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Senate

(Legislative day of Thursday, April 17, 2008)

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable SHERROD BROWN, a Senator from the State of Ohio.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Great is Your faithfulness, O God, our Father. We rejoice today because we know You are in control. We do not understand all of Your ways, but we know and trust You. Let that faith pervade all that we say and do today.

Guide and bless our Senators. Strengthen their courage and lead them to the right road. May they enact such laws as shall please You. Give them the courage to admit mistakes and the wisdom to trust Your mercy. May they faithfully serve You and promote the well-being of this great Nation.

Lord, we pray also today for all the men and women of our Armed Forces. Defend them day by day with Your Heavenly grace. We pray in your powerful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable SHERROD BROWN led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

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

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

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

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, April 18, 2008.

To the Senate:

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

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, after I speak, and if the Republican leader chooses to speak, we will be in a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each. No votes will occur today or on Monday. There will be no votes on Monday because of the Passover holiday. The next vote will occur at 12 noon on Tuesday on the motion to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to S. 1315, the disabled veterans' benefits bill.

VETERANS BENEFITS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is hard to comprehend why we have to file cloture on a motion to proceed to a bill dealing with veterans, but that is what is happening. It has been heard on this floor on many occasions in recent weeks, but it is hard to comprehend what the Republicans are trying to do with the country, other than maintain the status quo.

We invoked cloture twice on a technical corrections bill, and now, on a

veterans' benefits act, we have to invoke cloture on even being able to debate it. That is really too bad. There have been 4,039 Americans killed in Iraq; I read that in the newspaper this morning. The occupant of the chair indicated to me that he presented a flag to some Ohio people who lost a loved one. Tens of thousands of troops have been wounded. The morning papers report that 20 percent—one out of every five—of the Iraq veterans, our soldiers, coming home from Iraq have traumatic stress disorder.

Mr. President, we have talked about those who have been killed in Iraq, those who have been wounded, but there are also, as a result of this huge military presence there—earlier this year, about 175,000—people who are in the military who get hurt when trucks back over them by mistake or they may have falls—a lot of things happen to disable these veterans. We have been trying to bring this legislation to the floor since last August. In the height of the war, with soldiers being killed every day, being wounded every day, coming home from Iraq every day, we cannot even get to a bill to deal with their health. The Republicans are holding that up. We have been trying since August to bring it up.

This comprehensive, budget-neutral legislation will provide much needed benefits for veterans young and old. The legislation, among other things, would expand the number of individuals qualifying for traumatic injury insurance.

In the morning papers all over the country, there are headlines such as "VA Suicide Hotline Set Up Last Year Credited With Saving 726 Lives So Far." As I said, we have these stories appearing all over the country.

Twenty-two-year-old Joshua Omvig shot himself in his truck outside his parents' home in Grundy Center, Iowa, on December 22, 2005. A local newspaper reported that he

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



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had talked to his mother shortly before killing himself. Among his final words: "I've been dead ever since I left Iraq."

As a result of this, and in paying tribute to him, we have created a suicide hotline for veterans. That is what this is all about. We have saved 726 lives. Veterans need help. This is a war like we have never had before. We have never fought a war in big cities, street to street, house to house.

Last night, I had a marine in my office, at about quarter to 7 last night. He came with his wife-to-be, his mother, and his father. They are from Illinois. He is a big, strong man. One of his ears was cauliflowered, as he had been a college wrestler. He was missing his right leg above the knee. He is going to be in and out of the hospital, and he will be able to go home soon. His problem is not with the leg he lost, it is with the leg he still has. He lifted up his pant leg and showed me the scars. He had major surgery and has scars. He is tough and said, "I am going to be just fine."

We are trying to help people such as him. They are all over America, coming home from Iraq and are hurt and need help. We cannot even debate this legislation because Republicans are stalling it. We are having a vote at noon on Tuesday. I hope we will be able to get 60 votes and proceed. You would think there would be nine Republicans who are caring enough to allow us to go forward on this most important issue.

We also extend eligibility for specially adapted housing benefits to individuals with severe burns. This war, which is within cities—I got carried away describing this man's injuries.

I said, "Tell me what happened."

He said, "We came out of the house, climbed in the vehicle, and it blew up."

I said, "How long were you in the truck?"

He said, "Maybe 20 seconds."

The road had been paved—a newly paved road. They put a bomb on it. When he drove over it, the compression caused it to blow up. He had burns—you could see them—on his face. The scars weren't bad, but there were burns.

A lot of the people, because of these explosive devices, have terrible burns. This legislation we want to try to pass extends eligibility for these people who were burned badly to have special housing benefits.

The legislation would extend and increase benefits for individuals trying to change what they do, with apprenticeships and on-the-job training programs.

Also, the legislation would restore veteran status to Filipino veterans who served under U.S. command in World War II. One only need watch Tom Hanks's World War II series that appeared on television. It talked about the valor and the absolute necessity for the Filipino soldiers who were there fighting under our command. We have been trying for decades to extend benefits to them. They are getting very old

with each day that goes by, and more of them are dying. Their average age is well over 80. We want to allow them certain benefits. They fought alongside U.S. troops during World War II. It is the moral obligation of this Nation to provide for those Filipino veterans who fought under the U.S. flag during World War II.

After 8 months of obstruction by the Republicans, it is time to allow this bill to be debated. If there are people who don't like provisions in this bill, they can offer an amendment to try to take them out. Why hold up benefits for veterans?

This legislation provides much needed benefits and includes 8 titles, with 38 benefits. If there were ever a piece of legislation that should not be stalled, obstructed, and delayed, it is this one. We have waited 8 months to bring this up. With the Republicans, it is always tomorrow, we almost have it worked out, or how about tomorrow or next week or next month? We cannot wait any longer. People have to step up to the bar here, Mr. President, on Tuesday at noon and vote to find out if we can legislate for the veterans coming back from Iraq and those veterans who have, prior to Iraq, dedicated their lives to the service of their country, our country.

COMMEMORATING EARTH DAY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, 38 years ago, Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin founded Earth Day to celebrate the environment and to call attention to the major environmental issues of the time. Once again we celebrate the progress we have made to protect our environment, and are again called upon to address new challenges facing our planet.

Since Earth Day's conception in 1970 our Nation has worked to reduce pollution and clean up lakes, streams, and the air we breathe. These environmental accomplishments have made us healthier, our economy prosper, and have helped to make America even more beautiful.

Although we have made great strides to improve and protect our environment, it is clear that we are facing one of the gravest environmental challenges of our time. Global warming from man-made greenhouse gas emissions may be the most complicated crisis our world has ever faced. We must address it quickly and boldly in the United States and assert global leadership on this most important issue.

Rising temperatures threaten to devastate western landscapes, intensify drought, and magnify summer heat waves. Fortunately, if we act swiftly, we still have a narrow window of time and opportunity to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Over the next 15 years, I am confident that we can reduce emissions by at least 25 percent. We will establish a framework for capping greenhouse gas

emissions without imposing economic hardship on Americans. We will also create a business environment that provides ample incentives to phase out rapidly our current outdated 19th century energy production and decision-making methods.

Global warming is an enormous opportunity wrapped in a complex challenge. On this Earth Day, I want Nevadans and all Americans to embrace and prepare for the challenge, and recognize the tremendous opportunity we have to improve our energy security, create hundreds of thousands of new jobs and develop the new, clean, efficiency and renewable energy economy of the future. With the right investments and political will, we can soon power all our cars, homes and industry with power from the Sun, the wind, and the Earth.

In a 100-mile-square area of Nevada and the Southwest's desert, we have enough solar energy resources to supply the entire United States with electricity. This might seem unreal today because our thinking is shaped most by those who profit from selling us fossil fuels. But, solar technologies at the utility-scale and in distributed applications are quickly becoming economical and have far fewer of the hidden costs of coal, nuclear and other unsustainable resources.

In addition, we have vast wind and geothermal resources that America has only begun to tap. By expanding and improving transmission access to rural and undeveloped areas where solar, wind and geothermal are often most plentiful, our renewable energy resources can work in affordable harmony, improving our energy security and reliability, using cost-free fuel for ever.

In a speech I gave earlier this year, I established five policy goals to promote renewable energy. These principles will help launch Nevada and the nation in a new direction that chooses ingenuity over stagnation, progress over pollution. They include: consumer choice—allowing consumers to choose renewable energy to power their homes at reasonable cost; consumer empowerment—allowing homeowners to receive credit for generating their own renewable electricity; making space for renewables—setting aside federal land for renewable energy production; investment—providing incentives to utility companies to choose renewables and efficiency over fossil fuels; and electric cars—building a smart grid that can charge electric automobiles.

Achieving these policy goals could help make our nation more sustainable, both environmentally and economically. They are some of the necessary steps we must take toward a low-carbon economy.

Climate scientists tell us that the countries of the world have approximately 10-15 years to radically transform the way that energy is made and consumed because greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere are