

North Dakota, in South Dakota, in Texas, Louisiana, and other States. They are experiencing really very low numbers of unemployment because the jobs are plentiful. Our challenge is, just to comment briefly, on training the workforce we are going to need to fill all the jobs we have. These are very good-paying jobs, some starting at \$40,000 or \$60,000 a year—construction, welders—going up to \$125,000. Some are temporary, but many of them will be permanent.

So I hope we can resolve this unemployment issue, because, unfortunately, in Senator REED's State—the State of Rhode Island—and in 20 other States there is very high unemployment. In some States it might still be over 9 percent. They are chronically unemployed because of the competition of globalization and other factors. So I think we have to try to find a way to work together as a Nation. As I said, Louisiana is blessed to have relatively low unemployment, but we have a big job skills training gap we are working on in our State.

VETERANS AFFAIRS MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASE AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2013

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I want to actually talk a few minutes this evening about a very important bill the House just passed by an extraordinary vote of 346 to 1. My colleague, Congressman BOUSTANY in the House, was the lead sponsor, and I want to really congratulate him for his extraordinary work on this particular bill. It is something he and I have worked together on across party lines. He is a Republican and I am a Democrat, but we worked very closely together to get this entire bill passed not only for the benefit of Louisiana—which is shaded here on this chart as one of the States that would benefit—but we can see here how many other States between 2013 and 2017 will be affected positively by the passage of this bill.

The bill is the Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Lease Authorization Act. That is a mouthful, but it takes important action. It basically uses the guidance of the Office of Management and Budget—we received a letter from them at my request—and formulates a piece of legislation that will allow the Veterans Administration to build clinics the way they have been building clinics for our veterans—who really need the highest and best quality care—using a lease arrangement.

The reason we had to pass this bill—and I will be working with Senator VITTER and many others to ask unanimous consent at the proper time for this bill to pass through the Senate—is because about 6 years ago there was an administrative ruling that basically stopped the ability of the Veterans Affairs Department to be able to build these very needed veterans clinics by using a lease.

Internally, the administration just decided to score it differently. That threw lots of sand into the gears, and those gears have been stuck for 6 years. In our State, veterans in Lafayette and in Lake Charles have been waiting and waiting and waiting. We had some added complications, which the Veterans Administration has taken the blame for, in that the bid process that was used initially for one of our clinics was defective and they had to throw it out.

But the end of this sad story is that a great bill passed the House of Representatives, literally just a few hours ago, and I wanted to come to the floor to say how proud I am of Congressman BOUSTANY and his dogged pursuit of justice. The district of Congressman BOUSTANY is in the part of the State where these two clinics will be built, in Lafayette and Lake Charles, so I worked closely with him, as has Senator VITTER, to make sure we brought some clarity and focus to this issue in order to move forward. As the bill moved through to help us with our problem, it turns out it is also going to help many other States that are scheduled for veterans clinics.

I also want to thank Congressman MILLER of Florida, who is the chair of the VA committee. He worked very closely with Congressman BOUSTANY. Also I want to thank BERNIE SANDERS, our Senator from Vermont who chairs our committee here. Senator SANDERS—whose desk is right here, next to mine—has been very supportive of this effort. While I am not going to ask unanimous consent at this moment, he and I have had a discussion earlier today about how strongly he supports this effort and how much he wants to help us get this done.

There are 27 clinics in 22 States. This process—or nightmare, I should say—began in Louisiana about 6 years ago. Four years ago the ruling was made, but our legislation that was passed in the House will override that and basically set us on a course that is both fiscally responsible and so important to our veterans. We must honor the promises we made to them that we would provide clinics close enough so they could access them and so they are not driving hundreds of miles for regular care. We can be very smart in the way we design these leases so it will be a benefit to the taxpayer, a benefit to the veterans and it will really meet our obligation to them.

So again, the bill just passed the House, and tomorrow I will be asking unanimous consent, along with Senator VITTER, to move this bill, to get it to the President's desk and get it signed so that veterans who have been waiting—particularly in our State—for so long will have something extra special to celebrate this Christmas holiday.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

COMMENDING SENATOR MURRAY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, a couple years ago I surprised everyone—but I didn't surprise myself—when I selected PATTY MURRAY as chair of the supercommittee. At the time Patty was chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, she was a member of the Budget Committee, and I thought she would do a remarkably good job because I had such faith in her integrity, her temperament, her wisdom, and her ability to get things done.

The country should be so pleased with the work she was able to do on a bipartisan basis with PAUL RYAN. It is really a kind of unconventional pair working together to come up with a budget that we can work on for 2 years. We have numbers now. I am very pleased that budget negotiators MURRAY and RYAN have come up with an agreement today that will roll back the painful arbitrary cuts of sequester and prevent another costly government shutdown. I again commend Budget Committee chairman PATTY MURRAY for making this possible. But it is also fair—and I hope this doesn't get him in trouble in the House—to say that Chairman RYAN also worked hard. It was a compromise. We didn't get what we wanted, they didn't get what they wanted, but that is what legislation is all about—working together. “Compromise” is not a bad word.

We believed all along that Congress should set sound fiscal policy through the regular order of the budget process and not through hostage-taking or crisis-making. We will have a lot more to say about this in the days to come, but this is a good day for our country.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed now to a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise today in recognition of International Human Rights Day. Sixty-five years ago, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which serves as a foundation for human rights initiatives internationally, and is an enduring guide for human rights advocates around the globe.

On this annual celebration of International Human Rights Day we all

mourn with heavy hearts the loss of Nelson Mandela, a man who devoted his life to promoting human rights, freedom, and harmony.

Humanity has lost one of its greatest leaders with the passing of Madiba, or “father,” as he was lovingly called. My prayers go out to his family and all the people of South Africa. He was a personal hero of mine, and of those who work to uphold human rights around the world. He led his nation not only in overcoming the divisions of racism, but in reconciling and healing. Throughout his life Nelson Mandela never stopped fighting for the oppressed, speaking out for the voiceless, and given hope to the hopeless. One of the greatest leaders may have left this world but the lessons he taught us about human dignity, sacrifice, perseverance, and perhaps the most powerful lesson of all—forgiveness—will live on forever.

In 1964, Nelson Mandela was convicted of treason and sentenced to life in prison for his part in the fight for racial equality in apartheid South Africa. At his trial Mandela said:

I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

Thankfully Mandela did not die during his years of imprisonment, and instead after enduring the unthinkable with grace and dignity, he emerged to lead a country to self determination, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

In 1990, when Nelson Mandela was finally released after 10,000 days of imprisonment, his spirit was stronger than ever. Ten thousand days in prison were not enough to break his spirit and his devotion to the freedom of all people. In his autobiography, Mandela wrote “. . . to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

And that he did. His democratic ideals were unwavering. He led by example, living a relatively modest life, refusing to reside in the presidential mansion, and serving only one term as South Africa's first black President.

Mandela's influence on the continent, and indeed around the world, does not end with his passing. His story and moral courage has changed countless lives forever. As he once said, “the true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.” State and Federal lawmakers across the United States looked to Mandela as an inspiration when crafting laws that mandated divestment from South Africa's cruel Apartheid regime. I had the privilege of serving as speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates when we passed such legislation. Years later, our Nation is still striving to follow in Mandela's footsteps and fully realize his dream of peace and equality for all of mankind.

As President Obama said, Mandela “took history in his hands, and bent the arc of the moral universe toward justice.” And so on this International Human Rights Day, we pay tribute to the great Madiba, the father of a free and peaceful South Africa, a legendary African, and a shining example for future generations of change-makers who have inherited a better world because of his great deeds.

TRIBUTE TO MARY ELLEN MCCARTHY

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, when people think of government, some of the first words that may come to mind are politics and bureaucracy, two things that tend to stifle progress. Today, however, I have the great pleasure of honoring someone who has spent her many years on the Hill overcoming these barriers. She has implemented changes and fixed problems to improve the lives of veterans and their families in a very real way. Now, as she moves into retirement, she leaves behind an example to which we should all aspire.

Mary Ellen McCarthy has spent the last 7 years of her distinguished career serving as the lead investigator for the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the decade before that as staff director for two subcommittees of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. In that time, she has visited nearly every Department of Veterans Affairs regional office and reviewed thousands of benefits claims. She has not only identified gaps in services to veterans and their families, but also problems within VA. Most importantly, Mary Ellen never rested with the identification of a problem. Instead, she found solutions to meet the needs of veterans and their families and worked relentlessly to ensure they were put into place as quickly as possible.

Among her many achievements, Mary Ellen will be forever recognized for her extraordinary work in ensuring Vietnam era veterans and their families receive the benefits to which they are entitled. She has worked tirelessly to identify the many veterans whose exposure to dangerous toxins was previously overlooked. Her efforts have helped veterans with service on the inland waterways of Vietnam, along the DMZ in Korea, and on the perimeters of Air Force Bases in Thailand. Her work has led to vindication and assistance to those suffering from health problems related to Agent Orange exposure. Her efforts did not stop with the veterans themselves, however. She also brought attention to the children who are born with spina bifida, as a result of their parents' exposure to Agent Orange.

So much of Mary Ellen's work has focused on those most in need—elderly and low-income veterans and surviving family members. For example, one of Mary Ellen's investigations revealed the surviving spouses of veterans who had been receiving VA disability bene-

fits were not receiving the payments to which they were entitled during the month of their spouse's passing. These payments not only help with funeral costs, but provide some time to make other financial arrangements. Her discovery of this oversight and subsequent actions resulted in approximately 200,000 surviving spouses receiving more than \$124 million in benefits, allowing them to focus on moving forward after the death of a loved one.

Mary Ellen has also been heavily involved in working toward elimination of the claims backlog, a challenge that has plagued the Department for decades and caused far too many veterans unnecessary hardship. Before she came to Capitol Hill, she spent two decades working as a nurse and then a lawyer, helping low-income and elderly individuals obtain government benefits. This experience gave her a unique insight into the challenges of claims processing and she has been able to offer a number of solutions that may otherwise have been overlooked.

These are just a few examples of the very real contributions Mary Ellen has made to the veterans community throughout her career. To those who have had the pleasure of working with her, Mary Ellen has been an inspiration—working tirelessly to provide assistance to those who have served this great Nation—a true veterans' advocate.

As she enters into her much deserved retirement, she can rest easy knowing her efforts will continue benefiting veterans and their families for generations to come, which is, as she is known to say, not bad for an old lady.

Mary Ellen, thank you for your years of advocacy on behalf of our Nation's veterans. I wish you only the best in retirement. •

TRIBUTE TO SIMEON BOOKER

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, today I wish to honor Simeon Booker as he receives an honorary doctor of letters from Youngstown State University on December 15, 2013. Mr. Booker has devoted his life's work to chronicling the history of the civil rights movement in America.

As an African-American college student in the 1940s and 1950s, Mr. Booker experienced discrimination firsthand at what was then Youngstown College. Refusing to accept the indignities he found there, he transferred to Virginia Union University where he continued to champion the rights of Black students.

Early in his career, he was hired by his hometown newspaper, the Youngstown Vindicator, where he would write local columns focused on the city's African-American population and summaries for the local Black baseball leagues. He went on to work for the Cleveland Call and Post and was offered the esteemed Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University in the 1950s.

Mr. Booker became the first Black reporter for the Washington Post in