

stateside into facilities in American communities and neighborhoods. That sense-of-the-Senate resolution passed 94 to 3. Rarely do we see such unanimous, bipartisan opposition for the very acts the Attorney General announced last Friday, and it is with good reasons, some of which I have had the opportunity to discuss today. But there are other reasons that I will look for opportunities to come back and talk about to my colleagues.

I would ask the President of the United States to overrule the decision of his Attorney General because it is ill-advised. It will make America a more dangerous place, and it will allow terrorists such as Khalid Shaikh Mohammed—it will provide them the platform to spew their hateful ideology and encourage others to join them in killing innocent Americans and other individuals.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MILITARY TRANSITION

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, this afternoon the Senate will resume consideration of the Military Construction and Department of Veterans Affairs appropriations bill. This critical legislation will provide full funding for veterans health care and other essential VA services.

Last week, Mr. President, as I am sure you and many of my colleagues did, I had the opportunity to meet with veterans around my State, really for 2 days, and I came back to Washington with a renewed commitment to provide our Nation's veterans with full support and the benefits they so clearly deserve.

Passing this VA appropriations bill is an important step toward fulfilling the promise we make to our veterans when they enlist: that we will take care of them when they return home. I figure, when they signed up for war there was no waiting line, so when they come home to the United States of America and they need a job or they need health care or they need any type of help from this government, there should not be a waiting line.

But funding the VA's health care system—as we are doing this week—and other existing veterans programs is only part of fulfilling that promise. Another critical component of fulfilling that promise is helping our newest generation of veterans make the difficult transition from military to civilian life—and what a difficult transition it is. New figures have recently come out that show that for post-9/11 veterans, their unemployment in October was 11.6 percent—significantly above the national average. But, like many of the

national unemployment rate statistics, this statistic conceals the true scope of the problem. Here is the number to remember: 18. Eighteen percent of veterans who left the military in the past 1 to 3 years are unemployed, according to a 2008 Department of Veterans Affairs employment survey. Of those veterans who have found work, 25 percent earn less than \$21,800 per year and only 58 percent of veterans who are employed have been able to find work in the private sector.

These are the people whom I saw when I was at home. One of the things that came to my attention was that a number of them would choose, if they could, to pursue apprenticeships. A lot of them want to go to college for 2-year or 4-year degrees. We have large numbers of returning soldiers in college in Minnesota. One of the things I found from visiting some of our technical colleges is that a number of them would like to choose to pursue a different way to find a job.

A recent VA survey of private sector employers found there is a perception that servicemembers do not perform duties within tightly defined skill sets. The study concluded there should be a greater emphasis placed on business and professional training of veterans coupled with increased efforts to match their skills with available jobs. That is why I introduced bipartisan legislation last week, joined by Senator JOHANNIS of Nebraska and Senator MURRAY of Washington, to help Iraq and Afghanistan veterans obtain the training and experience necessary for full-time employment by allowing them to use their post-9/11 GI bill benefits for job training and apprenticeship programs.

As my colleagues know, last year, under the leadership of Senator WEBB, we passed into law the Post-9/11 Veterans' Educational Assistance Act, which will provide the men and women who served on active duty since September 11, 2001, with comprehensive educational benefits similar to those World War II veterans received. While I believe there is no greater investment we can make in the future of our veterans than granting them the chance to pursue the higher education of their choosing, I also believe we must not limit veterans' opportunities to only the pursuit of academic degrees. Not every returning soldier chooses to go to college, but they still want a job. Job training, from pipefitting to law enforcement, should also be covered by the GI bill.

Our legislation, the Post-9/11 Veterans' Job Training Act, would allow veterans who wish to enter the workforce immediately rather than pursuing an academic degree to use their post-9/11 GI bill benefits to obtain critical training and job skills.

Specifically, veterans enrolled in an on-the-job training or apprenticeship program could use their benefits to pay for a percentage of their monthly housing costs, which would decline over a period of months; certification and

testing fees; relocation and travel expenses; and tutoring costs. We put these things together based on our discussion with veterans across the country to see what their exact needs were to make it easier for them to go through the pipefitting apprenticeship programs and others that land them in the workforce more immediately.

In order to qualify under this legislation, veterans must be enrolled in programs that have been approved by their State's accrediting agency. As under the old GI bill, veterans can also receive a salary from their employer during this training. This bill will restore the same eligibility and benefits for job training and apprenticeship programs that were available to veterans under the Montgomery GI bill, but are no longer available under the post-9/11 GI bill.

I talked to Senator WEBB and I know there were some reasons this got changed. He is, in fact, supportive of including this, because we have seen this skyrocketing unemployment rate, in part because of the economy, and we want to find every opportunity we can for our veterans to find work.

According to the VA, up to 10 percent of veterans use their Montgomery GI bill benefits for education other than college or graduate school, including for on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. Through this legislation, post-9/11 veterans will be able to use their expanded benefits for the very same purposes. In Minnesota alone, there are over 50 such programs currently providing training and employment opportunities to veterans, including jobs in law enforcement, construction, engineering, and education.

I was at one of these institutions in Minneapolis this last week and met with some of our veterans, some of whom have done multiple tours in Iraq and one who was leaving in a few months, and they found it very helpful to return to these apprenticeship programs—some of which involve incredibly complex subjects—offering them the opportunity to learn those trades, and this will greatly help them so they can better afford these programs. By applying the new GI bill benefits they have earned toward these programs, veterans can acquire the skills and experience they need for success in the civilian workforce.

Last week, President Obama signed an Executive Order creating a Council on Veterans Employment and directing each Federal agency and department to establish an office to focus on the hiring of veterans. Like the President, I am committed to ensuring that veterans have a path to stable employment when they leave the military.

One other piece of legislation I wish to mention, because I am hopeful it will be included in our health care reform, is the Veterans to Paramedics Transition Act which I introduced along with Senator ENZI. It helps returning veterans with medical training to pursue further education as paramedics. One of the things I found in our

State was that in rural areas of the country—rural areas of Minnesota, rural areas of Virginia, rural areas in Wyoming—there are not enough paramedics. Here we have these returning soldiers who are trained in this area, but for them to have to move again and to go through an entire 2 years of training can be very difficult. The idea is not to say no training is needed but to simply give them some credit; set up rules to make it easy for colleges to give them credit for that on-the-job training they had as paramedics in Iraq and Afghanistan. It involves two problems: the problem of returning veterans who don't have jobs, and the problem of the lack of paramedics in the rural areas. So we are very hopeful, with the help of Senator ENZI and Senator HARKIN, that we will be able to get this bill on the health care reform bill.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass not just the Veterans to Paramedics Act but also this bill we introduced last week to make it easier for veterans, when they come home—our soldiers—to choose if they want to go to a pipefitting program or to go to a law enforcement program. For those veterans, there will probably be 10 percent of them who don't feel at that moment that they want to pursue an academic degree, but they need a job.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor, and I note the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2010

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3082, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3082) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2010, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Johnson-Hutchison amendment No. 2730, in the nature of a substitute.

Udall (NM) amendment No. 2737 (to amendment No. 2730), to make available from Medical Services, \$150,000,000 for homeless veterans comprehensive service programs.

Johnson amendment No. 2733 (to amendment No. 2730), to increase by \$50,000,000 the amount available for the Department of Veterans Affairs for minor construction projects for the purpose of converting unused Department of Veterans Affairs structures into housing with supportive services for homeless veterans, and to provide an offset.

Franken-Johnson amendment No. 2745 (to amendment No. 2730), to ensure that \$5,000,000 is available for a study to assess the feasibility and advisability of using service dogs for the treatment or rehabilitation of veterans with physical or mental injuries or disabilities.

Inouye amendment No. 2754 (to amendment No. 2730), to permit \$68,500,000, as requested by the Missile Defense Agency of the Department of Defense, to be used for the construction of a test facility to support the Phased Adaptive Approach for missile defense in Europe, with an offset.

Coburn amendment No. 2757 (to amendment No. 2730), to require public disclosure of certain reports.

Durbin amendment No. 2759 (to amendment No. 2730), to enhance the ability of the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit and retain health care administrators and providers in underserved rural areas.

Durbin amendment No. 2760 (to amendment No. 2730), to designate the North Chicago Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Illinois, as the "Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center."

Johanns amendment No. 2752 (to amendment No. 2730), prohibiting use of funds to fund the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN).

Akaka amendment No. 2740 (to amendment No. 2730), to extend the authority for a regional office of the Department of Veterans Affairs in the Republic of the Philippines.

Menendez amendment No. 2741 (to amendment No. 2730), to provide, with an offset, an additional \$4,000,000 for grants to assist States in establishing, expanding, or improving State veterans cemeteries.

DeMint (for Inhofe) amendment No. 2774 (to amendment No. 2730), to prohibit the use of funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this act to construct or modify a facility in the United States or its territories to permanently or temporarily hold any individual held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

DeMint amendment No. 2779 (to amendment No. 2730), to prohibit the use of funds for the transfer or detention in the United States of detainees at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, if certain veterans programs for fiscal year 2010 are not fully funded.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, as we come back from the Veterans Day recess, the Senate resumes consideration of the MILCON-VA appropriations bill. As I have stated several times on the floor during this debate, this is a vital piece of legislation that needs to be passed as quickly as possible.

As I speak, the VA is operating under a stopgap funding measure. Funding the VA in that manner is far from ideal and interrupts planning and hiring at VA hospitals. The bill before the Senate today protects against this sort of problem in the future by providing \$48.2 billion in advance appropriations for VA medical care. This is something that is supported by both sides of the aisle. In fact, this bill is one of the most bipartisan measures that we take up every year. That is why it mystifies me that we seem to be in a holding pattern.

One of the most critical parts of this bill is medical care for our Nation's vets. The VA is expecting to treat almost 6.1 million patients in fiscal year 2010, an increase of 2.1 percent over last year. Moreover, the Department estimates it will see the number of Iraq and Afghanistan war vets rise to 419,000 this year, a 61-percent increase in patient load since 2008. With these facts in mind, the bill targets the vast majority of discretionary funding for vets' medical care. The bill provides a total of \$44.7 billion for medical care. Additionally, it provides \$580 million for vital medical and prosthetic research. This is one of the many reasons why we need to get this bill passed and sent to conference as soon as possible.

In addition, hundreds of urgent military construction projects are on hold awaiting passage of this bill.

Under a unanimous consent agreement entered into last Monday, there are 27 amendments in order to this bill and one motion. As I understand it, we will soon be voting on one of the amendments and the motion to commit. Between now and the time of the vote, I wish to try to clear some of the other amendments that are in order to the bill. I have read all these amendments, and the vast majority are not controversial. It seems to me we should be able to clear them. If there are objections to any of these amendments, I urge my colleagues to come to the floor and express what objections they may have.

Taking care of our vets and our military troops and their families is one of the most important tasks of this body. Surely, we can all work together and pass this bill quickly.

AMENDMENT NO. 2781 TO AMENDMENT NO. 2779

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator DURBIN, I send a second-degree amendment to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. JOHNSON], for Mr. DURBIN, proposes an amendment numbered 2781 to amendment 2779.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

At the end of the amendment, add the following:

The provision of the amendment shall become effective 1 day after enactment.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.