

By Mr. MCCONNELL (for himself, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mrs. HUTCHISON, Mrs. CLINTON, Mr. MCCAIN, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. LUGAR, Mrs. LINCOLN, Ms. MURKOWSKI, and Mrs. DOLE):

S. Res. 250. A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate condemning the military junta in Burma for its continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners; considered and agreed to.

By Mr. GRAHAM (for himself, Mr. DEMINT, Mr. DODD, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. CHAMBLISS, Mr. KERRY, Mr. ISAKSON, Mrs. DOLE, Mr. SCHUMER, Mrs. CLINTON, Mr. BIDEN, and Mr. BURR):

S. Res. 251. A resolution honoring the firefighters and other public servants who responded to the fire in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 18, 2007; considered and agreed to.

By Mr. BOND (for himself and Mr. INOUE):

S. Res. 252. A resolution recognizing the increasingly mutually beneficial relationship between the United States of America and the Republic of Indonesia; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mrs. FEINSTEIN (for herself, Mr. CORNYN, Mr. COLEMAN, Mr. OBAMA, and Mr. LUGAR):

S. Con. Res. 40. A concurrent resolution supporting the goals and ideals of observing the National Day of Human Trafficking Awareness on January 11 of each year to raise awareness of and opposition to human trafficking; considered and agreed to.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 41

At the request of Mr. BAUCUS, the name of the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. LOTT) was added as a cosponsor of S. 41, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide incentives to improve America's research competitiveness, and for other purposes.

S. 156

At the request of Mr. WYDEN, the name of the Senator from North Carolina (Mrs. DOLE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 156, a bill to make the moratorium on Internet access taxes and multiple and discriminatory taxes on electronic commerce permanent.

S. 185

At the request of Mr. LEAHY, the name of the Senator from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW) was added as a cosponsor of S. 185, a bill to restore habeas corpus for those detained by the United States.

S. 206

At the request of Mrs. FEINSTEIN, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. CASEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 206, a bill to amend title II of the Social Security Act to repeal the Government pension offset and windfall elimination provisions.

S. 432

At the request of Mrs. LINCOLN, the name of the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. LOTT) was added as a cosponsor of S. 432, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide coverage for kidney disease education services under the Medicare program, and for other purposes.

S. 439

At the request of Mr. REID, the name of the Senator from Montana (Mr. BAU-

CUS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 439, a bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit certain retired members of the uniformed services who have a service-connected disability to receive both disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for their disability and either retired pay by reason of their years of military service or Combat-Related Special Compensation.

S. 777

At the request of Mr. CRAIG, the name of the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. VITTER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 777, a bill to repeal the imposition of withholding on certain payments made to vendors by government entities.

S. 838

At the request of Mr. SMITH, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. SPECTER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 838, a bill to authorize funding for eligible joint ventures between United States and Israeli businesses and academic persons, to establish the International Energy Advisory Board, and for other purposes.

S. 912

At the request of Mr. ROCKEFELLER, the name of the Senator from New York (Mr. SCHUMER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 912, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to expand the incentives for the construction and renovation of public schools.

S. 940

At the request of Mr. BAUCUS, the name of the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. LOTT) was added as a cosponsor of S. 940, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to permanently extend the subpart F exemption for active financing income.

S. 1060

At the request of Mr. BIDEN, the names of the Senator from Colorado (Mr. SALAZAR), the Senator from New York (Mrs. CLINTON) and the Senator from Maine (Ms. COLLINS) were added as cosponsors of S. 1060, a bill to reauthorize the grant program for reentry of offenders into the community in the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, to improve reentry planning and implementation, and for other purposes.

S. 1243

At the request of Mr. KERRY, the name of the Senator from Washington (Mrs. MURRAY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1243, a bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to reduce the age for receipt of military retired pay for nonregular service from 60 years of age to 55 years of age.

S. 1257

At the request of Mr. LIEBERMAN, the name of the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1257, a bill to provide the District of Columbia a voting seat and the State of Utah an additional seat in the House of Representatives.

S. 1259

At the request of Mrs. CLINTON, the names of the Senator from New Jersey

(Mr. MENENDEZ) and the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) were added as cosponsors of S. 1259, a bill to amend the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to provide assistance for developing countries to promote quality basic education and to establish the achievement of universal basic education in all developing countries as an objective of United States foreign assistance policy, and for other purposes.

S. 1267

At the request of Mr. SALAZAR, his name was added as a cosponsor of S. 1267, a bill to maintain the free flow of information to the public by providing conditions for the federally compelled disclosure of information by certain persons connected with the news media.

S. 1406

At the request of Mr. KERRY, the name of the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. REED) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1406, a bill to amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to strengthen polar bear conservation efforts, and for other purposes.

S. 1418

At the request of Mr. DODD, the name of the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1418, a bill to provide assistance to improve the health of newborns, children, and mothers in developing countries, and for other purposes.

S. 1544

At the request of Mr. GREGG, the names of the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR) and the Senator from New Hampshire (Mr. SUNUNU) were added as cosponsors of S. 1544, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to improve the quality and efficiency of health care, to provide the public with information on provider and supplier performance, and to enhance the education and awareness of consumers for evaluating health care services through the development and release of reports based on Medicare enrollment, claims, survey, and assessment data.

S. 1592

At the request of Mr. BROWN, the name of the Senator from New York (Mr. SCHUMER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1592, a bill to reauthorize the Underground Railroad Educational and Cultural Program.

S. 1661

At the request of Mr. STEVENS, the name of the Senator from Florida (Mr. MARTINEZ) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1661, a bill to communicate United States travel policies and improve marketing and other activities designed to increase travel in the United States from abroad.

S. 1681

At the request of Mr. DODD, the name of the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. KENNEDY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1681, a bill to provide for a paid family and medical leave insurance program, and for other purposes.

S. J. RES. 16

At the request of Mr. MCCONNELL, the name of the Senator from Montana (Mr. TESTER) was added as a cosponsor of S. J. Res. 16, a joint resolution approving the renewal of import restrictions contained in the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003.

S. RES. 235

At the request of Mr. WHITEHOUSE, the names of the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. REED), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Washington (Ms. CANTWELL), the Senator from Maine (Ms. SNOWE), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAIG), the Senator from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN), the Senator from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW) and the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. KOHL) were added as cosponsors of S. Res. 235, a resolution designating July 1, 2007, as "National Boating Day".

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Ms. SNOWE (for herself and Mrs. LINCOLN):

S. 1682. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to improve the management of medical care for members of the Armed Forces, to improve the speed and efficiency of the physical disability evaluation system of the Department of Defense, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Armed Services.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I rise today to proudly join my friend and colleague Senator BLANCHE LINCOLN in the introduction of the Servicemembers' Healthcare Benefits and Rehabilitation Enhancement Act of 2007.

In March, I was able to visit one of Maine's returning soldiers who has been assigned outpatient care at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. We spoke about the many issues and obstacles faced by our wounded troops as they struggle not only to recover from their injuries, but to prepare themselves for their future. During our meeting, this soldier covered many of the pitfalls faced by troops as they confront the bewildering processes of medical and physical evaluation boards without the benefit of anyone to advocate on their behalf. In fact, he aptly described the process as an "adversarial" system that onerously demands wounded soldiers to provide the "burden of proof" for their claims.

In response, we have crafted this legislation in order to remedy a variety of flaws that currently plague the military health care system, including: inequitable disability ratings, a lack of advocacy within military outpatient facilities, inadequate mental health treatment, and inefficient transition from the DOD to the VA.

First off, our bill would address the concerns I have heard from a number of returning troops from my home state of Maine and across this Nation who have gone without the proper advocacy and case management for medical ben-

efits during their stay at military outpatient facilities. It is inexcusable that our returning heroes are often forced to navigate the esoteric physical disability evaluation system, PDES, within an adversarial atmosphere.

The measure we are proposing would require the Secretary of Defense to provide each recovering servicemember in a military medical treatment facility with a medical care manager who will assist him or her with all matters regarding their medical status, along with a caseworker who will assist each servicemember and his or her family in obtaining all the information necessary for transition, recovery, and benefits collection. Further, provisions we included will create a DOD-wide Ombudsmen Office to provide policy guidance to, and oversight of, ombudsman offices in all military departments and the medical system of the DOD. Only then, will our returning servicemembers recover within an atmosphere that is based upon advocacy.

Additionally, recent news reports and independent analysis have revealed troubling statistics regarding rampant inaccuracies within the military disability ratings system. According to Pentagon data analyzed by the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission, since 2000, 92.7 percent of all disability ratings handed out by physical evaluation boards, PEBs, have been 20 percent or lower. Under the current policy, those who receive disability ratings under 30 percent and have served less than 20 years of military service are discharged with only a severance check, deprived of full military retirement pay, life insurance, health insurance, and access to military commissaries.

Further evidence of a troubled disability ratings system shows that since America went to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, fewer veterans have received disability ratings of 30 percent or more, inferring that the DOD may have lowered the ratings for injured troops who would have otherwise received a host of lifelong benefits. On top of that, it currently takes an average of 209 days for troops to complete the PDES process by receiving notification of potential discharge and a subsequent disability rating.

As a means of fixing these blatant flaws within the military disability ratings system, this legislation consolidates the physical evaluation system by placing the informal and formal physical evaluation boards under one command, as a method of streamlining and expediting the process. Our troops deserve timely care and efficient treatment upon their return home, and therefore, no recovering servicemember should be forced to endure lengthy delays in a medical hold or holdover status due to bureaucratic inefficiencies.

The bill also requires that physicians preparing each individual medical case for all PEBs report multiple diagnosed medical impairments that, in concert,

may deem a servicemember to be unfit for duty. Under the current system, the U.S. Army, for example, only rates physical impairments that individually cause a servicemember to be deemed unfit for duty, ultimately dismissing ailments that may significantly hinder a servicemember's ability to continue his or her service in the military or find gainful employment in the civilian sector.

Over the past year, the American public has also become acutely aware of the effects of traumatic brain injury, TBI, which has become the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, affecting thousands of returning servicemembers. Therefore, it is now more imperative than ever for both the DOD and the VA to implement mental health treatment policies that accurately diagnose and adequately treat debilitating mental health injuries among our injured troops.

Our bill addresses these issues by including a provision that requires all servicemembers who are expected to deploy to a combat theater to receive a mental health assessment that tests their cognitive functioning within 120 days before deployment, a mental health assessment within 60 days after deployment, to include a comprehensive screening for mild, moderate, and severe cases of TBI. Additionally, all servicemembers will receive a third mental health assessment at the time of their predischarge physical.

The measure we are putting forward today also aims to update the current disability ratings system used by the military and the VA to include the effects of TBI and post traumatic stress disorder, along with any other mental health disorders that may affect our Nation's returning warriors. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs would be required to issue a report to Congress detailing a plan to update the Veterans' Administration Schedule for Ratings Disabilities, VASRD, to align its disability ratings to more closely reflect the effects of mental health disorders, including TBI and PTSD on the modern workforce.

The Servicemembers' Healthcare Benefits and Rehabilitation Enhancement Act of 2007 also calls on the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs to provide Congress with a report detailing plans to increase the role of eligible private sector rehabilitation providers for assisting the VA in providing comprehensive post acute inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation for TBI and PTSD, if in certain instances the VA is unable to provide such services.

The Veterans Health Administration is, unequivocally, the foremost expert in providing mental health treatment for our recovering servicemembers, yet in varying circumstances, the VA may require additional health care coverage in remote areas. All of our returning heroes, despite the severity of their mental health ailments, or their location geographically, deserve every