

the VA. By getting rid of incentives to falsify wait times and make it easier to remove bad managers, we will hold more folks accountable for the care veterans receive. By making it easier to hire medical professionals and allowing more veterans to seek care from outside providers, we will reduce the bottleneck that forces veterans to wait too long for care.

I want to be clear about one issue. Once veterans get in the door at the VA, they receive incredibly good health care. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I continue to travel around Montana to talk to veterans. I speak to veterans' groups around the country as well.

They tell me that VA care is some of the best in the Nation. I have had wives, husbands, daughters, and sons seek me out to tell me what VA is doing right. Additionally, 9 out of 10 veterans report they are happy with the care they receive at the VA. That is important to remember.

It isn't all bad news, but the fact is that while the war in Afghanistan is winding down, and the war in Iraq has come to a close, the struggle for many service men and women continues here at home.

We went to war after 9/11 to fight against terror, to fight for the freedoms that we value in this country, but we didn't think far enough down the road. We didn't think about how we could care for our fighting men and women when they returned from battle.

When I joined the Veterans' Affairs Committee, the VA was starting to recover from years of neglect. In 2007, as Americans fought in the streets of Baghdad, Congress had to pass an emergency budget bill to keep the lights on in the VA. Imagine that—fighting two wars, but we didn't properly fund the department that cares for our troops when they come home.

With better planning and advance appropriations, we have come a long way, but attention spans and new cycles are short.

The bill we passed today is a good start, but it can't be the end of the story. Moving forward, we must make sure that we have all the facts because you can't fix a problem if you don't understand it.

That is why I have already worked with my colleagues to help pass legislation out of committee that will free up more resources for the inspector general's office of the VA to do its job and to make reports from the VA inspector general public and transparent.

The bill also prohibits the payment of bonuses to VA medical directors and senior VA employees until investigations are complete and reforms are made. Our message is clear; that is, that veterans come first.

In the 7 years since I held that first veterans listening session across Montana, since then we have worked with veterans groups to open new veterans centers and community-based outpa-

tient clinics across the State of Montana.

I have helped more veterans get transportation to get to their doctor appointments, and I have helped lead the way to expand the use of telehealth for rural veterans. We did this while working with the VA secretaries from both parties by working across the aisle to write commonsense legislation that meets the needs of veterans and their families. Not only should improving veterans care be an unrelenting focus for this body but it must be a nonpartisan one.

Improving mental health care for veterans is not a partisan issue. Improving veterans' ability to get a good job is not a partisan issue. Making sure that veterans get the care they have earned, the care that we promised them when they signed up to fight should never be a partisan issue.

Let's keep working together to honor the sacrifices made by our fighting men and women, as well as the families who anxiously wait for them back home.

On Saturday morning I will be in Anaconda, MT, kicking off my latest veterans listening tour to get more ideas about how we can improve the services and care for veterans.

I know that many of my colleagues are holding similar sessions in their States, and I look forward to hearing what ideas they bring back so that we can work together to improve veterans health care.

If this bill is the end of this Congress's work on veterans issues, it will be disappointing to me and it will be disappointing to the veterans out there who put their lives on the line to defend our freedom.

We have more work to do, and I hope it doesn't require another crisis to get it done.

I wish to thank BERNIE SANDERS for his great work on this bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. LEVIN. Before the Memorial Day recess, the Armed Services Committee voted 25 to 1 to favorably report out S. 2410, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015.

The bill is on the calendar, and both it and the committee report have been filed and are available online and in print.

As the chairman and ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, Senator INHOFE and I hope to bring the bill to the Senate floor as soon as the Senate schedule allows. I have talked with the majority leader about it, and he says he is going to do his best, but there are a number of things that we can do to be helpful on this effort.

Neither of us wants to be in the position that we were in last year when Senators were unable to take up the

bill and vote on any amendments to this important legislation because of how close it was to the end of the session when it was brought up.

Both of us are on the floor today urging Senators who are considering amendments to the bill to file them before the July recess.

We would then be in a position—both of us, with our staffs—to work with Senators to clear as many amendments as possible for inclusion in a manager's package and to begin identifying relevant amendments that would be likely to be contested.

Now, we believe if we can develop a list of a few relevant amendments that would require votes to start with when we first take up the bill, it would help us in getting to the floor. I believe that is the case, given the circumstances the Senate is in.

We have an awful lot of work ahead of us. We don't have a long time to do it. If we were able to put together a proposal to the leaders, that we have not only the bill, which is obviously on the calendar we have worked on a bipartisan basis to pass with the 25-vote majority—which is minus 1 vote in the Senate—it would be our belief this would have greater practical appeal to our leaders.

We think this approach would enable us to reach unanimous consent as to an initial set of relevant amendments to be considered so we could then move forward expeditiously when the Senate returns to the bill. I hope our colleagues will help us in this matter.

I think it is in everybody's interest and it is in the national security interest that we have a bill before us. We have to pass a bill in order to go to conference with the House or else we are put in the same kind of position we were in last year, where we simply present what amounted to a conference report before a bill had ever been truly debated and sent. We and our staff, working with colleagues, put together what amounted to a conference report, which was not a conference report in technical terms but was in effect the work product of both the Senate and the House and our committees by process of negotiation.

So our colleagues can be very helpful in getting this bill to the floor, meeting the concerns of our Nation and doing what we should be doing for our troops and our families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I first say and express my appreciation to Chairman LEVIN. We hear a lot of talk about bipartisanship and people getting along. That is usually just talk. In this case, it is real.

We have a committee of Democrats and Republicans concerned about defending our Nation with totally inadequate resources. Chairman LEVIN has responded every time we have had some kind of a controversial matter come up. Then our staff—Peter Levine

is the staff director for the majority and John Bonsell is the staff director for the minority—I have yet to call them when issues come up that we haven't been able to get this done, and this is kind of unusual. This doesn't happen in the Senate in very many committees.

I believe, and have always said, the NDAA is the most important bill of the year, keeping in mind we have actually passed one for 52 consecutive years. This is something that has to be done.

We adopted the National Defense Authorization Act on May 22, as the chairman said, 25 to 1, which doesn't happen very often around here. It contains a lot of vital work we have to do and it is within the budget caps.

I think it supports the training of the troops, the maintenance and modernization, research and development, and the pay and benefits. These are tough issues to negotiate, but we have done that, and we have it ready for more action.

What we don't want is what happened last year. Last year we had a lot of amendments. We on the Republican side were wanting to have all these amendments. I think we are entitled to amendments. We did a count last year of how many amendments were on the average bill. It was something like 140 amendments. We didn't have nearly that many requests, but we were able to get them in.

If we start now, we can do that. So I wish to tell my Republican colleagues that I don't want them to come back and start complaining later on, if we don't start getting amendments now so we can hash them out, find out what is acceptable, and find out where the opposition would be. But we don't want to wait until the end of the year.

It got so close last year, as we were approaching December 31, and we all know that if we don't have a Defense authorization bill by that time, hazard pay is at risk, reenlistment bonuses won't be paid. Stop and think about the cost. Right now, if we were to hire a person in training to be an F-22 pilot, the cost is \$9 million. However, the retention bonus for over a 9-year period could be \$225,000. Look at the economics of it. We don't want that to happen.

Last year we were able to get a bill. It is the first time I have ever participated in a "big four" meeting. Actually, three of us sat down because we had one no-show. So three of us put together a bill in a period of time, tried to consider all the amendments, and most people were pretty satisfied with it, but that is not the way it is supposed to happen.

We are going to have a lot of amendments. We always do. The only way we are going to be able to do this is to get this out on the floor. I think it needs to be passed before the end of the fiscal year. So I invite my friends on both sides of the aisle to bring down their amendments.

Let me again say how appreciative I am personally of having worked with

CARL LEVIN in this process and with the staff, who have been so easy to work with, and so competent and professional.

Mr. LEVIN. If the Senator will yield.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. I thank Senator GRASSLEY for his patience.

Senator INHOFE and his staff worked extraordinarily well with us on this side of the aisle. It is a bipartisan bill. It is a bipartisan committee. Senator INHOFE has helped in a very important way to maintain this bipartisan tradition of our committee. I thank him for the remarks, and I thank him and his staff.

I hope our colleagues will listen to what we both are urging them to do. Let us take a look at the amendments now, instead of waiting and waiting and waiting. Because if we look at amendments now, we increase our chances of getting this bill to the floor earlier rather than later.

I thank the Presiding Officer and my friend from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I come to the floor to address two issues, a shorter issue on immigration and a longer issue on the student loan program, particularly in reference to legislation offered earlier this morning.

On immigration, this morning, Secretary Johnson appeared before the Judiciary Committee. We had a chance to ask a number of questions related to the administration's release of 36,000 criminal aliens, for what reasons the Department voluntarily did release them—especially convicted murderers—and what they are doing to track down and keep track of where these people are. I didn't get answers, but the Secretary committed to respond in writing about the matter, and I thank him ahead of time for doing that.

I also asked about data on countries that refuse to cooperate in taking back their nationals. Today I am introducing a bill with Senator INHOFE to fix this situation and allow the government to detain foreign nationals who pose a threat to our homeland. I have a longer statement on that issue.

Finally, I mention that the Secretary of Homeland Security answered a lot of questions related to unaccompanied children coming to the United States, mostly from Central America, and entering our southern border.

I agree we do have a humanitarian problem. These are vulnerable children whose lives are on the line. They are escorted by strangers for the most part, away from their families in some cases, and each of these young people probably not understanding what lies ahead.

When in custody, our government makes an attempt to reunite them with their families. However, sometimes the government is handing them over to nonrelatives, which concerns me because of the potential of placing them in the hands of pimps and traffickers.

As I said this morning in the committee, these children are being lured into these dire circumstances by false promises. That is evident from the interviews being done with the children.

Already, border agents and intelligence analysts have been interviewing the youth to understand why they are migrating at this particular time. Today I received a document that summarizes the findings of these interviews. The document, while it does not have any author or official seal, was apparently done to summarize the interviews of individuals crossing the border along the McAllen, Rio Grande City, and Weslaco stations.

Two hundred thirty subjects were interviewed from several countries. An overwhelming majority said they were coming to the United States to take advantage of the new U.S. law that grants a free pass to unaccompanied children and female adults traveling with minors. That so-called free pass refers to a Notice to Appear document issued and then saying they are released on their own recognizance pending a hearing.

There is no new law. There is a new bill that passed the Senate 1 year ago but not through the House of Representatives, and it may never be. So there is no new law granting a free pass to unaccompanied children and female adults traveling with minors.

Specifically, this report states:

A high percentage of the subjects interviewed stated their family members in the U.S. urged them to travel immediately, because the United States Government was only issuing immigration [free passes] until the end of June 2014.

The report states that:

The issue of free passes was the main reason provided by 95 percent, plus or minus, of the interviewed subjects.

So while I understand there are a lot of factors involved, we cannot ignore the fact that these children are coming or are being forced here because of a belief on their part that they will never be deported.

We can say that is thanks to the Obama administration because this administration has refused to be serious about immigration enforcement. The President needs to send a signal right away, if he wants to stop this catastrophe from happening, that the laws will be enforced.

Instead of reviewing deportation policies and suggesting ways to remove fewer people, the President should task Secretary Johnson with finding ways to actually enforce the laws we have on the books.

We must send a very strong signal that there is no benefit and no avenue