

CONGRESSIONAL VETERANS JOBS CAUCUS

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, just over a year ago my good friend, Senator MARK KIRK of Illinois, and I launched a new caucus in the Senate. Our purpose was to bring attention to the problem of unemployment among our military veterans. Mark and I looked at everything the Department of Veterans Affairs and other government agencies were doing to help veterans find jobs. We believed the private sector needed to be more involved, so we created the Senate Veterans Jobs Caucus.

Today, the Senate Veterans Jobs Caucus is the Congressional Veterans Jobs Caucus. It is a bicameral, bipartisan group of 37 Senators and 46 House Members brought together by a shared commitment to the newest generation of veterans.

This week we are kicking off the caucus's activities for the 113th Congress with a "Day on The Hill." It is an event highlighting our work on behalf of veterans, and particularly our show-case program, "I Hire Veterans."

Not only will we be recruiting more Members of Congress to join our caucus, but we will also be enlisting more businesses to join the eight major corporate partners that have already joined our ranks. These corporations expect to hire about 200,000 veterans in the next 5 years.

The members of the Congressional Veterans Jobs Caucus are leading by example. We are hiring veterans to work in our Senate and House offices. My colleagues will probably see the signs as they go by our offices that say "I Hire Veterans." It is a logo displayed proudly in our offices—the same logo my colleagues will see in the businesses that share our commitment to veterans.

Our I Hire Veterans Program is basically our new yellow ribbon, a special welcome home and a commitment to serve those who have served our country in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances.

There is no sugarcoating the fact that the job market is tough, especially for our young veterans. Unemployment among these veterans has reached crisis proportions according to the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Listen to these figures, if my colleagues will. They are astonishing. For veterans 18 to 24 years of age, their unemployment rate is 31.3 percent—31 percent. Even more staggering is the jobless rate for female veterans in that same age bracket of 18 to 24, and that is over 55 percent unemployment. The employment situation isn't much better for the National Guard and Reserves because employers are reluctant to hire somebody who may be subject to being called to duty, and this generation of National Guardsmen and Reserves are coming home from a decade of repeated deployment that, in many cases, interrupted or delayed their careers or education. Many of them are just now realizing how difficult it can be to jumpstart school or a career.

If we don't do something it is going to get worse. With more than 100,000 service men and women expected to re-enter civil life each year over the next 5 years, their challenge to find jobs is only going to intensify. Listen to the veterans, and we would be surprised when they tell us that sometimes the stress of finding a job in a tough economy can match the stress of combat in some of the most dangerous and distant places in the world.

Imagine for a moment that you are 21 and just back from the rugged streets of Kandahar, reunited with your family, and you are going up and down the streets of your hometown looking for a job week after week with no luck at all. That is real stress. That is pressure, and that is what more than 3 out of 10 of our young veterans are experiencing right now as we speak.

Like every generation of American warriors before them, today's veterans make great hires. They lead by example. They understand teamwork. They are flexible and open to change. They are tech savvy. And talk about performing under pressure—even in the most stressful situations, with limited resources, they get the job done.

After World War II, with the millions of American GIs returning home, President Harry Truman appointed GEN Omar Bradley to run the Veterans' Administration. Bradley was a popular choice, and his steely approach to helping veterans was widely admired. Bradley's marching orders to the VA were simple: "We are dealing with veterans, not procedures, with their problems, not ours."

You will find that same kind of commitment to today's generation of veterans in the Congressional Veterans Jobs Caucus.

It is simply unacceptable that when the courageous Americans who fight our wars finally get to come home, they have to fight for jobs. The Congressional Veterans Jobs Caucus is committed to making sure that does not happen.

America has said it is time to bring our troops home. After a decade of war and incredible sacrifice by our warriors, the homecomings are well underway. It is not always easy to come home from war. But the homecoming will be easier if we fulfill our obligations, and that includes making sure our fighting men and women come home to a job.

After all, as General Bradley said: "We are dealing with veterans, not procedures, with their problems, not ours."

I would ask all of my colleagues here—we have 37 of our Senators signed up to this Veterans Jobs Caucus—I would hope we would have 100, and we are going to be working hard for that. I want to thank my good friend Senator MARK KIRK from Illinois for helping launch this. We have worked together. We will continue to work with all of our Senators. We appreciate and thank you.

• Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, more than 2 million Americans have served our

Nation in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other post-9/11 missions around the world. Now, as these men and women return home, they are confronting yet another challenge—finding a job.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployment among younger veterans has reached staggering proportions. Nearly one-third of all veterans aged 18–24—and more than half of female veterans in that range—are unemployed.

Roughly 800,000 veterans call Illinois home. And in 2010, Illinois' veteran unemployment rate was the fourth highest in the country.

That is why I joined with my good friend and colleague, Senator JOE MANCHIN (D-WV), in forming the Congressional Veterans Jobs Caucus. And 1 year later, 35 Senators and 46 Representatives from across the political spectrum have joined the effort.

We are bringing together government and business leaders, veteran service organizations, and educational institutions to identify solutions to reduce vets' unemployment. And I am proud to report that several Illinois employers, such as State Farm and Caterpillar are stepping up to help.

At a time when so many see a divided government, we owe it to our veterans to cast aside our differences and work across the aisle to help solve this problem. •

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FILIBUSTER AND A MOTION TO CUT OFF DEBATE

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I come to the floor to attempt to clear up some confusion about Senate procedure. The confusion I wish to address is that some observers of the Senate seem to have a hard time telling the difference between a filibuster that is designed to kill the nomination of a Cabinet member or a judge and a motion by the majority leader to cut off debate. Let me say that again—the difference between a filibuster that is designed to prevent the nomination of a Cabinet member or a judge on one hand or a motion by the majority leader of the Senate to cut off debate.

There is a big difference. But sometimes I read in the newspapers that Republicans are filibustering, for example, Senator Hagel, as if a majority of Republicans or a majority of the Senate intended to deny the confirmation of Senator Hagel through a filibuster, when, in fact, what most of the Republicans were saying was: The nomination of the former Senator has come to the floor only 2 days ago. We have Senators who have legitimate questions about the nomination, and we wish to have some time to discuss it.

In that case, we were forced to have a vote on a motion by the majority leader to cut off debate on Thursday before the recess, even though the

Democratic leadership and the White House had been told by Republican Senators—enough of us—if we voted after the recess there would be plenty of votes to make sure the President's nominee had an up-or-down vote, as we have done throughout history in the U.S. Senate.

Now, for whatever reason, the majority leader and the White House felt they had to push through a vote and then went into a large complaint that Republicans are filibustering the President's nominee, Republicans are obstructionists of the President's nominee, when all we were doing was doing what Senators historically do, which is ask for a sufficient time to exercise our constitutional duty of advice and consent.

Advice and consent is our best known constitutional responsibility. Books have been written about it, movies have been written about it, and speeches have been made about it time after time. If we do not do it, we would be derelict in our duty.

So there is a big difference between asking for time to exercise our constitutional duty of advice and consent and using a filibuster to prevent the nomination of a Cabinet member or a judge.

I went back through history as best I could. The Congressional Research Service has issued a report on what has happened throughout the Senate's history on Cabinet members and judges.

On district judges, according to CRS, no district judge nomination has ever failed to be confirmed because they failed to obtain cloture. Did it take some time? Were questions asked? Yes, of course. That is part of the process. But the fact is, no district court nomination has ever failed to be confirmed because they failed to obtain cloture.

So if the majority leader will wait a sufficient amount of time for the minority members to have their questions answered, a district judge in this body today—and we have proved it time and time again—will not be denied his seat because of a 60-vote cloture vote. There will be an up-or-down vote on a district judge.

The same is true so far with a Cabinet member. The only exception I have found is when the Democrats, unfortunately, used a cloture vote—a 60-vote requirement—to block the nomination of John Bolton, President Bush's nominee to be U.S. Representative to the United Nations.

Some Presidents include that position in the Cabinet; some do not. But aside from that singular incident, which I point out was the Democrats—the Democrats—saying they are going to filibuster a nominee by the President and deny him a seat, so far as I have been able to tell, there has not ever been an instance in the history of the Senate where Republicans have used a filibuster to deny a Cabinet member an up-or-down vote when nominated by a President.

That only leaves circuit judge nominees. Up until 2003, so far as I have

been able to find, the rule of the Senate was that the President's nominees to be on the Federal courts of appeals always received an up-or-down vote. They were decided by a vote of 51.

Then our friends on the Democratic side, when President Bush became President, decided they did not like that and they changed the practice. They began to filibuster President Bush's judges to deny them their seats.

I had just arrived in the Senate in 2003. I was very upset by that because I knew some of the nominees. I knew about Miguel Estrada. I knew how Charles Pickering, in Mississippi, had been a pioneer in the civil rights movement when people said he was not. I knew that William Pryor had been a law clerk to the Honorable John Minor Wisdom, the Federal courts of appeals judge for whom I clerked in New Orleans. I knew these were good people. They just happen to be conservative. They just happen to be Republicans. So our friends on the other side of the aisle said: We are going to filibuster and kill those nominees.

There were three others: Priscilla Owen, Carolyn Kuhl, Janice Brown. All the cloture votes failed. There was no final vote. And then there were four more in 2004. So there were 10 altogether. Democrats for the first time filibustered to kill 10 of President Bush's judges.

That produced a reaction. That produced Republicans who said: OK, we are going to change the rules of the Senate. We are going to make this a majoritarian institution. We are going to decide these questions by 51 votes.

Well, cooler heads prevailed and we adopted a consensus that only in extraordinary cases would Federal appellate court judges be denied their seat by a cloture vote, by a 60-vote margin. In every other case, it would be 51 votes.

Based on the research I have been able to make, only two of President Obama's circuit court nominees have failed to obtain cloture and were not confirmed, and those are Caitlin Halligan and Goodwin Liu.

So the bottom line of history is, no district judge has ever been denied his seat or her seat by a filibuster. No Cabinet member—with the exception of John Bolton by the Democrats, if you want to count that—has been denied his or her seat by a filibuster.

As far as circuit court nominations go, the score is 10 to 2. The Democrats have filibustered to death 10 of President Bush's nominees, and Republicans, in return, have filibustered 2. I think that is an unfortunate precedent. I would like for the Senate to go back to where it was when even a nominee such as Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court of the United States was decided by a majority vote.

In addition to that, of course, there is the question of: Do we filibuster legislation? The answer is yes, we do. And sometimes we do on either side to kill a bill. If a bill comes over here to abol-

ish the secret ballot in union elections, I imagine Republicans will do their best to kill the bill with a 60-vote margin. Democrats would do the same with a right-to-work provision if Republicans were in charge. That has happened throughout history. And with lesser nominations that has happened. If a National Labor Relations Board nominee is controversial, there might be a 60-vote requirement—even with a nomination to the Tennessee Valley Authority.

I remember when the distinguished majority leader held up President Bush's TVA nominees because he thought the President should have appointed Democrats instead of Republicans. I pointed out to him that the law did not say he had to do that. But the majority leader said, well, he was going to hold them up anyway. I could not get him to stop doing that until I held up somebody he wanted from Nevada.

So this has gone on throughout history with lesser nominees. It is a part of the advice and consent of the Senate. It is a way we gather information. It is a way we make a point. It is a way we sometimes get something in exchange. It is a power that an individual Senator has.

As with all the powers we have, it should be exercised with restraint. If all 100 of us exercised all the privileges we have at any given time, nothing would happen.

Let me conclude by remarking my first point. Advice and consent is the best known responsibility of this Senate. It is a constitutional duty. We exercise it diligently. It often involves some delay. It often involves asking for more time to consider someone, getting information that was not easily gotten before. Every Senator knows that the time to ask a nominee about an issue is before that nominee is confirmed. They are able to talk about something, it seems, easily. Their appointments are not hard to get. So that is a part of what we do every day.

But I hope the observers of the Senate will make a distinction in the future between the majority leader's effort to cut off debate and the minority's intention to kill a nominee with a filibuster. Because we do not do it with district judges—never have. We do not do it with Cabinet members—never have. We have done it twice on the Republican side with circuit court judges; Democrats have done it 10 times—both unfortunate precedents, I think. But with Cabinet members and district judges, that is the record.

So there is a difference. There is a difference between asking for a reasonable amount of time to debate and exercise advice and consent and a filibuster with the intention of preventing the nomination entirely, finally, of a judge or a Cabinet member.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, while the Senator from Tennessee is on the floor—and because he referenced the filibuster of district judge nominees—let me say that there was a concerted effort to try to filibuster a district court nominee, one whom Senator REED and myself had a particularly keen interest in, since we recommended this candidate to the President, and it was the Senator from Tennessee, along with 10 of his Republican colleagues, who decided that was not in the best traditions of the Senate and who voted against the filibuster and to allow cloture so that the precedent remains that district judges will not be filibustered. I just want to take this opportunity to thank him for doing that, and to let him know he has my gratitude for that. I think it was in the best interests of the Senate. I do not think the Senator did it in order to gain any gratitude from me. I think he did it because, as a matter of principle, he thought this was the way the Senate should behave. But I certainly do appreciate it and I want to take this moment to say so.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I am here, actually, Mr. President, to once again urge Congress that we have to wake up to the growing threat of climate change. The alarm bells are ringing. The signs are all around us. Yet we continue to sleepwalk through history, ignoring the warnings from the scientific community, from economists and business leaders—even from our military—of long-term shifts in the climate of our planet.

Another alarm has now sounded—this time by the Government Accountability Office, the taxpayers' watchdog. For the first time ever, the threat to the Federal Government of climate change has been included on the Government Accountability Office's High Risk List.

Every 2 years, at the start of a new Congress, GAO—the Government Accountability Office—provides the House and Senate with a list of program areas that are at high risk. GAO was the government's nonpartisan auditor, and the High Risk List is its catalog of threats to the integrity and performance of the Federal Government.

GAO says:

Solutions to high-risk problems offer the potential to save billions of dollars, improve service to the public, and strengthen the performance and accountability of the U.S. government.

House Oversight Committee chairman, DARRELL ISSA, has called the High Risk List “the most important report published.” As we face the indiscriminate spending cuts of the multi-billion-dollar sequester, Chairman ISSA pointed out that “the list represents tremendous opportunities to save those billions of dollars.” It is enough, actually, to prevent the sequester we are careening toward twice over.

Only 55 issues have been elevated to the High Risk List since it first began in 1990. The current list comprises 30 big-ticket problems, such as improving defense program management, protecting the Nation's cyber infrastructure, and modernizing Federal health programs. When a problem reaches GAO's High Risk List, it shouldn't matter if you are a Democrat or a Republican. These issues must be among the top priorities of Congress and of the Nation.

Add now to this list of serious national problems the destabilizing fiscal risk posed by climate change.

The Federal Government and our military—and by definition, the American taxpayer—own and operate hundreds of thousands of buildings and extensive infrastructure in every State, including utilities, flood control and navigation systems, powerplants, distribution networks, and irrigation systems, not to mention the usual roads and bridges. The Federal Government also manages about 650 million acres of land for grazing, for timber, for conservation, and for recreation. That is nearly 30 percent of the total area of the United States, and climate change is affecting virtually all of it.

The overwhelming majority of climate scientists tell us that the air and oceans are warming, that sea level is rising, and that we are changing the very chemistry of our oceans. These changes—some of them unprecedented in human history—increase the risk of extreme weather, such as heat waves, floods, droughts, and storms. As GAO points out, Federal assets in every corner of the country are at risk.

Storms crashing into the Southeast, wildfires burning throughout the West, and floods inundating the Northeast are not just local problems. Droughts are draining aquifers in the Midwest, warm temperatures are melting permafrost in Alaska, and rising, warming, more acidic oceans are eroding our national coast lines and threatening our lives and our seas. These are not just local problems. Climate change is a high-risk threat to our shared national well-being, our shared national wealth, and our shared national heritage.

The GAO High Risk List sounds yet another alarm that we are fools to ignore. For instance, GAO found that neither the National Flood Insurance Program nor the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation is prepared to deal with climate change.

Between 1980 and 2005, the Flood Insurance Program's exposure quadrupled to nearly \$1 trillion. The Crop Insurance Program increased 26-fold to \$44 billion. Yet GAO reports that these programs have not even developed the “information needed to understand their long-term exposure to climate change and not yet analyzed the potential impacts of an increase in the frequency or severity of weather-related events.”

Major private insurance companies such as Allianz, Swiss Re, Munich Re,

and Lloyd's of London have for years been developing strategies to address climate change. Our Federal insurance programs don't even have the basic information to address these risks.

Understanding and preparing for these risks is essential to protect our communities from catastrophic loss. According to NOAA, the value of flood insurance coverage in my home State of Rhode Island was \$2.2 billion in 2011. The Ocean State has received \$57 million in payouts since 1978, some of which helped Rhode Islanders recover from our record floods of 2010 brought on by extremely heavy rainfall. Folks who have flood coverage through the National Flood Insurance Program should know that heavy rainfall has increased in the Northeast by 74 percent since the 1950s, and scientists predict that warmer air will continue to increase the frequency of heavy rainfall and consequent flooding in the Northeast.

Disaster aid is expensive. FEMA has obligated more than \$80 billion in Federal disaster aid between 2004 and 2011. Another \$50.5 billion in emergency aid was just approved for the northeastern communities devastated by Hurricane Sandy. PSE&G, New Jersey's largest utility, plans to spend over \$4 billion over 10 years to make its electric and gas systems more resilient to these severe storms. New Jersey's second largest utility, JDP&L, announced that it intends to spend \$200 million to do the same. According to Jeanne Fox, who is a commissioner on the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, “This is a cost of climate change, pure and simple.”

It is really time for us to wake up. In the private sector, the insurance and utility industries are facing the threat. Congress must now act responsively.

House Oversight Committee ranking member ELIJAH CUMMINGS asked GAO Comptroller Gene Dodaro if it was “GAO's opinion that regardless of the outcome of global negotiations to reduce carbon emissions, the United States Government should take immediate action to mitigate the risk posed by the climate change.” Comptroller General Dodaro responded with a simple and unequivocal “yes.”

In the High Risk List, GAO states that despite any possible future reduction of emissions, “greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere will continue altering the climate system for many decades.” That is the way the laws of physics and chemistry work. Damage with lasting consequences is already done.

Many effects of climate change can be mitigated, and it is the responsibility of this Congress to help our Nation prepare and adapt. Some Federal efforts are underway. In 2003 the U.S. Department of Transportation initiated a study of climate risks to gulf coast transportation. It is now cooperating in that study with the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission. The Bureau of Land Management and