippines, who never became an American citizen, and who never came to this country, who has chosen to stay in his homeland. We now give them benefits, but this is a benefit well beyond what is even currently being offered to our own. Those are the fundamental reasons why we have objected.

I was pleased when the Senator from Texas said to the Senator from Illinois, the assistant majority leader: No. Yes, we will object, and we are not embarrassed about doing it, because there have to be priorities to our funding, especially at a time when the VA budget that is at the desk is the largest increase of a veterans' budget, to my knowledge, ever. We are proud of that, but there is a point when enough is, in fact, enough.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, how much time remains in morning business on our side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Twenty-three minutes.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, in a moment I am going to yield and ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Alabama be recognized for up to 10 minutes, followed by the Senator from Wyoming, Dr. BARRASSO, for up to 10 minutes.

Mr. CRAIG. Would the Senator yield for a unanimous consent request for material to be inserted in the RECORD?

Mr. CORNYN. I would.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that minority views on S. 1233 and minority views on S. 1315 be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

MINORITY VIEWS

S. 1233

The underlying legislation provides many important provisions that will improve the health care services and benefits available to America's veterans. I am particularly pleased that Title I takes many important steps towards improving the care provided to those veterans suffering with a traumatic brain injury.

However, in a few areas, I believe the legislation not only fails to improve the current benefits and health care system available for veterans, it in fact dilutes certain benefits available for service-connected veterans and may undermine the access and quality of care provided to the current users of VA's health care system.

Let me explain my concerns.

Repeal of the Regulation Concerning the Enrollment of Priority 8 Veterans

The underlying legislation repeals a regulation issued by former Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony J. Principi concerning enrollment priorities. That regulation prohibited enrollment into VA's health care system by any veteran in Priority 8 status who had not enrolled prior to January 17, 2003. At the time Secretary Principi announced the new regulation, a VA news release stated:

VA has been unable to provide all enrolled veterans with timely access to health care services because of the tremendous growth in the number of veterans seeking VA health care. . . .

In order to ensure VA has capacity to care for veterans for whom our Nation has the greatest obligation—[those with] military-related disabilities, lower-income veterans or those needing specialized care like veterans who are blind or have spinal cord injuries—Principi has suspended additional enrollments for veterans with the lowest statutory priority. This category includes veterans who are not being compensated for a military-related disability and who have higher incomes.

Since that decision was rendered, many Veterans Service Organizations and individual veterans have advocated re-opening the health care system to all veterans. However, none has advocated abolishing the priority system developed under the Eligibility Reform Act of 1996, which was the basis for Principi's decision in 2003. Continuing that trend, the underlying bill does not repeal the eligibility prioritization structure created under the 1996 law.

Given that the statutory priorities for health care enrollment still exist, it would be reasonable to presume that the majority had made a determination that VA was now providing all currently enrolled veterans with timely access to quality health care. And therefore the conditions which drove Secretary Principi's earlier decision (an inability to provide enrolled veterans with timely access to health care services) no longer existed. The record, however, does not suggest that such a conclusion has been reached by the majority.

Instead, the record shows many Senators expressing concerns about service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan facing—what are often described as—lengthy waiting times for care. In the face of such assessments, I do not understand how the majority could suggest that opening up the health care system to hundreds-of-thousands—if not millions—of new patients is wise policy.

Moreover, it appears that the provision in this bill would open VA to new enrollees on

the day the legislation is signed into law. There is no plan required to ensure that the enrollment process would be orderly and executed in a way that would minimize its effect on current patients. Nor is there any requirement that the necessary funding be available prior to its implementation. Instead, VA would simply open the doors and wait to see who arrives. I believe that is irresponsible and unfair to the current enrollees.

That is not just my view. Rather, my opinion echoes that of the Disabled American Veterans who, while commenting on the issue of re-opening VA to priority 8's, stated that “without a major infusion of new funding, enactment of this bill [S. 1147] would worsen VA's financial situation, not improve it, and would likely have a negative impact on the system as a whole.”

To address my concerns, I offered an amendment during the Committee's consideration of the legislation. My amendment would have required Secretarial certification of three facts prior to enrollment being deemed “open.”

First, the Secretary would have had to certify that quality of care and access thereto for enrolled veterans in Priority groups 1–6 would not be adversely affected by the newer patients. Because current law treats those veterans as a higher priority, I believe that VA must demonstrate conclusively that it is already offering high quality, timely care to our service-connected and lower income veterans. As I've already stated, recent observations and statements by some Senators suggest otherwise.

Second, the Secretary would have had to certify that troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan were provided timely, high quality health care already and that such timeliness and quality would not suffer because of newer enrollees. In my view, VA's health care system was created primary for the purpose of caring for “he who shall have borne the battle.” Congress should ensure that this unique group of veterans is not unduly burdened by any new influx of higher income veterans with no military-related disabilities.

Finally, my amendment would have required that the Secretary certify to Congress that VA had the capability to see a large influx of new patients. My amendment asked for an assessment as to whether VA had the physical infrastructure, human resources, and medical equipment to treat any new influx of veterans.

I recognize that many Senators believe that money is the only obstacle to providing all veterans with health care through VA. However, any money provided for new patients would be used to buy new staff, new equipment, and new space. Therefore, I felt it was important to know whether each of those three goods or services was possible to obtain.

The issue of whether VA has the capability to hire new staff alone should give any Senator pause in supporting the expansion in this legislation. It is widely known that the nation is struggling to provide a stable supply of primary care physicians and nurses to provide basic health care services in non-VA facilities. This issue was made clear in a July 2007 report from the Health Research Institute of PricewaterhouseCoopers which showed that the United States will be short nearly one million nurses and 24,000 physicians by 2020. In that environment, simply finding new staff to hire will be a challenge for any health care system, including VA.

Further, assuming the requisite staff can be found, I remain skeptical that VA has the necessary clinical space in which to provide more primary and specialty care services. I am also equally skeptical that many VA facilities could open the additional operating

rooms, post-surgical recovery units, and intensive care units that would be required with a large increase in patients.

My amendment failed in Committee. Still, while the answers to the questions may not be required by law prior to opening the health care system to all veterans, I continue to believe it would be a mistake to proceed without the knowledge set forth in my amendment. As such, I oppose Section 301 of the bill.

S. 1315

In view of these findings, I introduced S. 1290 to overhaul the statutory scheme regarding SAAs to help eliminate redundant administrative procedures, increase VA's flexibility in determining the nature and extent of services that should be performed by SAAs, and improve accountability for any activities they undertake. I am pleased that S. 1315 includes provisions that would require VA to coordinate with other entities in order to reduce overlapping activities and to report to Congress on its efforts to establish appropriate performance measures and tracking systems for SAA activities. However, I remain concerned that S. 1315 would leave in place the inflexible statutory provisions that mandate what activities SAAs must perform, how those functions must be carried out, and how VA must pay for them. As VA stated in response to GAO's findings, “amending the agency's administrative and regulatory authority to streamline the approval process may be difficult due to the specific approval requirements of the law.” Thus, I believe that, in order to effectively update and streamline this process, VA should be provided with the authority to contract with SAAs for services that it deems valuable and to determine how those services should be performed, evaluated, and compensated.

Finally, I wish to draw attention to the funding provision in section 302 of the Committee bill, which would provide \$19 million in mandatory funding to pay for SAA services for each fiscal year hereafter. To the contrary, my bill (S. 1290) included a funding provision—similar to legislation that the Senate passed in 2006—that would provide a \$19 million spending authorization for SAAs. This funding mechanism would, for now, continue to allow some funding to be drawn from mandatory spending accounts and would begin to transition SAA funding to a discretionary funding model. By relying on discretionary—rather than mandatory—funding, VA and the SAAs would have to justify budgeting and funding decisions based on need and performance outcomes, as with any private-sector business or good-government business model.

Section 401

Section 401 of S. 1315 would expand benefits to certain Filipino veterans residing both in the United States and abroad. I support improving benefits for Filipino veterans who fought under U.S. command during World War II. However, I believe the approach taken in this bill with respect to special pension benefits for non-U.S. citizen and non-U.S. resident Filipino veterans and surviving spouses is overly generous and does not reflect wide discrepancies in U.S. and Philippine standards of living.

Pension benefits for veterans residing in the United States are paid at a maximum annual rate of \$10,929 for a veteran without dependents, \$14,313 for a veteran with one dependent, and \$7,329 for a surviving spouse. When viewing these amounts in relation to U.S. average-household income of \$46,000, we find that the maximum VA pension represents anywhere from 16 to 31 percent of U.S. household income. In contrast, when measured against the Philippine average

household income of \$2,800, the special pension for Filipino veterans in S. 1315 represents anywhere from 86 to 161 percent of Philippine household income.

I think it is a mistake, and grossly unfair to U.S.-based pension recipients, to pay a benefit to veterans in the Philippines that far exceeds the relative value of the same benefit provided in the United States. Providing benefits for Filipino veterans in the name of equity should not be done in a manner that, in my opinion, creates a dramatic inequity for our U.S. veterans.

Furthermore, the offset that S. 1315 uses to ensure that the bill is in compliance with Congressional budget rules would have the effect of reducing pension amounts to elderly, poor, and disabled veterans predominantly residing in the U.S. The extra pension amounts were established as a result of a 2006 decision of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims in *Hartness v. Nicholson*. In my opinion, these extra payments for certain categories of veterans were never contemplated by Congress and, therefore, are not justified. However, if presented with the choice of whether to provide extra pension assistance to low-income veterans in the U.S. or to provide extra pension assistance in the amounts contemplated in section 401 of S. 1315, I would recommend to my colleagues that they choose the former.

Sections 205, 701, 702, and 802

I also wish to comment on four additional provisions that were adopted as amendments at the Committee's June 27, 2007, markup. In doing so I want to make it clear that my comments have nothing at all to do with the substance of the proposed policy changes contained in these provisions. Rather, my comments will focus on the manner in which the policy changes in each provision are proposed to be financed; whether the proposed financing method is in consort with the spirit of sound budgeting principles; and whether the financing method may potentially result in an unwieldy and inequitable outcome for veterans.

Each of the four provisions proposes to authorize the expenditure of discretionary appropriations as an "overlay" for the purpose of supplementing entitlement programs for veterans. Thus, beneficiaries of certain housing and auto grant programs, and burial-related programs, would be "entitled" to the amounts specified in the provisions, but only to the extent that annual appropriations bills provided the necessary discretionary funding that was in addition to the funding provided in regular mandatory entitlement spending.

The problem with creating "hybrid entitlement" programs—one part funded on a mandatory basis, the other funded through an annual discretionary appropriation—is both the ensuing problems that would exist in administering the programs and the implications such a model would have on how Congress controls spending of taxpayer dollars. We have budget rules referred to as Pay-As-You-Go or "PAYGO" that require the Congress to pay for new entitlement spending through a decrease in other entitlement spending, an increase in revenue, or a combination of both. Such a construct was created in order to keep budget deficits from growing. Yet the four provisions in question adopt none of these approaches.

Mr. CORNYN. To be clear, we have had objections from the majority, from our Democratic friends, to legislation that is vitally important to our veterans and to our active-duty military: the Veterans' Administration and military construction funding bill that was passed by both Houses of the Congress

last summer and which has been held up and held hostage to the political games here in Washington, as well as the emergency troop funding that is needed to fund ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, which we have discussed as well. This is a personal issue, as 1.7 million veterans live in my State in Texas. We have 15 major military bases where military families live and work. One out of every 10 active-duty military members who wears the uniform of the United States calls Texas home, and we have guards and reservists who are also serving valiantly in Iraq and elsewhere.

The bill which has been blocked by the majority would provide \$20 billion in military construction funds important for our troops and quality of life for our military families, and it is important to my State of Texas because of our support for the troops and military families. It contains almost \$90 billion for our veterans, which includes their health care, upgrading facilities, money to hire additional claims processors so veterans don't have to wait so long to get the benefits to which they are entitled. As I said, there are about 1.7 million veterans in Texas and they need these funds, and they shouldn't be held hostage to the political games here in Washington with regard to an omnibus appropriations bill.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and reserve the remainder of our time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama is recognized.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, we should be frank as to where we are today. The situation is not good. Yes, we do have too much partisanship in this body, and we need to move beyond it. But I wish to ask a couple of questions. I think we might as well talk about it directly and honestly: Has this Congress performed well this year? I say we have not. We passed only one appropriations bill, and it is almost Christmas. They all should have been passed before the end of the fiscal year, September 30. Only one has been passed. No wonder the polling data shows Congress has the lowest respect of the public in our history. I know that in this last election, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle campaigned strenuously: Elect us and we will do better. Elect us and we will balance the budget and we will be fiscally responsible; the Republicans aren't fiscally responsible. We will do things in a better way, and we will run the Senate in a better way. For the majority, I have to say it is incontrovertible that that has not occurred.

In fact, we are about to vote—perhaps, because who knows what may happen in the last hours—but the momentum is in place and the goal is to bring forward an omnibus bill that has all but one appropriations bill in it, no telling what other legislation in it. It is going to be hundreds, perhaps 1,000-plus pages. It is going to be dropped here. It is going to make this Agriculture bill look like a dime novel. They are going

to say: Vote for it. It is going to be over budget and it is going to try to put constraints on our military commanders in Iraq, telling them how to deploy our troops. It is not going to be accepted by the President. It is not going to be accepted by the American people.

So we are in a big deal. We are heading to a real collision course, and my colleagues on the other side are trying to blame people on this side for it. I don't think that is legitimate; I really don't.

Senator CORNYN has shown at great length how little has been done this last month. We have only had 10 votes. Is that right, Senator CORNYN? In the last 31 days, 10 votes. Why is that? Is this hard to do? It is not hard to have votes. You can have 10 votes a day. We have had days where we have had 40 votes or more a day. We are not having votes because the majority party, led by the majority leader, Senator REID, doesn't want to vote. Senator REID is a good friend and a person I like and respect, but he has a group of people there and they don't want to vote, because votes define you. You can talk all kinds of platitudes, but when a vote comes up, are you going to vote for money for our soldiers or not? Are you going to vote to tell General Petraeus how to deploy his troops or not? Are you going to vote to fund Defense? Are you going to vote to crack down on illegal immigration or not? So they don't want to vote. That puts them on record.

They are trying to move all of this pork, all this funding, all of those appropriations bills in one colossal package, and they want to have the absolute minimum number of votes to avoid being on record on important issues—issues that Americans care about; issues that are important to America.

But I will tell my colleagues the big deal. The big deal in this—and we might as well be honest about it—what are we going to do about our troops who are right there on the eve of Christmas serving us in harm's way?

Let me read an e-mail given to me by a father-in-law of a soldier in Iraq. It was sent in October. You know, we have had a tremendous reduction in violence in the last several months. Things have gone better than I would have thought possible in June. I believe General Petraeus's strategy is working in a way that I didn't think would be so positive. There is a long way to go, though, and this e-mail indicates that it is still tough.

He talks about his staff sergeant, a man of the highest character, who was killed by a sniper:

The loss affected us all significantly. He was a ranger and a jump master that constantly led his men from the front. The men performed heroically and magnificently. After he was hit, myself and our medic were attending to him within seconds. We were receiving fire from multiple locations and the boys were hitting them back hard. We did get the sniper and he is no longer a threat to

any of our forces. Still, more are out there, unfortunately. Four days later we had another one of our leaders hit by an IED.

He goes on to say this:

I have been reading in the newspapers and trying to figure out why some political powers are openly encouraging the enemy to embolden themselves and display the disdain to attack us daily. If all these presidential candidates would admit to the public what they already know, this would be easier. They voted for us to be here. They authorized the President to use force.

And so forth.

I want to say our men and women are there. They are serving us. We have seen tremendous progress, and we don't need to tell General Petraeus, who is doing a fabulous job, how to deploy his troops. The President cannot and will not accept that. We need to fund them. General Petraeus promised that in March he would be back before this Congress and hopefully, he implied, to announce further reductions in our troops. Let's do this. Let's don't have this gimmick in which all the appropriations bills are put into one, the supplemental for our troops is put into it, and try to put the President in a position where he is forced to veto legislation that ought not to be. We ought to take care of our soldiers first, get that done, and we can fight over these other matters at some time.

I know other people are here who wish to speak. I will offer this unanimous consent request for S. 2400.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Armed Services be discharged from further consideration of S. 2400, the Wounded Warrior Bonus Equity Act, and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I would simply indicate that the wounded warriors legislation has already passed the Senate once. I am wondering, since it is included in the Department of Defense reauthorization legislation that will be coming to us—the conference report will be coming to us shortly—I am wondering if my friend will amend his unanimous consent request to indicate that when we receive the conference report on the Department of Defense reauthorization, that it will be agreed to by unanimous consent.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I probably misspoke a little bit. This is not the wounded warrior legislation you are talking about; it is the Wounded Warrior Bonus Equity Act that has been filed. It is S. 2400. It deals with a situation in which persons who have been promised bonuses to enlist and re-enlist and then have been discharged due to injuries sustained in the line of duty, the Dole-Shalala Commission raised the question of whether those promises were being honored because these bonuses are dispensed over a

number of years. They have been injured, some have been in combat, and they have not received their full bonus. This would move that bill forward. It is different than the bill which the Senator referred to. It has bipartisan support. Senator CASEY, the Presiding Officer, Senators CLINTON, DORGAN, LAUTENBERG, MARTINEZ, MURKOWSKI, SANDERS, WYDEN, WEBB, LIEBERMAN, ENSIGN, COLLINS, and MCCAIN are in support of it. For some reason, there is a hold on it. I renew my unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, again reserving the right to object, I would indicate we certainly will work together with the Senator from Alabama. We have placed our troops and veterans as our highest priority. But given the time at the moment, I would, on behalf of the majority leader, object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I will yield the floor in 1 second, but first I need to say we are not in a good position today. This Congress has not performed well. We have passed only one appropriations bill. We have had only 10 votes in the last 31 days. That is not a good performance. I have been prepared to move forward on this legislation and I hope others will. I am disappointed that we have continual objections to that end.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, may I ask how much time remains on this side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Fourteen minutes.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time remaining be evenly split between the Senator from Wyoming and the Senator from Oklahoma and the Senator from Arizona.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I will ask for unanimous consent today to call up legislation that I introduced last month and seek debate and a vote on that bill today.

Before I make that request, I wish to make a brief comment about what I have seen during this morning's debate.

Prior to joining the Senate, I served as a member of the Wyoming State senate. I served as the transportation committee chairman. I served on the health committee and the minerals committee.

Legislation in the Wyoming legislature needs to be on a single subject. We are prohibited from considering legislation that includes more than one subject. As a result of the procedural re-

quirements there, amendments to bills are narrowly targeted and need to be on the single issue of that bill. The system works well there and we get our work done.

The Senate, of course, works very differently. Comprehensive legislation often contains multiple topics. They are packaged together and brought to the floor for a single vote. Under the rules of the Senate, Members are allowed, and it is their right, to offer amendments to these large bills, such as the ones on the desk today that contain, clearly, more than one topic.

The process is challenging, but this body has agreed to do it that way. Regrettably, the majority party has tried repeatedly to alter that process and deny Members the right to offer amendments. Whether it is filling the tree, objecting to the consideration of amendments, refusing to bring bills to the floor or filing cloture motions, the majority party has abused its rights and is attempting to muzzle debate.

Fortunately, the Senate doesn't give unfettered power to any one party or any one individual. The Senate has learned over history that attempting to deny the minority their rights is not democratic and will not be supported by Members.

I was sent to be a voice for the people of Wyoming, and I take that responsibility very seriously. I encourage the majority leadership of the Senate to develop a process that allows Members to call up bills, have them debated, amended, and voted on by this body. The Senate would benefit from this and this is exactly what the public expects us to be doing.

I now turn to legislation that discourages States from issuing driver's licenses to illegal immigrants. I introduced the bill November 13, 2007. It is S. 2334. This bill requires States to prove lawful presence before granting a driver's license. It requires States to check the Social Security numbers against the registry before offering a driver's license. States that do not comply with this would lose 10 percent of their Federal transportation funds, and those funds would then not go back to the Federal Government but would be redistributed to the other States that are in compliance with the law.

This is an issue that is vital to our national security. It is also an issue the Senate hasn't yet taken up. I believe issuing driver's licenses to illegal immigrants is an unacceptable and avoidable threat to our national security. We have a duty and the time is now to start this discussion.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2334, a bill to withhold 10 percent of the Federal funding apportioned for highway construction and maintenance from States that issue driver's licenses to individuals without verifying the legal status of such individuals.

I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and passed; that

the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table; and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, this is a very important issue we need to have a thorough debate on. At this moment, on behalf of the majority leader, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I am disappointed with the objection.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, we are 2 days away from the expiration of the continuing resolution—our second one. We had difficulty as a party when we were in the majority with getting the bills done on time. It is difficult to move things through this body. That is not necessarily always the majority's fault, but it requires that we work together. One way to take the pressure—the crash pressure in coming up against a point where everybody ends up losing is to have an automatic CR so we don't have that problem. There has been a bill offered that says if we cannot get our work done, there is an automatic CR, that the Government continues to run at the rate it was, or at the lower of the Senate- or House-passed bills. It takes us away from the idea of playing chicken and protects the American people and those employed by the Federal Government. I think it is common sense. It is something we ought to do. It takes the pressure off both sides so we are not running down to the end and looking at bills that nobody knows what is in them, thereby doing a grave injustice to the rest of the American people. I think it is an idea whose time has come.

On the basis of that, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2070, the Government shutdown prevention bill. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, on behalf of the majority leader, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, that tells us something. That tells us we are going to get a bill that none of us knows what is in it because we are going to run it up against a deadline—the deadline was September 30, we know that. We need a way to relieve the pressure. This bill relieves it; otherwise, we are going to do a great and harmful injustice to the American people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona is recognized.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, it is obvious by now we are not going to be able to conclude some of our business through the process of getting concurrence from the other side. There are two emergency matters that do cry out for treatment quickly and, therefore, I will propound two emergency unanimous consent requests.

The first has to do with border funding. Twice this year, the Senate overwhelmingly—in fact, in 1 day—unanimously approved \$3 billion for increased border fencing, 23,000 additional Border Patrol agents, 300 miles of vehicle barriers, 700 linear miles of fencing, 105 ground-based radar and camera towers, 4 unmanned aerial vehicles, and increased the detention capacity to 45,000. Twice that was passed, but it is still not law. We are coming up to the end of the year. It has to be done.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2348, the Emergency Border Funding Act, and I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and passed; that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table; that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, as my friend indicated, this has been included in the Department of Defense reauthorization and Homeland Security budget. I wonder if my friend would be willing to amend his unanimous consent request to indicate that—because it is included in the conference report we will be receiving shortly—we have unanimous consent to pass the conference report for the Department of Defense authorization when the Senate receives it.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, if that is a unanimous consent request, since we obviously have no idea what that conference report is, whether it includes anything else, obviously we cannot do that. If that is a unanimous consent request, obviously, we cannot agree and I will object.

The question is, Is there objection to the unanimous consent I propounded?

Ms. STABENOW. Reserving the right to object, because we will shortly be passing this legislation, at this time, I will object to this request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, it is certainly nice to have an assurance that we will soon be passing it, with only a few days remaining in the session. Obviously, we need to pass it. The reason for my request was in the event it is not done later. I think we are tempting fate.

The other request I will make relates to another emergency matter. Last August, in a bipartisan fashion, we filled a very dangerous hole in our terrorist

surveillance capabilities by passing the Protect America Act, which updated our Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act by giving our law enforcement professionals the tools they need to keep up with modern technology to monitor terrorists overseas. That act expires in February. We are not here that many days between now and then. Obviously, the terrorist threat continues; it is not going to expire. We need to permanently extend this critical law enforcement tool to make sure our American telecommunications companies, which bravely answered the call to help their country when asked to do now, do not have to respond to frivolous lawsuits as a result of their patriotism.

I hope my colleagues will join me in seeing to it that the Protect America Act can be passed and made permanent.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of a bill to make permanent the Protect America Act, the text of which is at the desk, and that the bill be read the third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. STABENOW. Reserving the right to object, as our friend indicated, we are working together on that issue in a bipartisan way. It will be resolved before February. At this time, on behalf of the majority leader, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, again, I appreciate the assurance that this will be done by February 1, when it has to be done, or all of the authority to collect this intelligence expires. It has to be done. I think we are in session maybe 1 or 2 weeks, potentially, when we come back before that date. If we don't do it, our country is in grave jeopardy. I would have thought perhaps a better way to resolve that is to do it now so we don't have to wait again until the very last minute to accomplish something that is so important for the security of our country.

I yield the remaining time to the Senator from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, how much time remains?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Two minutes.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2318, a bill that provides permanent relief from the alternative minimum tax, which extends the 2001 tax cuts and the 2003 capital gains dividends tax relief, and that the bill be read the third time and passed.

I further ask that the bill be held at the desk until the House companion arrives, and that all after the enacting clause be stricken and the text of the Senate-passed bill be inserted, and the House bill, as amended, be read the third time and passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. STABENOW. Reserving the right to object, as my colleague knows, we all agree we need to stop the tax increases on middle America. We are committed to that. At this time, on behalf of the majority leader, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I am disappointed, and I think the American people are going to be disappointed if we don't deal with the alternative minimum tax, which, of course, was targeted at the "rich" when it was passed but which now affects 6 million taxpayers and which, if we don't act, will affect 23 million middle-class taxpayers next year.

My distinguished colleague didn't mention the capital gains and dividends tax relief, which has been so important as a stimulus to the economy, which has resulted in 50 months of uninterrupted job growth since we passed that legislation. I hope we will continue to work on that.

Unfortunately, given the compression of time due to the squandering of opportunities earlier this year to act on this important legislation, I am afraid we are not going to get it done before we break for Christmas. The IRS is going to have to send out notices to many new taxpayers of their increased tax bill under this AMT, unless we act promptly.

I yield the floor and yield back the remainder of my time.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

FARM, NUTRITION, AND BIOENERGY ACT OF 2007

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume conversation on H.R. 2419, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2419) to provide for the continuation of agricultural programs through fiscal year 2012, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Harkin amendment No. 3500, in the nature of a substitute.

Harkin (for Dorgan-Grassley) modified amendment No. 3695 (to amendment No. 3500), to strengthen payment limitations and direct the savings to increase funding for certain programs.

Brown amendment No. 3819 (to amendment No. 3500), to increase funding for critical farm bill programs and improve crop insurance.

Klobuchar amendment No. 3810 (to amendment No. 3500), to improve the adjusted gross income limitation and use the savings to provide additional funding for certain programs and reduce the Federal deficit.

Chambliss (for Cornyn) amendment No. 3687 (to amendment No. 3500), to prevent duplicative payments for agricultural disaster assistance already covered by the Agricultural Disaster Relief Trust Fund.

Chambliss (for Coburn) amendment No. 3807 (to amendment No. 3500), to ensure the priority of the farm bill remains farmers by eliminating wasteful Department of Agriculture spending on casinos, golf courses, junkets, cheese centers, and aging barns.

Chambliss (for Coburn) amendment No. 3530 (to amendment No. 3500), to limit the distribution to deceased individuals, and estates of those individuals, of certain agricultural payments.

Chambliss (for Coburn) amendment No. 3632 (to amendment No. 3500), to modify a provision relating to the Environmental Quality Incentive Program.

Salazar amendment No. 3616 (to amendment No. 3500), to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide incentives for the production of all cellulosic biofuels.

Thune (for McConnell) amendment No. 3821 (to amendment No. 3500), to promote the nutritional health of school children, with an offset.

Craig amendment No. 3640 (to amendment No. 3500), to prohibit the involuntary acquisition of farmland and grazing land by Federal, State, and local governments for parks, open space, or similar purposes.

Thune (for Roberts-Brownback) amendment No. 3549 (to amendment No. 3500), to modify a provision relating to regulations.

Domenici amendment No. 3614 (to amendment No. 3500), to reduce our Nation's dependency on foreign oil by investing in clean, renewable, and alternative energy resources.

Thune (for Gregg) amendment No. 3674 (to amendment No. 3500), to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exclude charges of indebtedness on principal residences from gross income.

Thune (for Gregg) amendment No. 3673 (to amendment No. 3500), to improve women's access to health care services in rural areas and provide improved medical care by reducing the excessive burden the liability system places on the delivery of obstetrical and gynecological services.

Thune (for Gregg) amendment No. 3671 (to amendment No. 3500), to strike the section requiring the establishment of a Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network.

Thune (for Gregg) amendment No. 3672 (to amendment No. 3500), to strike a provision relating to market loss assistance for asparagus producers.

Thune (for Gregg) amendment No. 3822 (to amendment No. 3500), to provide nearly \$1,000,000,000 in critical home heating assistance to low-income families and senior citizens for the 2007-2008 winter season and reduce the Federal deficit by eliminating wasteful farm subsidies.

Thune (for Grassley/Kohl) amendment No. 3823 (to amendment No. 3500), to provide for the review of agricultural mergers and acquisitions by the Department of Justice.

Thune (for Sessions) amendment No. 3596 (to amendment No. 3500), to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to establish a pilot program under which agricultural producers may establish and contribute to tax-exempt farm savings accounts in lieu of obtaining federally subsidized crop insurance or non-insured crop assistance, to provide for contributions to such accounts by the Secretary of Agriculture, to specify the situations in which amounts may be paid to producers from such accounts, and to limit the total amount of such distributions to a producer during a taxable year.

Thune (for Stevens) amendment No. 3569 (to amendment No. 3500), to make commercial fishermen eligible for certain operating loans.

Thune (for Alexander) amendment No. 3551 (to amendment No. 3500), to increase funding for the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems, with an offset.

Thune (for Alexander) amendment No. 3553 (to amendment No. 3500), to limit the tax credit for small wind energy property expenditures to property placed in service in connection with a farm or rural small business.

Thune (for Bond) amendment No. 3771 (to amendment No. 3500), to amend title 7, United States Code, to include provisions relating to rulemaking.

Salazar (for Durbin) amendment No. 3539 (to amendment No. 3500), to provide a termination date for the conduct of certain inspections and the issuance of certain regulations.

Tester amendment No. 3666 (to amendment No. 3500), to modify the provision relating to unlawful practices under the Packers and Stockyards Act.

Schumer amendment No. 3720 (to amendment No. 3500), to improve crop insurance and use resulting savings to increase funding for certain conservation programs.

Gregg amendment No. 3825 (to amendment No. 3673), to change the enactment date.

Sanders amendment No. 3826 (to amendment No. 3822), to provide for payments under subsections (a) through (e) of section 2604 of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act of 1981, and restore supplemental agricultural disaster assistance from the Agricultural Disaster Relief Trust Fund.

Wyden amendment No. 3736 (to amendment No. 3500), to modify a provision relating to bioenergy crop transition assistance.

Harkin-Kennedy Amendment 3830 (to amendment No. 3500), relative to public safety officers.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 5 minutes.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 3671

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I wish to speak in support of a provision in the bill that the amendment before us is going to strike, the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network, which is included in the underlying bill of the Agriculture Committee.

This network is a critical service to help American families, particularly rural families. I oppose the amendment offered by the senior Senator from New Hampshire that would strike this measure.

Without a doubt, farmers and ranchers face unique challenges in providing food and fuel for this country. Farming is one of the most stressful and dangerous occupations in the United States. There are environmental, cultural, and economic factors that put farmers and ranchers at a higher risk for mental health problems.

Stress in agriculture contributes to rates of depression and suicide that are double the national average. This is true even in good times for farmers. As a farmer myself, this troubles me.

It also concerns me when rural residents, especially those involved in agriculture, are disproportionately represented among the uninsured of the United States. One-third of the agricultural population lacks health insurance coverage for behavioral health conditions. With the rising cost of health care and many farmers and ranchers in business on their own, the