

I withdraw the pending motion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is withdrawn.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning with Senators allowed to speak therein for a period of up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO GERALD W. HAYES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I rise today to honor a man well respected throughout south central Kentucky, Gerald W. Hayes. Mr. Hayes has faithfully served citizens in parts of south central Kentucky through his commitment to the Warren Rural Electric Cooperative Cooperation, RECC, and its members for 40 years.

Hayes was born in humble circumstances in Simpson County under the roof of his grandmother's farmhouse. After 4 years in Butler County, the Hayes family settled in Richardsville, located in Warren County. Mr. Hayes attended Richardsville Elementary School and later, Richardsville High School, where he played point guard on the basketball team.

As a promising young man, Mr. Hayes married his childhood sweetheart, Karen Smith, in December 1966. Two years later, on May 6, 1968, Mr. Hayes began his work for Warren RECC.

He entered as a chainman and quickly exceeded expectations, being promoted to groundman in the same year. By 1969, Mr. Hayes had worked his way up to apprentice lineman and acquired the nickname "Squirrel" for his prodigious ability to climb poles. Mr. Hayes' physical talents were not the only thing that went noticed at Warren RECC. His relentless hard work and dedication earned him a promotion to line frontman just 1 year later.

From here, Mr. Hayes continued to impress. His tenacity and loyalty led to his eventual promotion as successor to Wilmuth Deweese in 1990 as district manager of the Warren RECC Leitchfield office. In 2000, Gerald accepted the position of president and CEO of Warren RECC, taking on the responsibility of leading a company he had already committed to for 32 years.

The Warren RECC mission statement claims "safety, integrity, value, and innovation" as their guiding principles. Mr. Hayes has worked relentlessly to see that these values are upheld and not forgotten. On May 6, 2008, Gerald will honorably retire from his position as CEO, 40 years to the day he began work as a chainman. Mr. Hayes's wife Karen, their four children Laura, Leah, Lisa and Landon, and their seven grandchildren have proudly supported him throughout his career, and are the foremost reason Mr. Hayes has been able to achieve so much.

Warren RECC has been providing quality electrical service to south central Kentucky residents for 70 years thanks to Mr. Hayes' constant and faithful service. He is a truly outstanding Kentuckian, and I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Mr. Gerald W. Hayes for his 40 years of outstanding and loyal service.

NATIONAL PEACE CORPS WEEK

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, on March 1, 2008, the Peace Corps celebrates its 47th year of operation. I congratulate all past and present volunteers and staff members on 47 years of international service and I welcome many more years to come.

Since 1961, the Peace Corps has served as a creative and productive outlet for U.S. citizens to spread some of the very best of our society—our desire to help those less fortunate than ourselves—around the world. The year 2007 was no exception.

I am proud to recognize that the spirit of that movement is still strong in America's youth, and our young at heart. Last year witnessed the highest number of volunteers since 1970, with 8,079 volunteers serving in 74 countries as of September 30th.

The Peace Corps is expanding in breadth as well as numbers, with a new program opening in Cambodia. Also in 2007, Ethiopia welcomed the Peace Corps back after 8 years, making it the 10th nation that is also a focus country for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief to host volunteers. In fiscal year 2007, over 1 million people affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic were assisted by Peace Corps volunteers and their activities.

Constantly rotating their personnel, the Peace Corps is well accustomed to adapting to and taking advantage of new ideas, thinking, and technology. In the coming year PeaceWiki will launch, allowing volunteers to share experiences and information with each other. They are even creating an online "role-play" game to teach middle schoolchildren about international service.

Many people mistakenly believe the Peace Corps is only about helping those distantly removed from our daily life here in America. This could not be further from the truth. Peace Corps volunteers return with a sense of accomplishment and the skill sets to that are often desperately needed or in short supply here in the United States. Volunteers have had to learn approximately 250 different languages and dialects, not to mention how to handle different cultures with dexterity and ease. Twenty-two percent of all current volunteers serve in predominantly Muslim countries.

Returned volunteers' paths after service are as varied as their tours. They include Assistant Secretary of State Christopher—Chris—Hill, who served in Cameroon in the 1970s, several of my colleagues in Congress,

CEOs and founders of major companies such as Netflix and The Nature Company, authors, journalists, teachers, government employees, and businessmen.

Volunteers often return to service later in life as part of the Peace Corps Response, which sends former Corps members to assist in crisis and natural disasters around the world for brief intervals. Over 200 served in our own country after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Across the globe, 36 intrepid Alaskans currently serve their country as members of the Peace Corps. I would like to take this opportunity to extend a special thank you to them in particular. Whether they are in El Salvador, Ghana, or Kazakhstan, I know they are not only fulfilling the Peace Corps' mandates of providing trained personnel to developing nations and promoting cross-cultural understanding, but they are also learning important life lessons which will be a credit to them in their future endeavors and to our State. I look forward to welcoming them back to Alaska as I do all who choose to serve our Nation abroad.

POST-9/11 VETERANS EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, this Chamber has recently been consumed by discussion of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obviously, we don't all agree on this issue. But there are a few things that I think we can agree on.

We can agree that the brave men and women serving their country overseas and at home are doing a superb job. We can agree that we have the finest fighting force the world has ever known. And we can agree that our veterans deserve benefits for the sacrifices they make and the risks they take while serving their country.

For nearly 65 years, one of those benefits has been affordable access to a college education when they return from war. Commonly called the GI bill, this benefit is widely recognized as one of the best pieces of legislation ever passed by Congress. Unfortunately, for many Oregonian citizen soldiers this benefit has remained just out of reach.

Oregon has no large active duty military bases, and most Oregonians who serve their country do so in the National Guard or Reserves. They stay trained and ready, and when our nation needs them they fight bravely. But when the fighting is over, they return to their communities and their jobs. And, all too often, their sacrifice is not rewarded the way it is for members of the active duty force.

An active duty soldiers can collect GI bill benefits even after they leave the military. However, if a member of the Oregon National Guard wants to attend Portland State University after fighting in Iraq for a year, he or she must

stay in the Guard, risking another deployment, to collect his or her benefits.

I believe that as a matter of basic fairness, soldiers that share the same foxhole for the same length of time should get the same benefit. Some people say "That's too logical for government." But fortunately, Senators WEBB and WARNER recognizing this basic inequity have written a bill to correct this problem, and generally modernize the GI bill.

I firmly believe education should be both available and affordable to all service men and women, and it for this reason that I am proud to stand today in support of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act.

Many servicemembers who volunteered to join the armed forces after September 11, 2001, did so with the full knowledge that they would very likely be called to serve in harm's way. Over 600,000 members of the Nation's Guard and Reserve have been called to active duty. Since our nation came under attack, more than half of the Oregon National Guard has deployed overseas. Oregon's deployment rate has ranked among the highest per capita in the Nation. The National Guard has done much more than they have historically been called upon to do, and at great sacrifice. This bill honors all who have served on active duty on or after September 11, 2001, by expanding the educational benefits provided under current law.

The cost of higher education has increased dramatically in recent years. Over the past 5 years, the average cost of tuition has increased 35 percent. Room and board costs have also risen on average over 35 percent. Many of our servicemembers have put their educational plans on hold while at war, and the rising cost of education has outpaced their ability to pay. This has put them at a competitive disadvantage in a nation that has called them to service. This bill would put them back on equal footing. Servicemembers, including activated Guard and Reserve members, who have served on active duty for at least 3 months would be entitled to benefits under this bill.

As with previous GI bills, this bill would secure tuition payments, a monthly stipend to assist with living expenses, and a stipend for books and required educational expenses. This bill would go a step further, however. Instead of recognizing an activated reservist's longest consecutive active service, this bill would recognize cumulative active service. This is a crucial distinction that recognizes the way we employ our forces today. Payments and stipends would be scaled up to 100 percent. The benefits would be protected if a servicemember is deployed or transferred. It would contribute to licensure and certification testing and to some college-level correspondence courses. Finally, this bill would establish a new program in which colleges or universities may voluntarily agree to make up or reduce the difference between

tuition costs and what the new benefits would provide. Under this program, the benefit would match a school's additional contribution dollar for dollar, up to 50 percent of the tuition difference.

This bill would not just recognize and reward our service men and women for their sacrifices. It would create a meaningful retention and recruiting tool for our active, Guard and Reserve forces, and it would provide an investment in the future of our Nation by encouraging and contributing to the kinds of education and training that lead to good jobs, good pay, and economic stability. I am proud to cosponsor the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act and encourage its immediate passage so we can begin to repay the debt we owe to those who stand guard and defend our liberty.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING W. LAIRD STABLER, JR.

• Mr. BIDEN. Madam President, today I wish to remember the Honorable W. Laird Stabler, Jr., a devoted public servant and a gentleman in the truest sense of the word. It is clear from the ways in which Delawareans from all political persuasions and all walks of life have mourned his death this week that all that knew him understand this part. He was a decent man, a man who viewed public service as a duty and a trust.

I first met Laird in 1969, when he was the house majority Leader in Dover and I was a young public defender. Despite only having served for 3 years, he had already gained a reputation as a fair and thoughtful man. In 1970, when I first sought public office as a county councilman, the people of Delaware recognized Laird's sterling character and integrity by entrusting him with the office of attorney general. He later served as U.S. attorney for the State of Delaware and, for 20 years, as Delaware's Republican National Committeeman. It seems incredible today that a man who in Delaware was literally synonymous with the Republican Party endeared himself to a generation of Democrats.

No matter where he was in his career, or whom he was representing, every decision Laird made was guided by his two most redeeming qualities: honor and integrity. As the British songwriter, Charles Dibdin, wrote: "If honour gives greatness, [he] was great as a king."

Laird's exceptional sense for others earned him the respect of nearly everyone he knew, from U.S. Presidents to his neighbors. His fierce devotion to his Scottish ancestry and his unending sense of humor were legendary.

Laird was that rare breed of politician who could lead with very few words. For all his commitment and knowledge, Laird led with a calm and steady hand. The universal outpouring

of mourning expressed by Delawareans from every corner of the State is a testimony to his quiet dignity and nobility.

As Shakespeare wrote in "Hamlet:" "He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again."

Knowing Laird Stabler, I am certain he did not judge his life based upon how others viewed him or even his great contributions to the state and country. I believe Laird would prefer to be judged based on those he loved most and those who loved him—his family. For me, it was hard to tell where Laird ended and where Peggy, his beautiful wife, began. At least from my perspective, they seemed to be a matched pair in terms of effortless grace, genuine empathy and devotion to one another. They produced a family that is a genuine reflection of their collective virtues. I know Laird III the best, and he is every bit his family. Their daughter Margaretta and son Ramsay are a genuine reflection of their parents' decency.

As a Delawarean and a Democrat, I feel privileged today to pay tribute to a Delawarean and a Republican whose life reflected what all of us strive to achieve.●

OIL PRICES

• Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, in April 2004, when American consumers were paying \$1.78 per gallon at the pump, I warned that energy experts were "predicting that the price of gas may rise to \$2.50 or \$3.00 per gallon." The administration did nothing. Last October, when American consumers were paying \$2.87 per gallon at the pump, I warned that "oil may be on its way to over \$100 a barrel." The administration did nothing.

This week, oil reached a record \$102 a barrel, and gas prices averaged \$3.13 a gallon. How much will families in Vermont and across America have to pay to heat their homes in this long winter and drive to work before the President takes action? At a news conference yesterday, the President was not even aware that some are predicting that gas prices will hit \$3.50 or even \$4 a gallon by the spring.

Two facts are painfully clear: Gasoline prices have more than doubled since the President took office, and the President has no plan to protect consumers and our economy.

I have said this before, and I say it again today: The principal cause of the relentless increase in oil prices is not a natural supply issue, but market manipulation by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC, an international cartel that limits the supply of oil to keep fuel prices high. In January, the President's best attempt to increase the supply of oil was to tell Saudi King Abdullah that "paying more for gasoline hurts some American families." Indeed it does, and I am pleased the administration acknowledges the effects of rising gas