

to allow for caucus luncheons. There will be no rollcall votes during today's session. We will continue to work on an agreement to finish the appropriations bill during the day. Senators should expect the next rollcall vote to occur on Monday.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader, the Senator from Kentucky, is recognized.

VETERANS DAY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, tomorrow is Veterans Day, the day we set aside to honor the service and sacrifice of the heroic men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. America remains a beacon of freedom throughout the world today because of commitments and sacrifices they have made. Over the years, many brave Americans donned their country's uniform to ensure we would remain safe and free at home. That effort continues today as our fighting forces courageously defend freedom from threats in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere around the world.

My own State of Kentucky has a proud military history, and today is home both to Fort Knox and Fort Campbell, which together house thousands of soldiers. Many have gone from vital training at these two posts to protecting our Nation in the heart of the fight in Afghanistan and Iraq.

So tomorrow, as America takes a moment to thank these brave men and women who fought to preserve our way of life and to remember the heroes who did not return home, we will also give thanks for the men and women in uniform who are currently in harm's way.

I might say, every Veterans Day I remember my own father, who served in World War II. He arrived in Europe after the Battle of the Bulge and was there until his unit met the Russians in Pilsen. One of my treasured possessions is a letter he wrote to my mother on V-E Day. They called it V-E Day at the time. He wrote "V-E Day" at the top of the letter. That began a series of correspondence in that period right after the cease-fire and the Germans' surrender in which he had at one point prophetically—and this was just a foot soldier—prophetically mentioned to my mother after his experience interacting with the Russians in Pilsen that they were going to be a big problem down the road. I thought it was quite noteworthy that a regular foot soldier sort of instinctively understood at the moment that the Russians were an ally of convenience in World War II and not a long-term ally.

Regretfully, both my mother and father are no longer living, but I do remember them fondly and reread their correspondence from time to time of that period when he was overseas.

Later today, the Fort Hood community will honor the victims of the trag-

ic shootings there last week. We were all shocked by the assault on American soldiers right in the heart of a post they call home. We mourn their loss, and we pray for the victims and their families.

In the midst of this terrible tragedy, we also saw the courage of many troops and civilian law enforcement, and we thank these brave men and women for their dedication that they showed in putting themselves in harm's way.

So we honor every American who has fought for this country, and we recognize this country was built on what they have sacrificed.

I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the second half.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum and request that the time of the quorum call be charged evenly to both sides under morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business.

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

FORT HOOD SHOOTING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, of course, the Nation will observe Veterans Day this week, as we have each year, in commemoration of the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month with the end of World War I. This commemoration is one of special importance this year. We are in the midst of two wars where literally tens of thousands of Americans risk their lives each day in service of our country. It gives us a heightened awareness of our military and the men and women who show such extraordinary courage in serving.

Many of us have taken on the task of reaching out to the families in our States who have lost soldiers in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. When I took on this responsibility a few years ago, I had no idea that by 2009, I would still be writing notes of condolence to families in Illinois. But it continues

and, of course, other tragedies intervene.

Just last week, there was the tragedy at Fort Hood, claiming two lives of Illinois soldiers, as well as those of 11 others, and another 28 seriously wounded. It is a reminder of the danger of this commitment that each soldier makes. It is a reminder too that each of us needs to have gratitude for their service, not only on this day when we commemorate veterans and their service but around the calendar year.

We seem to be more focused on veterans issues in the midst of war, and that is no surprise. In my office last week, the major veterans organizations came in and talked about the fact that there seems to be more interest in veterans hospitals and veterans benefits and the GI bill than ever before, and it has a lot to do with the fact that we are in the midst of a war.

We also understand this tragedy at Fort Hood has brought a sharpened awareness of the vulnerability and the commitment of our soldiers. All Americans were saddened by this horrific outburst of violence. That the brave men and women who are trained to defend our Nation at war should be cut down on a U.S. Army post on American soil apparently at the hands of an Army doctor is deeply shocking and painful. We grieve for these men and women who died in this despicable act. We pray for their families and the recovery of all those who were injured.

We pray for the soldiers and families stationed at Fort Hood, for the safety of all of our brave men and women in uniform wherever they are stationed. This horrendous attack touches us all deeply. But we know the horror of this tragedy, like the burdens of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, falls hardest on our servicemembers and their families. We want them to know our entire Nation stands with them.

Among the fallen at Fort Hood were two young soldiers from Chicago: PFC Michael Pearson of Bolingbrook, IL, and PVT Francheska Velez from the West Humboldt Park neighborhood in Chicago. Both of these fallen veterans were 21 years of age.

PFC Michael Pearson was an honor roll student in high school and a talented musician who taught himself to play the piano and was passionate about playing guitar. He joined the Army a little over a year ago. He has been training to defuse explosives and roadside bombs and was scheduled to be deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan this January.

He was a devoted son. When his father was laid off from his job, Michael sent money home to buy new tires for the family car.

He leaves behind his mom and dad, Sheryll and Jeff, a sister and two brothers, including one who serves in the Illinois National Guard.

PVT Francheska Velez joined the Army right out of high school. She had already served a year in South Korea and 10 months in Iraq where she drove fuel tankers and disarmed bombs.

Friends say she wanted to make the military a career and hoped one day to be a psychologist and help soldiers cope with the stress of battle.

Private Velez had just returned from Iraq 3 days earlier, 3 days before the shooting, to begin maternity leave. Her father, Juan Guillermo Velez, a Colombian immigrant who never realized his dream of serving in the U.S. military, said his daughter was living his dream "to be part of the military, part of the United States."

In addition to her father, Private Velez leaves her mother Eileen and two older brothers.

Another young soldier from the Chicago area, PFC Najee Hull, of Homewood, IL, is among those wounded in the Fort Hood tragedy. Private Hull is also 21 years old. He was shot three times, twice in the back, once in the knee, as he was preparing to complete paperwork to be deployed to Afghanistan. He remains hospitalized.

I was meeting with representatives of these veterans service groups and lawyers who donate their time to help veterans when the names of the Fort Hood victims became known. There was a profound sense of sadness in the room.

The men and women who wear America's uniform are some of the finest people our Nation has to offer. They are patriots who are willing to sacrifice to protect each and every one of us. They and their families have endured great hardship during these wars. They are heroes, such as CAPT Russell Seager of Racine, WI. Captain Seager was a nurse practitioner who had worked at a Veterans Affairs hospital in Milwaukee with soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. He was 51 years of age. His uncle said he had been a "helper" all his life. Four years ago, he joined the Army Reserve. Captain Seager was scheduled to go to Afghanistan in December. He had gone to Fort Hood for training. He is among the 12 soldiers and one civilian who died there. He leaves a wife and 20-year-old son.

A few months ago, in an interview with Milwaukee's public radio station, Captain Seager explained his decision to enlist. He said:

I've always had a great deal of respect for the military and for service, and I just felt it was time that I stepped up and did it.

That is part of what defines America's military members and veterans. This Wednesday, we will remember and honor all our veterans, from Bunker Hill to Baghdad. We will remember, in particular, those brave men and women who lost their lives at Fort Hood.

President Obama, Army Chief of Staff General Casey, and Secretary of the Army John McHugh have ordered a thorough investigation into how this tragedy at Fort Hood occurred. The inquiry must happen. We need answers, and we need to do everything possible to ensure it never happens again. While the authorities are investigating, we also need to be thoughtful and reserve judgment about the proper response.

Consider this: One week before the gunman allegedly opened fire on his fellow soldiers at Fort Hood, U.S. military investigators released a report regarding another horrific incident. Last May, an army sergeant, with 15 years in the military, killed five of his fellow soldiers on a military base in Baghdad. The soldiers, including an Army psychiatrist, were killed in a stress clinic where the gunman was being counseled. The soldier who committed the killings was just weeks away from finishing his third tour of duty in Iraq and had served previously in Bosnia and Kosovo. Until the terrible events at Fort Hood, the shooting at Camp Liberty was the worst episode of soldier-on-soldier violence.

The father of the soldier charged with the Camp Liberty killings said his son's job in Iraq was defusing bombs and that he probably saw "a lot of carnage and a lot of things he shouldn't have seen, that nobody should see." The military investigators who looked into those deaths blamed a lack of adequate guidelines on how to handle soldiers under such severe distress.

To rush to judgment based on this new act of violence at Fort Hood is premature, certainly to the 3,500 Muslim Americans who proudly serve in our Nation's Armed Forces today. As you walk through the section of Arlington Cemetery devoted to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, you will find headstones with the crescent star alongside the crosses and Stars of David.

As investigators search for answers to what happened last week, we owe it to the brave men and women serving at Fort Hood and throughout our military to think clearly and act thoughtfully. We need a better understanding of what took place. Let us honor those who demonstrated the best our military has to offer when their lives were on the line at Fort Hood.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I come to the floor, as I have many times, with Senator WHITEHOUSE, my colleague from Rhode Island, Senator UDALL of New Mexico, and others to talk about health care and, in many cases, to share letters I have received from people in my State. These letters have several things in common. Typically, they are letters from people who thought they had good health care, if you asked them a year ago. Then they had a child with a preexisting condition and they lost their health insurance or maybe they got sick themselves and found that their health insurance was canceled because of a policy insurance companies use called rescission. Often these are people who were middle class but because of health care expenses due to an illness, coupled with insurance policies that were far less than ade-

quate, it meant they no longer were middle class.

I have read letters from families who were consistently denied care because of a loved one's cancer or asthma. I have read letters from people who pointed out that if a woman is a victim of domestic violence, some insurance companies call that a preexisting condition and they literally can't get insurance because they are deemed to be more likely to again be a victim of domestic violence. I have read letters from small business owners who see double-digit premium increases year after year, especially if 1 of their 15 or 20 employees gets very sick, with very expensive care, and the insurance company raises the rate so much that the small business owner can no longer afford the insurance.

Many of the letters I have read are from individuals in their late fifties or early sixties who have lost their jobs and, therefore, have also lost their insurance. They write of the anxiety they feel and the hope that they can—in their words—make it to 65 so I can get on Medicare because I know Medicare will not deny me for a preexisting condition. I know I can count on Medicare. I know Medicare will be stable.

Last Saturday night, as we all know, a historic vote in the House of Representatives brought us one step closer to passing a law that will finally meet the promise of equality and affordable health care for the American people. We have been trying for 75 years—the last 100 years. Theodore Roosevelt first tried—a Republican—to pass health care. Then Franklin Roosevelt tried, then Harry Truman tried. They were Democrats. Lyndon Johnson was able to push Medicare through Congress, as we know. That was very difficult because of some of the same interest groups—insurance companies and others—that oppose this legislation now. Richard Nixon tried to build a catastrophic health insurance that would have been a major step—a Republican. So we know how long this has been happening, and that makes Saturday night's vote even more important.

Last week, I had the opportunity to be with Ohioans who oppose these health care changes and who wanted to share their thoughts and concerns. Some don't agree that article 1 of the Constitution permits health care reform. I spoke to a young man who said that all these health care reforms are unconstitutional because article 1 doesn't allow us to do that. I said: Does that mean we should eliminate Medicare? He said: Yes, because article 1 doesn't allow for Medicare. I am not a lawyer, but I certainly don't read the Constitution that way. I don't think many of my colleagues do and I think it is clear Medicare is constitutional and it is clear what we are doing today is equally so.

But I wished to run through the four things that were said with probably the most frequency in my meetings last week with people who are opposed to