

a timely manner the needs of farmers who have suffered devastating losses this year. First, due to budget constraints, the permanent disaster program was developed with only a fraction of the funding compared to spending under previous ad hoc disaster programs. Second, as currently written, the disaster program guarantee is based on the level of the farm's crop insurance coverage. This will do little to help those acres with CAT coverage. And third, while USDA has made excellent strides in implementing many of the provisions of the new farm law, we have yet to see the details of the permanent disaster provisions. It is also evident that the data required to administer the whole-farm, revenue-based disaster program will not be available for some time. This means any financial assistance, in the absence of an advance payment, can not be made available to farmers until the latter half of 2009. That is simply too late for those that have suffered losses.

As you know, today's modern farming operations require expensive inputs and investment. Input and technology costs have escalated in 2008 with skyrocketing fuel and fertilizer prices. We are experiencing these losses at the absolute worst time because we incurred maximum costs of production as the harvest approaches. We are now dealing both with the impact of the lost revenue for this year's crops and trying to finance next year's crops. Without timely assistance, many Louisiana growers will be unable to settle this year's outstanding debt or secure the necessary financing for next year's crop. In short, without timely assistance, some farmers will find themselves in a financial situation that will make it difficult to continue farming.

Louisiana is not the only state with losses due to Hurricane Gustav. USDA data indicate that approximately 470 thousand acres of cotton were planted in South Texas in 2008. USDA's preliminary estimates of harvested area imply approximately 400,000 will be harvested, leaving 70,000 acres abandoned. In southeast Arkansas, losses might run 25%, according an initial estimate by the Extension Service. Damage also is being reported in Mississippi, mainly in the south and central Delta counties where the heaviest rains fell and some fields flooded.

The National Cotton Council recently joined with other agricultural organizations in a letter to USDA's Risk Management Agency requesting expedited appraisals for crop insurance policy holders. This would help speed payments for those covered by crop insurance. However, more needs to be done. I encourage Congress to develop a plan that will deliver financial assistance to producers in a timely manner. Enhanced crop insurance coverage, timely ad hoc disaster relief, supplemental payments delivered in the same manner as direct payments, and enhancements to the provisions of the permanent disaster programs should all be considered in order to expedite assistance that is commensurate with the losses that have been incurred. In addition, additional funding for existing conservation program can be used as a means of providing assistance for restoration of damaged fields. Finally, I urge the Committee to consider providing some form of financial assistance to gins, warehouses and other key components of our infrastructure who will experience significant financial losses due to sharply reduced volumes.

Mr. Chairman, the economic losses caused by the hurricanes are dramatic and severe, and immediate assistance is needed. Many farmers simply do not have the financial resources to wait until 2009 for assistance.

Thank you for your consideration of our views and recommendations and for giving me the opportunity to present testimony.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask the Chair to lay before the Senate a message from the House with respect to S. 3001, the Department of Defense authorization bill.

The Presiding Officer laid before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives:

S. 3001

Resolved, That the bill from the Senate (S. 3001) entitled "An Act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2009 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes", do pass with an amendment.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support the House amendment to S. 3001, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009. This bill was voted out of the Senate Armed Services Committee by a unanimous vote back in April. Last week, the Senate passed the bill by a vote of 88-8.

Over the last week, we have worked around the clock to reconcile the Senate and House versions of the Defense authorization bill. The compromise version of the bill—the House amendment to S. 3001—has now been approved by the House by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 392-39.

The bill that we bring before the Senate today contains many provisions that will improve the quality of life for our men and women in uniform, give them the tools that they need to defend our nation, and provide critical reforms to improve the operations of the Pentagon.

First and foremost, the bill would provide critical support to our men and women in uniform. For example, it would increase military pay by 3.9 percent—a half a percent more than the President requested; provide continued authority for the payment of enlistment and reenlistment bonuses, accession and retention bonuses for service members with critical skills or assigned to high-priority units, and other special bonuses and incentives needed to reward our troops and ensure that we can recruit and retain the people that we need in our military; authorize funds for military family housing and military construction projects needed to ensure that our troops have the housing that they deserve and our military has the facilities it needs for the national defense; and protect members of the military, family members and retirees from any increase in TRICARE fees, premiums, deductibles and copays.

The bill would increase the end strength of the Army, the Marine Corps, and the Army National Guard, to help reduce the incredible stress on

our troops. It would also establish and extend critical authorities needed by the Department of Defense in our current operations. For example, the bill would provide DOD the authority to use funds for quick-turnaround construction projects needed to support our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan; extend DOD's authority to provide "train and equip" funds and "stabilization and security assistance" so essential to the well-being of our troops; provide \$1.5 billion for the Commanders' Emergency Response Program, CERP, which commanders on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan consider the highest priority for protecting U.S. forces; and provide funding for critical initiatives, including \$2.2 billion for the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization's, JIEDDO's, ongoing efforts to defeat the threat of improvised explosive device, IEDs.

At a time when thousands of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are deployed around the world and our all-volunteer military is straining to meet the requirements of two ongoing conflicts while remaining prepared for other contingencies, these are steps that we simply must take. When our men and women in uniform are in harm's way, there is nothing more important.

The bill also includes a number of measures to ensure the proper stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

It would also ensure that the Iraqis use their own oil revenues rather than U.S. tax dollars to pay for large infrastructure projects and for the training and equipping of the Iraqi military. At the beginning of the Iraq war, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz testified that Iraq would be able to "finance its own reconstruction" through oil revenues. That has not proven to be true. To date, the U.S. taxpayers have paid approximately \$48 billion for stabilization and reconstruction activities in Iraq. While the Iraqi government has generated more than \$100 billion in oil revenues since the war began, it has spent only a small fraction of that amount on its own reconstruction. The Iraqi government now has \$80 billion at its disposal to fund large scale reconstruction projects. Under these circumstances, it is inexcusable for U.S. taxpayers to continue to foot the bill for projects that Iraqis are fully capable of funding themselves.

Other provisions of the bill would help improve the management of the Department of Defense and protect taxpayer dollars. For example, the bill would institute improved cost controls for the acquisition of major weapon systems; require program managers to incorporate energy efficiency requirements into the performance parameters for such systems; establish new ethics standards to prevent personal conflicts of interest by contractor employees who perform acquisition functions on behalf of the Department of Defense; and establish a new database of information regarding contractor integrity, ensuring that this information

is available to acquisition officials making key contracting decisions.

I am disappointed that procedural obstacles in the Senate precluded us from considering a package of more than a hundred amendments, which would have taken further steps to support our troops and improve the management of the Department of Defense. Where it was possible within the scope of the House and Senate bills, we tried to include elements of these amendments. Unfortunately, many of these important amendments were beyond the scope of the two bills and will have to be deferred until next year.

I am also disappointed that we were unable to adopt provisions addressing the administration's excessive reliance on contractors to perform functions that should be performed by the uniformed military or by civilian federal employees. For example, both the Senate bill and the House bill included provisions that would have precluded the use of contractor employees to perform inherently governmental functions in an area of combat operations, or to conduct interrogations of detainees. Unfortunately, these provisions drew a veto threat, so we had to limit ourselves to a Sense of Congress expressing our views on the issue.

When this bill was under consideration in the Senate, we spent a great deal of time and effort discussing how best to provide public visibility for our funding decisions, including earmarks of funds authorized in the bill. Historically, our funding tables have been included in report language, rather than in bill language. In Executive Order 13457, the President stated his view that such funding decisions should be "included in the text of the bills voted upon by the Congress and presented to the President."

Unfortunately, the Government Printing Office informed us that incorporating our funding tables into bill language would have added three full days to the time required to prepare a bill for floor consideration in the Senate and the House—even if GPO did not have other high priority work to accomplish at the same time. This delay would have been in addition to the day and a half it would have required for the committee staff to prepare the funding tables in a form that could be processed by GPO, and to ensure the accuracy of GPO's work.

With only a few days left for the House and the Senate to consider the bill before the end of this year's session of Congress, we determined that placing the funding tables into bill language was not an option that was available to us. Instead, we have incorporated the tables into the bill by reference—an action that has the same legal effect. To ensure public visibility of all of the funding decisions in the tables, the tables have been posted on the websites of both the Senate Armed Services Committee and the House Armed Services Committee. This is in addition to the posting on these

websites of separate transparency tables which—as required by the Rules of the Senate and the House of Representatives—provide information about each funding item requested by a Senator or a Member of Congress.

As of today, almost 200,000 U.S. soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are deployed far from home, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait and other theaters of operations around the world. After more than 6 years of war, our military, particularly our ground forces, are severely stressed. Too many of our troops are worn out, their families are tired of repeated deployments, and our equipment is being used up.

We need to enact this bill to improve the quality of life of our men and women in uniform. We need to enact this bill to give them the tools that they need to remain the most effective fighting force in the world. Most important of all, we need to enact this bill to send an important message that we, as a nation, stand behind them and appreciate their service.

At a time when our men and women in uniform are sacrificing so much for our country every day, it is surely not asking too much for our colleagues to agree to enact this bill so we can provide our troops the support that they need and deserve. I urge my colleagues to support the House amendment to S. 3001—the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009.

• **Mr. McCain.** Mr. President, I rise to offer my sincere congratulations to Chairman LEVIN, Senator WARNER, the members of our committee, and our House colleagues for their work on the fiscal year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act. With provisions that authorize a considerable pay raise for all military personnel, increase Army and Marine end-strength, improve the system that serves wounded veterans, and help prevent waste, fraud, and abuse in defense contracting and procurement, this bill contains many important provisions that will help support our national defense and, in particular, our servicemen and women. However, this bill also contains other provisions that are very problematic.

Before explaining my concerns with this bill, let me take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to Senator WARNER for his many years of service to this Nation, not the least of which are 30 well-spent years in the Senate where he has been a consistent and steadfast champion of our men and women in uniform. Senator WARNER has been instrumental in providing needed oversight of the Department of Defense, and in ensuring that our soldiers are well trained, well equipped, and that they and their families are well provided for. I am particularly grateful for his contributions during this Congress when he so frequently stepped in on my behalf. Let me be clear that my concerns with this year's bill reflect in no way on Senator WARNER's outstanding efforts: He deserves much credit for the many exemplary provisions contained in this bill.

Nonetheless, in this year's bill, and the accompanying report, there are \$5 billion in earmarks. Of that total amount, \$2.1 billion arises from a single provision that authorizes the procurement of six C-17 Globemaster aircraft that the Defense Department states we neither need nor can afford. In my view, the massive pork spending in this bill renders it a frontal assault on this body's purported commitment to ethics and earmark reform and, in my view, results in a failure in our obligation to the taxpayer.

Among the most egregious items in this bill are:

The Defense bill provides more than \$2.1 billion for 6 C-17 cargo aircraft. The Secretary of Defense wants to end production of C-17 aircraft for the U.S. Air Force. These aircraft are neither requested nor required by the Department of Defense. In the fiscal year 2008 Defense supplemental appropriations, the Congress added another 15 C-17 aircraft that also were not requested nor required by DOD. Congress has earmarked 31 C-17s above the amount that is necessary in various Pentagon requirements studies over the last 2 years. C-17 aircraft cost more than \$300 million per plane. With this bill, the total number of C-17s procured will rise to 211 total aircraft. This is a thinly veiled effort to keep the C-17 production line open using taxpayer's dollars to fund what is essentially a more than \$2.1 billion corporate earmark for the Boeing Corporation.

The Defense bill provides \$140 million in advance procurement for additional F-22s. The Air Force and contractors say that prohibiting spending in this bill would cause second tier suppliers to shut down and make it more expensive to restart the line if the next administration wants to continue production, even though the Secretary of Defense's position is that 183 F-22s is the full military requirement. Advanced procurement funding for additional F-22 aircraft is neither requested nor required. This earmark is being pursued by Lockheed Martin and its supporters.

The Defense bill includes funding of \$88 million for a VIP aircraft to fly Air Force general officers. Scott AFB has served as headquarters for numerous Air Force commands. Today, two 4-star Air Force generals from the Air Mobility Command and the U.S. Transportation Command call Scott AFB, home. Just as senior leadership in-transit comfort capsules, SLICCs, created a stir several months ago when it was learned from Air Force documents that Air Force Generals were trying to use GWOT money to purchase "first class" seats and beds in "flying pods" so that generals could travel in luxury when they fly overseas, it is egregious to think that while the military—mostly privates, sergeants, and petty officers—is engaged in the global war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, we would be spending scarce defense dollars on VIP aircraft for generals.

The Defense bill continues to fund the Presidential helicopter program for

next year at \$1.1 billion. The VH-71A program is intended to provide the replacement helicopter for the transportation of the President and Vice President. The current program which would build 23 aircraft has had excessive delays and cost overruns of more than 70 percent. This level is well in excess of the percentages—in fact five times as much—that would trigger a breach of the Nunn-McCurdy limits for major acquisition programs. Several program managers have been dismissed or reassigned in an effort to restructure this ailing program. This program should be cancelled. In the meantime the \$1.1 billion to continue next year's development of the Presidential helicopter should be halted and the money withheld until the Navy and the contractor demonstrate more transparency and accountability on this failing program.

The Defense bill includes a provision directing the Secretary of the Navy to sell the "yard floating drydock", AFDL-23, to Gulf Copper Ship Repair in Aransas Pass, TX. This provision would authorize the Secretary of the Navy to sell the drydock; however, the provision restricts the Secretary from recouping the full costs, approximately \$120-\$190 million, because the Secretary is directed to consider the amounts paid by, or due and owing from, the lessee—Gulf Copper Ship Repair. This would essentially allow the rent paid by Gulf Copper Ship Repair to be deducted from the total price of the drydock.

The Navy does not support this provision. The Navy is in the process of determining whether the dock is excess to future Navy needs and, if so, whether it would be required by other U.S. Government agencies or activities when the current lease to Gulf Copper expires. Subsequent to a determination that there are no additional U.S. Government needs, the vessel would be struck from the Naval Vessel Register and designated for disposal. This provision is an end-run of the normal process for disposal or sale of government equipment and is not in the best interest of the taxpayer.

The Defense bill includes a provision which is highly objectionable and is strongly opposed by the administration which purports to incorporate by reference into the bill most of the earmarks included in the accompanying report—totaling more than \$5 billion. The provision is meant to thwart President Bush's Executive Order 13457 "Protecting American Taxpayers from Government Spending on Wasteful Earmarks."

I had advocated a better approach of putting all the spending tables into the actual bill language. By hiding/shielding the tables in the report, the taxpayer does not have full transparency of Congress' actions in adding corporate and Member earmarks which are not requested or needed by the military services.

Again, while there is much in this year's Defense authorization bill that

is very worthwhile and helpful to providing for the national defense, the provisions contained within it that move in the wrong direction are too numerous, too large, and too costly for this Member to ignore.●

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, as a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I was pleased the Senate passed the House Amendment to S. 3001, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, today by unanimous consent. This bill follows through on the commitment that this Congress has made to our troops and their families to provide them with the support that they need and deserve. This includes a 3.9-percent across-the-board pay raise for all uniformed personnel—a half a percent more than the President's request—and a prohibition on increasing TRICARE beneficiary cost shares and pharmacy copays. It also includes a number of provisions designed to improve the readiness of our troops. For example, the bill fully funds Army and Marine Corps readiness and depot maintenance programs which will help ensure that the men and women in our armed services have the equipment necessary for them to fulfill their mission requirements. It also adds \$15 million for the readiness and environmental protection initiative to fund priority projects that benefit critical mission training sites and directs the Secretary of Defense to conduct a comprehensive technical and operational risk assessment for DOD installations, facilities, and activities.

As the chairman of the Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, I was pleased to work toward the inclusion of a number of critically important management and acquisition policy provisions which were included in this bill. These include a provision to establish steering boards to review new requirements that could increase the costs of major weapons systems, language requiring business transformation offices for each military department and a provision requiring the DOD to establish ethics standards to prevent personal conflicts of interest by contractor employees who perform acquisition functions on behalf of the DOD. I applaud the inclusion of language that expresses the view of Congress that private security contractors should not perform inherently governmental functions in an area of combat operations and that contractor employees should not conduct interrogations of detainees during the aftermath of hostilities. However, I am disappointed that due to a large extent to the Administration's objections and the absolute need to pass this bill in an expeditious manner, we were not able to incorporate this sense of the Congress into provisions that have the force of law.

As chairman of the Veteran's Affairs Committee, I was very pleased to have worked toward the inclusion of a number of provisions related to the treat-

ment of wounded warriors. This includes a clarification of the requirement that DOD utilize the VA criteria in establishing eligibility of retirement and disability. It also requires the Secretaries of Defense and the VA to jointly establish a center of excellence in the mitigation, treatment and rehabilitation of traumatic extremity injuries and amputations as well as a center of excellence in the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, and rehabilitation of hearing loss. In addition, this bill includes a provision derived from legislation that I introduced to extend senior-level oversight of cooperative efforts between the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs. The Senior Oversight Committee, SOC, was formed in the wake of last year's Walter Reed scandal, to improve the efforts of DOD and VA in managing the transition from military service to veteran status for wounded servicemembers. The Senior Oversight Committee's responsibilities are not complete as long as wounded warriors are still returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, therefore, I was pleased to be able to include this language for the SOC to be able to continue its important function.

Once again, I would like to thank Chairman LEVIN for his strong leadership and dedication to ensuring that this bill was passed. I also want to take this last opportunity to extend my warmest aloha to my friend and colleague Senator WARNER who managed this bill on the minority side. In my many years of serving with Senator WARNER on the Armed Services Committee, I have never failed to be impressed by his character, graciousness, and collegiality. Mahalo Nui Loa for your friendship and for all that you have done for our nation and the members of our armed services in particular.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate concur in the House amendment to the Senate bill, and that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I am very pleased to say there is no objection on this side.

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

The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I am overjoyed this has been done.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have said on many occasions—and I say it again—this bill is a great piece of work.

Has the bill passed?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The request was agreed to. The bill has passed.

Mr. REID. OK. Now, I said it before, and I will say it again: I so admire and respect the two managers of this bill who have worked together on this bill for 30 years. There was a time this year when we thought this would be the first year in those 30 years that my friends have worked on this bill that it would not pass. And it did. It is done.

It is a great day for America. It is a great day for our troops. As I have said to my two friends, I appreciate so much being able to work with you. It is a great honor for me that the two distinguished senior Senators, whom I have so much respect and admiration for, would allow me to, being a part of the Senate, come and offer this consent agreement. I am going to talk on Monday about my friend from Virginia who is leaving. So I will save those words for him. He already knows the knowledge I have of our friendship.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished leader. I say to him, as you referred to: Two Senators who worked on this, coincidentally, it is the Presiding Officer, the Senator from Michigan, Mr. LEVIN, who is in the chair to whom you were referring. We both thank you, and we thank Senator MCCONNELL and all Members of the Senate for their support in passing this key piece of legislation.

Sometimes people are concerned that this institution does not quite work in a manner in which is easily comprehensible. But this is an effort that has been one that you and I and all the members of our committee and the distinguished staff whom we have on the committee have worked on throughout this year.

I say to the Presiding Officer, you are the chairman. I am now the senior serving Republican on it, the former chairman, having served with you. Senator MCCAIN is the ranking member. By reason of necessity, he is absent; otherwise, he would be standing here today in terms of the bill.

This bill is not about us, though. It is about the men and women of the Armed Forces and their families and their loved ones and their friends. The Constitution provides very explicitly that the President is the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. To the legislative branch—the Congress of the United States—is entrusted the care and welfare and safety and, indeed, protection of the men and women of the Armed Forces.

Now, I commend the distinguished Presiding Officer, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Senator CARL LEVIN of Michigan, with whom I have worked these 30 years, side by side, on this committee. This is a good bill. There were times when I think we could have made it stronger. But given the rules of the Senate, which I respect, as does the Presiding Officer, and all other Senators, we were not able to quite achieve those goals. But that is the nature of the Senate. The minority has a very respected and powerful voice in this Senate, and it is right and just that it be heard.

So despite the fact this bill may not have all the features and important provisions I and the Senator from Michigan and other members of our committee and other Senators might have had incorporated in this bill, it is

still a very fine bill. It adequately—most adequately—cares for the men and women of the Armed Forces.

Again, I commend the distinguished chairman, the Senator from Michigan, my friend of these 30 years.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. Landrieu. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, first, let me thank the Presiding Officer.

This is a bittersweet moment for me. This will be the last time the Senator from Virginia and I will be standing here and celebrating the passage of a Defense authorization bill. We stood together in support of these bills and the men and women of our Armed Forces for 30 years. In this particular case—there have been previous examples of this, but this is perhaps the most dramatic one—we would not be standing here with a bill in hand now going to the White House but for the courage of the Senator from Virginia.

I will not go into all the details as to how that came about, but it is because of his commitment to the men and women in uniform that we have a bill. We would not have a bill this year except that he took the steps which he was determined to take as a Senator of this Nation—not just of Virginia—to support the men and women in uniform.

So on behalf of 25 committee members, 45 committee staff members, 2.3 million Active Duty and Reserve members of the military and their families, I offer a heartfelt thanks for them for a job always well done by the Senator from Virginia.

I will have more to say about the Senator from Virginia also next week. But for the time being, let me say this: In the future, when we cannot seem to find our way out of the difficult situations that a bill of this magnitude and complexity get us into, people will say: Well, what would JOHN WARNER have done? That will be the question we will ask. When we ask that question, the right answers will follow. I thank my dear friend.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Madam President, I thank my dear friend. If I could take a moment. I wish to join the Senator in thanking our respective leaders, Senator REID, Senator MCCONNELL and the members of the committee and the staff, once again, and indeed the members of the leadership staff and the floor staff who made possible this bill.

But I wish to tell a short personal story since this is my last bill.

I just walked through Senator REID's office. He asked me to come in and visit with him privately a minute. As I passed by, I looked up on the wall, and there was a portrait of Harry Truman. I had the privilege of serving in the Navy in World War II—the closing year of World War II—as a young 17-year-old, 18-year-old sailor, and never dreaming I would ever be a Senator—that was the furthest thing from my mind—a 17-year-old, 18-year-old sailor.

It was one of the darkest hours of the United States. Roosevelt was then President. Truman was Vice President. It was the winter of 1945. I, similar to so many young men at that time—and those women who joined the military also—signed up and volunteered. We wanted to be a part of this. The war had gone unexpectedly the wrong way in Europe for a while when Hitler trapped our divisions and Allied divisions in the Battle of the Bulge. Iwo Jima was underway. Okinawa, a terrific battle, was on the horizon.

America was all together, and we were determined to establish our freedom in the world. But I remember my first night—I had been on a steam train for about 2 days, working its way up to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. It would stop at the station, and 17-, 18-year-old guys would get on the train, and they would be in those old cars, cold, shivering, with no food that I can remember to speak of. We arrived at the Great Lakes at about 4 o'clock in the morning. We all were herded off the train into a great big gymnasium. A fellow, a chief petty officer—he was as big around as he was tall; I remember a very big fellow—got up, and he had a bullhorn, and shouted at us. I remember the words—here it was 65 years ago, 66 years ago—as if it were this minute. He said: All you guys who can't read and write, raise your hand.

Well, I had been in a wonderful home. My father provided well as a medical doctor, with the best of schools, even though I left school to join the Navy. I did not know people who did not know how to read and write. Some of the other guys' hands were raised, and the fellow said, through the bullhorn: All right, you smart guys, fill out the forms for the others. So I and others went over to help those people fill out their forms—put their X on it. The next day, we were in the training camps side by side, all training.

Those men went on to different tasks in the military but important tasks. There were many jobs in our military that did not require an education, but they were as important a part of the force as those of us, I guess, who felt we were a little smarter.

But why do I tell that story? I later served in the Marines. So I look back over these 60 years. I have spent a great deal of my life associated with the men and women of the Armed Forces. My Active service is of no great consequence.

But the thing I have always remembered is that you and I, as a team, I say to the Senator—all these years we have been working here, we have been working to improve and make possible that the current generation of young men going into the uniform, and women, have the same advantages my generation had: The GI bill—working with Senator WEBB recently to get that through.

I always feel I am a Senator today because of all the military men and women whom I have served with, who

have trained me, who have disciplined me, who have inspired me. They performed the same duty I did that cold night in 1945. They have helped me fill out the forms. I have learned from them, have had the wisdom to work with you and others to put together these legislative measures for their benefit.

So I close my last words thanking all those in uniform who have so generously given to me their wisdom, their friendship, their inspiration, and their courage to do what little I have been able to do as a Senator to help me fill out the forms and put my X on this my last bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Well, Madam President, the men and women of this Nation would be grateful to JOHN WARNER if they knew him, had that honor of knowing him. They have been benefitted by him even though they will never know him. Maybe as a 17-year-old sailor back in 1945, the last thing in his mind was that he would ever be a Senator. There is something about this Nation that makes it possible for men and women—in this case a man such as JOHN WARNER—to rise to the very top of the respect of his country men and women. It has been a true pleasure and honor to serve with him.

I, again, will have more to say about that next week. But I, again, wish to thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

Mr. WARNER. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEVIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Ms. LANDRIEU pertaining to the introduction of S. 3647 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

HIGHER EDUCATION DISASTER AND EMERGENCY RELIEF LOAN PROGRAM

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, this past August the President signed into law the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which reauthorized programs for postsecondary and higher education. Contained within the reauthorization is the Education Disaster and Emergency Relief Loan Program. The bill established a loan program within the U.S. Department of Education to provide critically needed low interest guaranteed loans to institutions in the event of catastrophic natural or man-made disasters.

The colleges and universities in Louisiana, particularly those in the New Orleans area, remain in many ways fi-

nancially crippled by Hurricane Katrina. Three years after Katrina and Rita devastated Louisiana and Mississippi these institutions still have nearly \$700 million in unrecovered losses. The estimates for Gustav and Ike are still not finalized but at this stage the damage is purported to be at least \$46 million to state colleges and universities alone.

Before Katrina, the 11 colleges and universities in the New Orleans area educated 70,000 students. Today that number is only 50,000 but it continues to slowly rebound. This growth comes despite the fact that our institutions of higher education experienced more than \$1 billion in physical damages and operational losses due to the 2005 hurricanes and have recovered less than half of those losses. Higher education institutions are the largest employers in New Orleans both before and after Katrina. The higher education industry in New Orleans continues to attract millions of research dollars and supports industries as diverse as biotechnology, aerospace and medicine. The work of each institution in the city can be seen in every aspect of the region's recovery, from the redesign of the city's troubled public schools to coastal restoration and hurricane protection to the provision of health care across the region. They engage in this important work even as they continue to struggle with mounting revenue losses, buildings that remain in disrepair due to flooding and the loss of key faculty and staff.

I call today on the Secretary of Education to make the Education Disaster Loan program a top regulatory priority. It is my understanding that some Department of Education officials have said that they will not promulgate regulations on any newly create programs in the Higher Education Act until funds are appropriated. This simply is not acceptable. This issue has become a major roadblock in the current disaster funding process, and it is my hope that the Secretary and the Department will move expeditiously to establish regulations so that the program may provide crucial assistance to the colleges and universities impacted by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, Ike and the Midwest Floods.

This is a program I was proud to author, design, shepherd through the last Congress to help all the colleges and universities that have been so hard hit, and a portion of the community development block grant loans that we have provided could possibly go to help our universities.

NEW ORLEANS REGION HOSPITAL DISASTER FUNDING

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I rise to highlight the continued and critical need for post-Katrina health care recovery funding for those hospitals that have struggled to this day to provide critical medical services in the New Orleans region. The Congress has been ex-

tremely helpful to the State of Louisiana in providing funding support for many Katrina and Rita recovery purposes. However, minimal assistance has been provided to enable the greater New Orleans area hospitals to maintain adequate and required health care operations. The affected hospitals, specifically East Jefferson General Hospital, Ochsner Health System, Touro Infirmary, Tulane Medical Center, University Hospital, and West Jefferson Medical Center, provided over 90 percent of all regional hospital-based health care, and are expected to do so for at least the next five years. It is vitally important that this health care base be maintained in order to preserve other recovery efforts throughout the region.

Louisiana hospital executives have testified before Congress concerning the post-Katrina health care funding crisis caused by escalating expenses that significantly outpaced revenues, with no immediate stabilization expected; post-Katrina labor expenses that increased by \$140 million; non-labor expenses—i.e. utilities, insurance, interest, bad debts—that increased by \$300 million; and fewer skilled healthcare professionals. The regional hospitals are experiencing reduced bond ratings—with defaults looming—increased marketing and recruiting expenses, and even a loss of leadership. The Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General—OIG—and the General Accounting Office, through extensive and voluntary audits, have objectively validated the magnitude of these post-Katrina financial losses and the demonstrated need for New Orleans regional hospital disaster assistance.

To stabilize critical health care services in the region, the New Orleans area hospitals require a federal funding "bridge" as they transition to a firmer economic base through adjusted wage indexes and other revenue streams. The hospitals are at a critical tipping point in financial losses, and each is determining the steps necessary to remain medically and fiscally sound. Without funding support, the potential reduction in health care services will impact the fragile recovery of the entire New Orleans region.

In the pending appropriations bill now before this body, Social Service Block Grant funding is provided to partially address health care and other needs resulting from Katrina, Rita and other hurricanes and natural disasters. I intend to work closely with the President, the Secretary of Department of Health and Human Services, and other Federal officials to ensure that sufficient block grant funding is provided to the New Orleans regional hospitals to ensure the stability of health care services in the Katrina-affected regions.

Again, I was instrumental in crafting this program to help hospitals that, with the electricity off and the city underwater, stayed open by the sheer