

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I join the remarks of the Senator from Ohio acknowledging the great contribution made to America by our men and women in uniform. I hope we can honor their service, not only by providing for them while they are at war but providing for them as well when they come home. I am sure the Senator joins me in believing that a new GI bill which will provide for those returning soldiers is a fitting tribute to their service and a great investment in our future.

Our initial GI bill after World War II was born in conflict. After World War I, those returning soldiers marched on Washington time and again, demanding some payment for their service to our country. They were rebuffed and even attacked at times by our then Army in uniform. By the Second World War, we understood that we owed a great debt to the 16 million men and women who served, and 8 million of them took advantage of the GI bill.

That GI bill was groundbreaking and revolutionary. It paid for their tuition, their books, their room and board, as well as a monthly allotment so they could go to school. Those graduates of the GI bill became the thriving middle class of America that built our great Nation in the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. It was the greatest single investment in returning soldiers in our history, and it should be replicated.

Those who honor the armed services should also honor them when they come home, to make sure they receive all the health care and benefits promised and are given a chance to have a full life after having served our country so well.

I am happy to identify myself with the remarks of the Senator from Ohio.

REPUBLICAN FILIBUSTERS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I also want to say that this has been a week when we have achieved a few things in the Senate but not nearly enough. We started off the Senate with a historic occasion, one which is not likely to be remembered by great historians but should be remembered by all who follow the business of the Senate. As of this week, the Republicans, the minority in the Senate, have now engaged in 71 Republican filibusters. A filibuster is an effort to stop the business on the floor of the Senate or at least to slow it down. It is a time-honored tradition in the Senate, but it is a tradition which has not been overused until this session of Congress.

In the entire history of the Senate, the total number of filibusters in any 2-year period, the maximum, was 57. So far in this 2-year period, the Republicans have engaged in 71 filibusters, and, of course, we have another 6 or 7 months to go in this session of Congress. It is clear that their ambition is to stop the Senate from addressing the major issues facing our Nation, or at least to slow us down to a crawl.

We have what we believe are good ideas and good proposals to deal with the high gasoline prices facing America's families and businesses, farmers and truckers. We have good proposals to deal with tax breaks for working families so they can meet the needs of their families with escalating prices for food and health care and daycare and the cost of daily living. Again, the Republicans have done their best to slow us down, if not stop us.

It reached a point several weeks ago that was nothing short of ridiculous. The Republicans initiated a filibuster to slow down the consideration of a bill known as a technical corrections bill. That is a bill that takes care of spelling and grammar errors. They engaged in a filibuster to slow down the Senate so it would take us a whole week to finish a technical corrections bill. When we finally reached the point and asked them for amendments, they had three or four that could have been dispensed with quickly.

They are dragging their feet and slowing us down with this record number of filibusters. But that isn't it alone. There is also a device in the Senate known as a hold. Most every Senator has used a hold, either on a bill or a nomination. Some of the holds that have been applied recently are so-called secret holds. Senators don't step forward to identify why they have held up a nomination or bill.

I have used holds. I am currently using those. But I have been very public about it. I have said exactly why I am doing it and the conditions for my releasing the hold. For example, when the Department of Justice wanted the approval of the Deputy Attorney General Mark Filip, a good man from Chicago, I said I would hold his nomination until I had received responses to questions I had submitted to the Department months before. Well, to his credit, Attorney General Mukasey moved on it extremely quickly. Within 48 hours, I had the answers and withdrew the hold immediately as promised. I am sorry it reached that point, but after waiting months, I didn't know another way to turn to get answers to important questions. So holds can be used effectively and honestly and openly.

Then again, there are holds that have been applied that I think are almost impossible to explain or justify. For example, one of the Senators on the Republican side has put a hold on a bill which was not controversial and very bipartisan, which would establish in the United States a national registry of those who are suffering from a disease known as ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease. It is a terrible, debilitating disease. It was the hope of the sponsor, Senator HARRY REID of Nevada, that we could establish this registry and move even closer to finding the cause of this disease and perhaps lead to a cure. It was certainly a high-minded and sensible approach to a very serious medical condition affecting thousands of families across America.

One of the Senators from Oklahoma on the Republican side put a hold on this bill—in other words, stopped us from calling this bill for a vote. That is extremely unfortunate. There is nothing controversial about this bill. He should reconsider that hold. But it is not the only one.

PEPFAR REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise this evening to speak for a few moments about another hold that has been placed on critically important legislation.

Anyone who follows what we do here on the floor of the Senate or in the House of Representatives knows that many of us on the Democratic side have disagreed with President Bush as to his policies. Over the last 7 years, there have been ample opportunities to vote against the President's policies, whether it is on the invasion, the war in Iraq, or economic policies that brought us to this sorry stage of the American economy, with working families struggling to pay their bills and to survive.

I have opposed President Bush's economic policies and many other things during the course of his administration. But there was one moment I can still recall when the President gave a State of the Union Address and announced that the United States would try to lead the world in dealing with the global AIDS epidemic. On the Democratic side, I joined many of my colleagues, standing and applauding President Bush for that announcement. Though I may disagree with him on many issues, I salute him for his special efforts to deal with the global epidemic of AIDS and tuberculosis and malaria.

The President established a program known as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, commonly known as PEPFAR. This important program is up for reauthorization so that it can continue to save lives across the world.

They have renamed it in honor of two men who served in the House of Representatives—one a Democrat, Tom Lantos; the other a Republican from Illinois, Henry Hyde. It is known as the Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Reauthorization Act.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee considered this bill and passed it out 18 to 3—an overwhelming bipartisan vote. Our colleagues in the House passed a similar measure with an overwhelming vote at the end of March of this year.

The President has urged Congress to send him the bill before the end of the year. President Bush takes great pride in this bill. He believes it is one of the hallmarks of his tenure in office and administration. I join him. I think it is his most positive achievement as President of the United States.

The purpose of this bill is to prevent 12 million new infections; support

treatment for at least 3 million people; provide care for another 12 million, including 5 million very vulnerable children.

That kind of assistance helps to save lives, and it is an important step not only from a humanitarian viewpoint but also to alert the world as to our real values in America. We are in a struggle across the world now. Many of our harshest critics paint a picture of the United States that is not close to reality. This kind of legislation, where the United States puts investment in the health care of people around the world, tells the right story about who we are and what we believe.

There is a sad ending, regrettably, as is too often the case in the Senate. This bill—despite the President's support, despite broad bipartisan support in the House and the Senate—is being blocked by several Republican Senators. Seven of my colleagues across the aisle, who have publicly identified themselves, have stopped the consideration of this bill to deal with the global AIDS epidemic. Those Senators are Senators COBURN, DEMINT, SESSIONS, CHAMBLISS, VITTER, BUNNING, and BURR.

Now, former Bush speech writer, Michael Gerson, issued a scathing criticism of this Republican hold in a recent article in the Washington Post. I quote him when he says:

It is the nature of the Senate that the smallest of minorities can impede the work of the majority. But it takes a conscious choice—an act of tremendous will and pride—for members to employ these powers against an AIDS bill with overwhelming bipartisan support.

Mr. Gerson is right. I appreciate and share his sentiments and the frustration that comes with them.

There is broad bipartisan support for this measure. There are literally lives on the line. The President says we need it. Who would disagree? Virtually all of us on both sides of the aisle have applauded the President's efforts and voted for funding the PEPFAR program. Our ability to save the lives of millions of people around the world depends on a parliamentary maneuver in the Senate, where seven Republican Senators have put a hold on a bill to try to fight the global AIDS epidemic.

Many of my friends on the other side of the aisle support this bill enthusiastically. Even those with concerns about it are willing to concede this has been a remarkably successful program.

Since 2003, when we were treating only 50,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa, the PEPFAR and Global Fund now reach nearly 2 million people, primarily on the continent of Africa. That is an amazing record of progress in 5 years. That has literally changed the situation in Africa.

I went to Africa 7 or 8 years ago and did not go looking for the global AIDS epidemic. But you could not avoid it. Everywhere you turned, in every country I visited, terrible stories were being told about the people who were dying,

how it was necessary to hire two teachers for every grade in school because one was likely to die before the end of the school year. It was awful. There was no hope. People would not go for tests to see if they were positive because learning that information led them nowhere—just the knowledge of impending doom.

Well, Mr. President, that has changed. Because of PEPFAR and the Global Fund, because of the efforts of the Gates Foundation, because of the efforts of former Presidents Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush, we now find medications and treatment available in Africa. People are going forward to be tested so they do not unnecessarily expose someone else to the disease and so they can seek treatment at an early stage and live a long life.

The world has changed in Africa because of this program. But the program is about to expire, and these seven Republican Senators are standing in the path of reauthorizing that program.

When they were asked why they opposed this program being reauthorized, one of the Senators argued that it has gone beyond its original mission of treating AIDS and now is dealing with other issues. This critic of the program, my Senate colleague, called it “mission creep.” I wish that Senator could go to Africa and see it firsthand.

To argue that adding nutrition, safe water, and sanitation programs, treatment of tuberculosis and malaria, and protection of vulnerable populations is somehow beyond the scope of the original bill is to ignore reality.

I went to a portion of Nairobi, Kenya, to one of the larger slums, which has some 600,000 people and a rampant AIDS epidemic. Well, it is being treated with drugs and testing, and we are making some progress, but they took me to a small area where a group of parents who were infected with HIV were sitting and watching their children play.

I looked on as several of the women who were sitting there looked as if they were about to die, they were so emaciated. I said to the person with me: It is a shame they didn't have access to the drugs. The person said: They have access to the drugs. They are taking the drugs. They just don't have access to food.

These drugs don't work on a hungry person and an empty stomach. So when the critics of this PEPFAR reauthorization argue against food and nutrition as part of the program, they are ignoring the obvious. If you want to treat a woman with a child, and you want the drugs to work, she needs basic nutrition. That has to be part of the program. It does no good to give these drugs to a starving, dying person.

Maintaining the status quo, as some of my Republican colleagues who oppose this bill prefer, would deny the progress we have made under President Bush. This bill creates a program that is sustainable and maintains our essential leadership role in the fight against AIDS, TB, and malaria.

Some on the other side may disagree, and let me tell you, it is their right to disagree. But I think the honorable thing to do, the right thing to do, is to bring their disagreement to the floor and to offer an amendment. If they want to change the program, so be it. That is why we are here. We should consider the merits of their amendment and vote it up or down. Then, depending on the outcome, they can decide whether they want to vote for or against the bill.

But to hold this bill indefinitely, when 12 million lives hang in the balance, I have to agree with Mr. Gerson, it is a conscious decision—as he said: “an act of tremendous will and pride.”

I urge my Republican colleagues: Please, please reconsider this hold. I find it very difficult to understand how some of these same colleagues can go to our Prayer Breakfast regularly and pray for the poor and suffering in the world and come to the floor of the Senate and put a hold on a bill that would provide nutrition and drugs to people who will die without it. I do not understand that. I hope they will reconsider.

Recently, President Bush traveled to Africa. He was greeted with great warmth and hospitality by a continent grateful for his efforts in the fight against AIDS. The Senate should not turn its back on what the President and America have achieved. We should move quickly to reauthorize the U.S. commitment to global AIDS relief. The efforts of these seven Senators holding this important bill should not stop us from doing the right thing for the millions of people around the world whose lives literally depend on it. I am going to urge my colleagues, as often as I can, to drop this hold on this bill to allow the Senate to debate and pass this important legislation.

TRIBUTE TO LUCY AND ROSA TREVINO

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this past Sunday—Mother's Day—Barbara Mahany, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune, wrote a touching front-page story about Rosa Trevino, a mother who never gave up on her daughter, Lucy.

Born with a rare genetic degenerative disease, spinal muscular atrophy, Lucy Trevino was determined to win a degree in bio-engineering from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Her quest would have been physically impossible if her mother had not been by her side for every class, every lab, every study session, and there to turn every page of her daughter's textbooks when Lucy's arms were too weak.

On Saturday, Lucy Trevino overcame the greatest obstacles and earned her degree. And Rosa, in reporter Barbara Mahany's words, taught us “all a lasting lesson of a mother's love.”

At Lucy's commencement, the dean of UIC's engineering college stopped the ceremony to tell the members of the Class of 2008 about Lucy's persistence and Rosa's devotion. He said he