



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 160

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, JUNE 2, 2014

No. 84

Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, a Senator from the State of Connecticut.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Most merciful God, You have been better to us than we deserve. Accept the grateful labors of our lawmakers as they seek to meet the challenges of our times. May they not become weary because of the obstacles they encounter but trust You to order their steps. Hear even the silent prayers of their hearts as they give their time and strength to make America an instrument of Your purposes. Lord, help them to remember it is righteousness that exalts a nation but that sin is an equal opportunity destroyer. May they humble themselves in prayer, seeking Your face as they turn from evil, so You will hear our prayers, forgive our sins, and heal our land.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, June 2, 2014.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, a Senator from the State of Connecticut, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. MURPHY thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

BIPARTISAN SPORTSMEN'S ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to proceed to Calendar No. 384, S. 2363, the Hagan sportsmen's legislation.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 384, S. 2363, a bill to protect and enhance opportunities for recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting, and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 5:30 p.m.

At 5:30 p.m. there will be a rollcall vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Keith Harper to be U.S. Representative to the U.N. Human Rights Council.

CARING FOR VETERANS

Our esteemed colleague, the chairman of the Budget Committee, PATTY MURRAY, has said, "Caring for our veterans is the duty of a grateful nation."

She knows of what she speaks because she led that committee in a very vibrant, positive way as chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I have no doubt every Member of this body agrees with the sentiment she expressed. There is a big difference between nodding one's head in approval and actually doing something to take care of our veterans.

The chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee today is Senator BERNIE SANDERS of Vermont, and he is doing something to help our veterans. The junior Senator from Vermont has introduced a bill to ensure that American veterans are getting the care they need. This legislation allows veterans facing long delays in health care to seek outside help, and they can go to private doctors, community health centers or military bases. Additionally, this bill authorizes the VA to use emergency funding to hire new doctors and nurses, which are badly needed.

Senator SANDERS' legislation increases accountability through the Department of Veterans Affairs, holding senior officials responsible for poor job performance. This is very good legislation. This bill will improve the manner in which the United States of America cares for its veterans, and I hope all Members will support this. In light of the shocking reports of inappropriate practices at the VA, and especially their hospitals, every Senator should support this legislation.

Last week the Veterans Affairs inspector general's office released its report detailing many troubling systemic failures which are unnecessarily putting our Nation's veterans at risk. They are so wrong, and they are putting our Nation's veterans at risk. Instead of receiving the proper care they deserve, thousands of combat veterans have been languishing on nonexistent waiting lists at a VA hospital in Arizona.

The inspector general's report declared that many of these men and women who have been relegated to health care limbo are "at risk of being lost or forgotten." The brave veterans of our Nation's Armed Services should never be lost or forgotten. These soldiers went to war and pledged not to leave their brothers- and sisters-in-arms behind. Now, in their moment of need, some of our most vulnerable veterans have been left behind. We must

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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never allow any servicemember—past or present—to simply fall through the cracks.

Now that the Senate has returned from its State work period, we should pass Senator SANDERS' bill as soon as possible, ensuring that our veterans get the care they deserve. Yet even as Senate Democrats try to improve the reliability of our veterans health care, certain Republican Members of Congress are content to scapegoat the VA. Even more disappointing is the fact that these same Republicans have, through their obstruction, deprived the VA of essential resources it needs to help veterans.

Last February Senate Republicans blocked legislation introduced by Senator SANDERS which would give the VA the tools needed to meet the demands of a changing veteran population. We tried to break that filibuster. We couldn't do it. We didn't have 60 votes.

That bill would help our Nation's veterans by improving health and dental care, providing educational and employment opportunities and addressing claims backlogs. The legislation that has been introduced this week does the same. That legislation was shot down because as the junior Senator from Florida said, it had a cost issue, but that junior Senator, a Republican Senator from Florida, was correct—taking care of our Nation's wounded veterans does cost money, but it is money well spent.

Senator RUBIO is not alone. The junior Senator from Alabama, along with the rest of his caucus, opposed the same bill because he didn't want to "bust the budget." Republicans didn't worry about busting the budget when they initially sent our troops by the hundreds of thousands to Iraq on a credit card, the credit card of the taxpayers of America, running up—in that war alone—about \$1.5 trillion in money that was borrowed.

Therein lies the problem. Republicans ignore the true cost of democracy. The lives and well-being of the brave men and women who fight to protect our way of life are part of the cost of our democracy. Instead, Republicans focus on the monetary costs only, the dollar bills, because any money going to our veterans is \$1 less going to billionaires, corporations, and unnecessary tax cuts.

The American people are tired of the doublespeak coming from the Republican Party when it comes to caring for our soldiers and our veterans. If Republicans support our Nation's soldiers, then help us protect our Nation's soldiers and help us support our Nation's soldiers. Instead, there is always an excuse, some exception they find to justify prevention of them standing with America's veterans and our soldiers.

Let's give American veterans the care and attention they deserve. As the Department of Veterans Affairs works to remedy these serious shortcomings, we in Congress must do our part to help. We owe America's veterans far

too much to leave them behind in their hour of need.

ERIC SHINSEKI

I wish to say a few words about the retired Secretary, retired general, Eric Shinseki, who resigned in the wake of the Veterans Affairs' troubling performance.

General Shinseki is a very good man, a devoted, disabled combat veteran. Under his leadership the VA drastically improved its care of veterans suffering from mental illness, and they addressed the issue of veterans' homelessness. He oversaw initiatives which decreased dependence on pain killers and other drugs, addressing a problem which was crippling many combat veterans.

General Shinseki's work at the VA has also helped cut waiting times for GI benefits down to just 1 week, helping countless veterans get paid the aid they were promised. As the Secretary has done his best, I am sorry his time as head of the VA ended with his resignation, but I understand why he felt the need to step aside.

Eric Shinseki has served this country for decades: on the battlefield, as Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army, and as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I personally thank him for his service and wish him well as he undoubtedly continues his work for America.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is preserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 5:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. I suggest 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. MCCAIN. 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.

HARPER NOMINATION

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, today the Senate will consider the nomination of Keith Harper as the U.S. Representative to the U.N. Human Rights Council.

I am generally deferential to the President's decisions when it comes to nominations brought before the Senate for confirmation, but in extraordinary circumstances I don't hesitate to oppose them. Given the extraordinary circumstances present in this case, I

must strenuously object to this nominee.

Mr. Harper is the latest State Department "bundler-blunder" that is slated for a U.S. ambassadorship. Earlier this year we saw the administration nominate several wholly unqualified top Democratic fundraisers to serve as ambassadors to various posts around the world.

One such fundraiser, Mr. George Tsunis, was nominated to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Norway. During his confirmation hearing, Mr. Tsunis revealed his complete unawareness about the country in which he would serve as our Nation's top envoy. For example, he referred to Norway's head of State as their President, not knowing that the country is led by a constitutional monarch.

Another Presidential pick, Colleen Bell, for Hungary could not answer a single question at her Senate hearing about U.S. strategic interests in that country, but that is OK. I am certain her professional background as a TV soap opera producer will come in handy while the crisis in Ukraine continues to unfold.

Inside the beltway, these nominees are known as "campaign bundlers," partisan political operatives who have each fundraised hundreds of thousands—if not millions—of dollars for the President's campaign. Mr. Harper is another example of a campaign bundler wholly ill-suited to serve in the diplomatic post for which he has been nominated.

According to the Center of Responsive Politics, which tracks campaign donations, Mr. Harper is on a list called "758 Elites." These are donors who combined "at least \$180 million for Obama's re-election effort." That is a quote from the Center of Responsive Politics. Mr. Harper is classified as a bundler of \$500,000 or more, and his contribution level matched such notables as actor Will Smith, actress Eva Longoria, and Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

I am not naive as to why some of these ambassadorships are doled out. Candidly speaking, Presidents from both parties frequently issue these diplomatic posts as political favors. But I have never before seen an administration this brazen in transmitting individuals who are so terribly and fundamentally unfit for foreign service. Traditionally, according to the retired Foreign Service group, about 30 percent of ambassadorships go to political appointees. Since the election of 2012, that is up to 50 percent. Some go to countries that, frankly, deserve better than someone whose only qualification is whether they raised \$500,000 or more for the campaign of President Obama.

Some of my colleagues will say that what sets Mr. Harper apart from these other campaign donors is his cultural heritage. They say Mr. Harper would be the first Native American in history to hold the rank of U.S. Ambassador. They also say he should be