Roberts Supreme Court reversed decades—decades—of precedent and the intent of the law. It also overturned the policy of the EEOC under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

After the Ledbetter case—until we fix this—workers are powerless to hold their employers accountable for unlawful, unjust, unfair, unequal conduct. It creates an incentive for employers to discriminate against workers because now if they can hide the discrimination for just 180 days, then they are home free and the worker can do nothing about it.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act will fix this injustice and put Federal law in the same place it was the day before the Court decision. This has been American law. It has been American law about fairness and equal pay. All we are trying to do is reverse this extreme decision of the Supreme Court and put it back in current law.

The economic impact of unfair pay practices on working families is staggering. Today, women still make 77 cents for every $1 men make. In Michigan, it is even lower: 70 cents for every $1.

The current job climate has been particularly hard on women and people of color all across America. The unemployment rate for women has risen sharply, and their wages are falling faster than men's. For people of color, the unemployment rate is even higher. African Americans' unemployment rate is almost twice the national average. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act would help correct this unfairness, this disparity.

Just as important as upholding the rights of women, the Fair Pay Act is needed because the Ledbetter case would affect all kinds of discrimination cases. At the end of the day, it simply puts the law back where it was and creates the opportunity for fairness and equality.

Let me say that when a woman goes to the store in Michigan, she does not pay less for milk. When she goes to the gas station, she does not pay less for gas. She does not pay less for the food or the electric bill. She does not pay less in any area. Yet until we fix this outrageous Supreme Court decision, she can be paid less for the very same job.

Mr. President, let me also say a few words about the bill we passed earlier today for veterans. That bill was almost unanimously passed, despite being held up for 7 months.

For too many of our servicemembers, that last day on Active Duty is just the first day of a difficult transition back to civilian life.

Our veterans deserve every benefit they get, and more. But too often our veterans return home to find out their insurance is inadequate or it is very hard to figure out their educational benefits because they are spread out over numerous different agencies.

Perhaps most important, under current law, our permanently disabled veterans who are recovering from injuries cannot even count on the Federal Government to help them finance necessities such as wheelchairs or wheelchair ramps for their homes.

When the men and women of our Armed Services put on the uniform, they are making a promise to defend America. In return, we promise them that a grateful nation will be there for them when they come home. What they do need—and what we owe them—is a system that works for them, not against them.

That is why the Veterans' Benefits Enhancement Act that was just passed today is so critically important. It addresses many of the problems that plague this difficult transition to stateside life and provides necessary improvements to education and health care and insurance programs.

This bill would expand the number of individuals qualifying for retroactive benefits for traumatic injury protection coverage. This is important for all of our veterans because we are now learning that this kind of injury is happening more often than we thought, and it can have a devastating impact.

Just last week, a new veterans center was opened in Saginaw, MI. This center will not only assist our veterans returning from combat but will also serve our veterans from as far back as World War II—the war my father fought in. These veterans should also be eligible for benefits if they are victims of traumatic brain injury.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 1 minute remaining.

Ms. STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. President.

The act would expand eligibility for home improvement and structural alteration assistance. It would also improve survivor benefits for the surviving children of our service men and women and a number of other things.

I am glad we passed this legislation. I am sorry it was held up for 7 months, and then all this week there was obstructionism and delay before we could get to it. But I am glad we got it done.

I am deeply disappointed that earlier this week we saw another filibuster that stopped us from proceeding to an equally important bill, and that is a bill that relates to equal pay and protection under the law, when women are working hard every single day and find themselves in a situation where they are receiving less than male counterparts for the same job. It is wrong. It needs to be fixed for the women of America and their families.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time is expired.

Ms. STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. President. I look forward to the opportunity to bring this to the floor again, and, hopefully, we will be able to get it done.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be granted up to 15 minutes for my remarks today.

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

ALLEGED FILIBUSTERS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I have a great deal of appreciation for the distinguished Senator from Michigan. I know how sincere she is, and I know she feels very deeply about what she has just spoken. But this business of 68 clotures is hitting below the belt.

Time after time, the majority leader has filed bills—many of which have not even gone through committee, have not had 1 day of hearing, some of which have been filed for political purposes just to create tough votes—and then filed cloture immediately.

In the old days—I have been here almost 32 years—nobody did that. Then they call it a filibuster when they are the ones who filed cloture just for the purpose of being able to say there is a filibuster.

Almost invariably the bills that are good go through. Republicans will object sometimes because we want to be able to offer at least germane amendments. In this body, we have, in the past, even been able to offer nongermane amendments. But that is a no-no right now because the majority is concerned some will bring up amendments that might be embarrassing to the majority.

Well, having talked about ''embarrassing to the majority,'' why do you think the Ledbetter case was brought up through this statute? First of all, it did not have 1 day of hearings, as far as I know. It certainly was not put through a committee. It was brought up under rule XIV—which is a right to do—and then the bill itself was classically poorly written.

The fact is, this bill would have done away with the statute of limitations and made it almost impossible for any business to defend itself even in class action lawsuits. But it was brought primarily because the friends in some areas of the plaintiffs' bar wanted it brought so they could bring more suits in our society.

But to basically do away with the statute of limitations so that you could bring suits 10, 15, 25 years later, when all of the documentation is gone, the witnesses are gone, there is no way the company can defend itself, and it is an automatic slam dunk for plaintiffs' lawyers—some plaintiffs' lawyers, because most great plaintiffs' lawyers are not going to play this game—and then call that a good bill, there is something wrong with it.

With regard to the veterans bill—my goodness gracious. Let's think about this. With regard to the veterans bill, we are all for veterans—every last one of us. But, again, cloture was immediately filed. We were not able to bring up amendments. Finally, in the end, what did we do? We spent all day yesterday doing nothing in order to accommodate two Presidential candidates on the Democratic side. Now, I

have no problem with that, with that accommodation, but we could have worked all day yesterday on the veterans bill and scheduled that vote the same time at the end of the day, as we did. But it was basically a wasted day in the Senate, other than hearings that might have gone on. To waste a whole day and then blame us for it, that is not right.

We all know why the Ledbetter bill was brought up. In many respects, it is just to score political points or it would have gone through the committee. Had it gone through the committee, had we done a good statute of limitations change, had we made some other changes that make sense in the law, I think we would have passed a bill that would have made Lilly Ledbetter at least realize that her actions were not in vain. But the way it was done looks to me as if it was done for political purposes and to score political points. We could have worked it out. At least I think we could have worked it out. But there was not even a chance to do that.

Let me just say this: I believe we have too much of this business that every time the majority files a bill and then files a cloture motion, they then call us filibusterers. That is not right, and it is not true. Frankly, we all know it is not true.

(Ms. STABENOW assumed the chair.)

AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, we live in cynical times, and today I want to address that cynicism; namely, a small number of media reports that, some have suggested, call into question the command abilities of the senior leadership of the U.S. Air Force.

In addition, I was dismayed to learn that a Member of the Senate has compounded these misrepresentations by recently authoring a letter that makes inaccurate assertions about matters that have already been dealt with by the proper military authorities and investigated by the inspector general of the Department of Defense.

Let me address the underlying matter directly. It has been my privilege and honor to represent the people of Utah in this august body for now more than 31 years. During that time, I have had the pleasure to meet many of our Nation's military leaders, their families, and, of course, military period. However, I can say without reservation the current generation of Air Force leaders is among the finest I have ever known in all my years in the Senate.

Under the steadfast and capable leadership of Secretary Michael Wynne and GEN Michael Moseley, the leaders of our Air Force are resolute in the defense of this country, tenacious in their support and care for the young men and women who serve under them, and dedicated to modernizing the ancient—or should I say aging—equipment of their force.

These are leaders to be proud of, not criticized the way they have been. They are leaders to have confidence in. They exemplify the Air Force's unofficial motto: ''Nothing Comes Close.'' They are the rightful heirs to the title: ''The Right Stuff.''

This does not mean errors do not occur. In any organization, especially one with more than 350,000 servicemembers, some will make mistakes, a few will veer from the straight and narrow; and, sadly, a tiny minority might even betray the public trust. That said, I believe the true measure of military leadership is not to wipe away every possible temptation and sin of mankind; it is to create a culture where malfeasance, once identified, is dealt with firmly, swiftly, and justly.

For example, the current Air Force leadership met this standard when it was recently tested by the wrongdoing of a civilian official during an initial attempt to replace our Nation's aerial tankers that are, on average, 47 years old. Once Senator MCCAIN brought this malfeasance to the attention of the Air Force, the service responded by holding accountable those responsible. These individuals were prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Yet from that troubled time, the current Air Force leadership rallied and conducted one of the most transparent, open, and fair procurement competitions in recent memory. That is stuff of which real leaders are made.

I was also disappointed to read the characterizations of some press reports regarding the speech given by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates during his trip on Monday to the Air War College. When one reads some of these reports, one could only conclude that Secretary Gates was issuing a rebuke to the Air Force's leadership. This is most perplexing. Although I have not spoken to Secretary Gates about his speech, I have read the official transcript. My impression of his address was that Secretary Gates was not issuing an admonishment—not at all. In fact, I believe the Secretary was seeking to do what all good Secretaries of Defense strive to obtain: a more effective and efficient force through new and creative thinking.

Now, this conclusion is ironically bolstered by later reports from the same news service that published the initial reports I find so puzzling. These later reports quote the Pentagon press secretary as saying one of the major alleged reproaches was not directed at the Air Force as a service, but to ''the military as a whole.''

As I said earlier, we live in cynical times. Unfortunately, it has become customary for many in political circles to hurl unfair and even untrue criticisms at one another. One could argue this is the price of a vibrant democracy. However, this sort of behavior is unbecoming when it wrongly distracts our military leaders, especially during a time of war.

The Air Force leadership, under Secretary Wynne and General Moseley, has done an extraordinary job of protecting our Nation and supporting our other armed services in this war on terror. I, for one, am thankful we have such leaders in positions with such heavy responsibility. So today I rise to thank them. I thank Secretary Wynne. I thank General Moseley. They are thanks I believe they deserve from the entire Senate.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If the Senator would withhold.

Mr. HATCH. I withdraw that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana is recognized.

VETERANS' BENEFITS ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I wish to commend Chairman AKAKA on the legislation that was passed in the Senate earlier today, S. 1315.

This bill makes a number of commonsense improvements to the benefits packages we offer America's veterans. I am pleased to have voted for this bill as it came out of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I am also pleased to have supported it on the floor today. It is long past due to give our disabled veterans the ability to purchase affordable life insurance. That is what this bill does. It provides up to $50,000 in life insurance for any veteran younger than the age of 65 who has a service-connected disability.

The bill also adds a host of new benefits to help critically injured service men and women get their households refurbished if they become disabled. That can mean putting in wheelchair ramps, remodeling a kitchen or a bathroom, and countless other chores. Again, it is a small measure, but for a soldier who has lost an arm or a leg or a marine who has suffered severe burns, it means the world.

It is long past time to increase burial benefits to help families deal with the growing costs of providing a final resting place for their veteran loved ones. This bill does that by authorizing double the current allowance for the burial of a veteran who dies from a service-connected disability to $4,000. It also triples the $300 benefit for nonservice connected disabilities. With the average funeral cost now around $6,000, this is a small gesture to the loved ones of our veterans, but it matters a great deal.

At a time of record national debt and chronic annual budget deficits, I am particularly pleased this bill is deficit-neutral. It does not increase taxes.

With all the good in the bill, it is little wonder the Veterans' Benefit Enhancement Act is supported by every major veterans service organization. This bill passed out of the VA Committee unanimously last summer, and I am pleased by the bipartisan support it got today. We now need to turn our attention to the veterans health care legislation that I am told will follow this bill. Our Nation's veterans deserve nothing less.