

Many veterans have been denied VA health care under the current ban. Take, for example, California, where over 22,500 veterans have been denied enrollment; or Texas, where 23,800 have been denied access since 2003. This phenomenon is not limited to the larger States—17,000 veterans in Pennsylvania; 12,300 in Illinois; 36,000 in Florida; and over 14,000 in North Carolina have all been denied VA health care.

Also, I want to clarify that we are not talking about allowing veterans with “upper-income” entry into VA care. While the administration, and some of my colleagues, characterize Priority 8 veterans as “higher-income,” that is not necessarily the case. The current income eligibility threshold for VA health care is under \$28,000 a year—which can hardly be classified as a “high-income” salary. In my home State of Hawaii, where the cost of living is one of the Nation’s highest, the average salary for a veteran who has been denied is \$39,300 a year.

It is not just in Hawaii, but in many other States as well. For example, in South Carolina, the threshold is \$31,650 a year; in North Carolina, \$32,000 a year is considered low-income. These are not meaningless numbers—the dollar values represent the hard work of veterans who have served honorably and are now earning well below the median income for their area.

No, these are not poor veterans. But one devastating illness without health care coverage, and make no mistake about it, they will be impoverished.

Many of these veterans do not have any other form of health insurance. A recent study conducted by researchers at Harvard University found that nearly 1.8 million veterans are uninsured. This suggests that there are veterans in Priority 8 who are stuck in the middle between not making enough money to afford their own private insurance and making too much to qualify for VA care. No veteran who served their country honorably should be denied care when they need it because they were fortunate enough not to have been wounded in combat.

I also urge Members to read the text of the contested provision relating to Category 8 veterans. If the Secretary of Veterans Affairs sees opening up enrollment as too much of a financial burden, the Secretary could simply publish a decision in the Federal Register to again block these veterans. Congress is not seeking to overstep the Secretary’s authority to determine who can come through VA’s doors.

Finally, Senator CRAIG calls the inclusion of enrollment for middle-income veterans, a “last minute” addition. I say with a smile, that while time does seem to stand still in the Senate, I would remind my colleague that the bill enabling full enrollment was introduced last April, it was the subject of a hearing last May, and was marked up by the committee in June. This is not something that can be characterized as a “last-minute” change.

Now I turn briefly to address concerns raised about S. 1315, the committee’s omnibus veterans benefits legislation. The proposed Veterans’ Benefits Enhancement Act of 2007 is a comprehensive bill that includes benefits for a broad constituency of servicemembers and veterans, particularly those who are service-disabled. Provisions in this bill would also improve benefits for World War II Filipino veterans, virtually all of whom are now in their 80s or 90s.

While not providing Filipino veterans living outside the United States with benefits identical to those provided to veterans living in the United States, I am satisfied that the provisions in S. 1315 are equitable and should be adopted. It is important to note that S. 1315 would fix a historical wrong.

Filipino veterans served under the command of the United States military during World War II. They were considered by the Veterans’ Administration, the predecessor of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to be veterans of the United States military, naval and air service until that status was revoked by the Rescission Acts of 1946. Therefore, as a matter of fundamental fairness and justice, Filipino veterans’ benefits should be similar to those of other veterans.

Those who oppose the pension provision in S. 1315 argue that the pension that would be provided through this legislation is too high. However, pension benefits are designed to allow wartime veterans and their survivors to live in dignity—above the poverty level. I am satisfied that the levels of pension designated in this bill would allow these veterans to live with such dignity, while finally giving them the recognition that they so richly deserve.

I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to take a good look at the facts surrounding the provisions contained in both S. 1233 and S. 1315 that some on the other side are objecting to, and to realize that opposing these bills on the current basis provided effectively denies valuable and meaningful benefits to our Nation’s veterans.

In closing, I again stress that all we are seeking is a time agreement that will allow for debate. For those who believe that there are provisions in these two bills that should not be approved by the Senate, offer amendments, debate the merits, let the Senate vote. That is the least we can do as we seek to meet the needs of our Nation’s veterans.

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

Mr. SALAZAR. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### TRIBUTE TO BRIGADIER GENERAL BENJAMIN J. SPRAGGINS

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I wish to take this opportunity to recognize and say farewell to an outstanding Air Force officer, BG Benjamin J. Spraggins, upon his retirement from the Air Force after more than 34 years of service. Throughout his career, Brigadier General Spraggins has served with distinction, and it is my privilege to recognize his many accomplishments and commend him for his service to the Air Force, the Congress, and our grateful Nation.

Brigadier General Spraggins is a longtime resident of my home State and devoted public servant of Harrison County, MS. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force on March 17, 1972. After over 6 years of successful enlisted service, reaching the grade of technical sergeant, Brigadier General Spraggins received his commission from the Academy of Military Science, McGhee Tyson, TN. Following graduation from Officer Candidate School, Brigadier General Spraggins completed aviation school at Mather Air Force Base, CA, and RF-4C training at Shaw, Air Force Base, SC. Brigadier General Spraggins was then stationed with the 187th TRG at Dannelly Field, AL, flying the RF-4C fighter aircraft. While stationed in the 187th, Brigadier General Spraggins served in many critical positions, including instructor, scheduling officer and assistant chief of standards and evaluations. He flew the RF-4C from 1979 to 1983 and was a weapons instructor in the F-4D from 1983 to 1988 at the 187th Fighter Wing. Brigadier General Spraggins completed his military flying career with over 2,500 hours in the T-37, T-43, RF-4C, and F-4D aircraft.

On September 23, 1987, Brigadier General Spraggins was assigned to the Combat Readiness Training Center, Gulfport, MS. During his tenure at the training center, he served in various positions, including range control officer, director of operations, operations group commander, and finally as commander of the Combat Readiness Training Center. As commander, Brigadier General Spraggins was responsible for operations and training of over 20,000 military personnel annually and provided oversight for a \$75 million budget.

Concurrently, Brigadier General Spraggins was sent to Andrews Air Force Base, DC, in 2002 to run the Crisis Action Team for the Air National Guard. In 2003, he also served as the commander of the 186th Air Refueling Wing, where he was responsible for operations of KC-135 aircraft wing, with

over 1,000 personnel and oversight of a \$48 million annual budget. He was the first member of the Mississippi Air National Guard to simultaneously command two major units, the Combat Readiness Training Center and the 186th Air Refueling Wing.

Brigadier General Spragins was assigned to the Tennessee Air National Guard in November 2005 as the chief of staff. In this capacity he was responsible to the adjutant general for readiness of Tennessee's three flying wings and three mission support units. In addition to duties as chief of staff, Brigadier General Spragins also served as the air deputy commander, joint forces Headquarters, Tennessee National Guard. Brigadier General Spragins was also attached as the battle commander for Air Force North, Tyndall AFB, FL. In this capacity he was responsible for ensuring the air sovereignty and air defense of the continental United States.

During his long and distinguished career, Brigadier General Spragins successfully completed Squadron Officer School, Air Command and Staff, and the Air War College with the Air University. His decorations and awards include Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal, Mississippi Magnolia Cross, Tennessee Meritorious Service Medal, Combat Readiness Medal, Air Reserve Forces Meritorious Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Air Force Longevity Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal and the Air Force Training Ribbon.

Upon the retirement of Brigadier General Spragins after 34 years of dedicated service, I offer my congratulations to him and his wife Judy. Brigadier General Spragins is a credit to both the Air Force and the United States of America. I know that I speak for all my colleagues in expressing heartfelt appreciation to him. I wish Brigadier General Spragins blue skies and safe landings and congratulate him on completion of an outstanding and successful career.

**HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES**

**CORPORAL TANNER O'LEARY**

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Corporal Tanner O'Leary and his heroic service to our country. As a member of the Army's C Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division based in North Carolina, Corporal O'Leary was serving in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. On December 9, 2007, he was killed in action in Afghanistan.

A native of rural Eagle Butte and a 2003 graduate of Timber Lake High School, Tanner joined the Army in 2005. His teachers remember Tanner as a student who loved to learn. He was active in school science fairs and on the football team. As his former science teacher recalls, "Once Tanner latched on to something he didn't let

go; I know that was how it was with him with the Army as well."

Growing up on a ranch west of Timber Lake, Tanner was a hard worker who enjoyed spending time with his family. He took great pride in his daughter Alexis, and his family will always remember what a wonderful father he was. Friends and family will miss Tanner's easygoing, fun-loving personality.

Corporal O'Leary gave his all for his soldiers and his country. Our Nation owes him a debt of gratitude, and the best way to honor his life is to emulate his commitment to our country. I join with all South Dakotans in expressing my deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Corporal O'Leary. He will be missed, but his service to our Nation will never be forgotten.

**FURTHER CHANGES TO S. CON. RES. 21**

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, section 307 of S. Con. Res. 21, the 2008 budget resolution, permits the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee to revise the allocations, aggregates, and other appropriate levels for legislation, including one or more bills and amendments, that reauthorizes the 2002 farm bill or similar or related programs, provides for revenue changes, or any combination thereof. Section 307 authorizes the revisions provided that certain conditions are met, including that amounts provided in the legislation for the above purposes not exceed \$20 billion over the period of fiscal years 2007 through 2012 and that the legislation not worsen the deficit over the period of the total of fiscal years 2007 through 2012 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2007 through 2017.

I find that Senate amendment No. 3551 offered by Senator ALEXANDER to Senate amendment No. 3500, an amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 2419, satisfies the conditions of the deficit-neutral reserve fund for the farm bill. Therefore, pursuant to section 307, I am adjusting the aggregates in the 2008 budget resolution, as well as the allocation provided to the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee.

I ask unanimous consent that the following revisions to S. Con. Res. 21 be printed in the RECORD.

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

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008—S. CON. RES. 21; FURTHER REVISIONS TO THE CONFERENCE AGREEMENT PURSUANT TO SECTION 307 DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND FOR THE FARM BILL

[In billions of dollars]

<i>Section 101</i>	
(1)(A) Federal Revenues:	
FY 2007 .....	1,900.340
FY 2008 .....	2,024.841
FY 2009 .....	2,121.615
FY 2010 .....	2,176.237
FY 2011 .....	2,357.103
FY 2012 .....	2,498.980

<i>Section 101</i>	
(1)(B) Change in Federal Revenues:	
FY 2007 .....	-4.366
FY 2008 .....	-25.955
FY 2009 .....	14.689
FY 2010 .....	12.516
FY 2011 .....	-37.447
FY 2012 .....	-98.116
(2) New Budget Authority:	
FY 2007 .....	2,371.470
FY 2008 .....	2,508.833
FY 2009 .....	2,526.124
FY 2010 .....	2,581.393
FY 2011 .....	2,696.822
FY 2012 .....	2,737.603
(3) Budget Outlays:	
FY 2007 .....	2,294.862
FY 2008 .....	2,471.548
FY 2009 .....	2,573.005
FY 2010 .....	2,609.877
FY 2011 .....	2,702.851
FY 2012 .....	2,716.412

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008—S. CON. RES. 21; FURTHER REVISIONS TO THE CONFERENCE AGREEMENT PURSUANT TO SECTION 307 DEFICIT-NEUTRAL RESERVE FUND FOR THE FARM BILL

[In millions of dollars]

Current Allocation to Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee:	
FY 2007 Budget Authority .....	14,284
FY 2007 Outlays .....	14,056
FY 2008 Budget Authority .....	17,088
FY 2008 Outlays .....	14,629
FY 2008-2012 Budget Authority .....	76,881
FY 2008-2012 Outlays .....	71,049
Adjustments:	
FY 2007 Budget Authority .....	0
FY 2007 Outlays .....	0
FY 2008 Budget Authority .....	0
FY 2008 Outlays .....	0
FY 2008-2012 Budget Authority .....	74
FY 2008-2012 Outlays .....	36
Revised Allocation to Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee:	
FY 2007 Budget Authority .....	14,284
FY 2007 Outlays .....	14,056
FY 2008 Budget Authority .....	17,088
FY 2008 Outlays .....	14,629
FY 2008-2012 Budget Authority .....	76,955
FY 2008-2012 Outlays .....	71,085

**FURTHER CHANGES TO S. CON. RES. 21**

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, earlier today, pursuant to section 307 of S. Con. Res. 21, I filed revisions to S. Con. Res. 21, the 2008 budget resolution. Those revisions were made for Senate amendment No. 3551, an amendment offered to Senate amendment No. 3500, an amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 2419.

The Senate did not adopt Senate amendment No. 3551. As a consequence, I am further revising the 2008 budget resolution and reversing the adjustments made pursuant to section 307 to the aggregates and the allocation provided to the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee for Senate Amendment No. 3551.

I ask unanimous consent that the following revisions to S. Con. Res. 21 be printed in the RECORD.

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