

administrative staff—to improve the timeliness of care to the 8 million veterans enrolled in the Veterans Health Administration. We can help meet that demand if we make those jobs more competitive by adjusting the pay scale.

In the bill we passed this summer—which is now law—Congress gave Secretary McDonald the authority to fire underperformers. The other side of that coin is competitive pay for those who are performing. These doctors and nurses are caring for the men and women who put their lives at risk through military service. Let's lift the pay freeze on their salaries. The VA should have the best and the brightest medical staff out there. That means hiring the best and firing those who do not pass muster.

The shortage of health care providers is not a new issue—particularly in rural areas of the country. We have struggled with this in Illinois. The Danville and Marion VA medical centers—both in small towns far from an urban center—struggle to fill health care positions. In 2009 I offered an amendment to the fiscal year 2010 funding bill that set aside \$3 million for incentive pay to help with recruitment and retention for medical personnel to serve in rural VA facilities. Raising salaries would help facilities such as these attract and keep topflight doctors and nurses.

The Veterans Health Administration is an important training ground for many medical students. At Hines VA medical center in Chicago, medical students from Loyola get much of their training in a clinical setting. The veterans benefit from the addition of these young doctors. And hopefully that experience leads to more doctors looking to the VA as a career choice. But no matter how appealing the VA is, medical school debt is a factor. The VA offers a loan repayment program that can help offset those worries, but offering pay that is more comparable to the private sector would make working for the VA health care system even more attractive to new graduates and would help retain current staff.

The VA cares for America's heroes, the men and women who have worked to keep our country safe and defend American ideals abroad. As recent investigations have brought to light, VA must improve recruitment and retention of medical personnel to keep pace with growing demand. I am happy Secretary McDonald is lifting the salary freeze on medical personnel and plans to increase compensation for the health care providers who work with our veterans. They deserve the best.

HUNGER ACTION MONTH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in honor of Hunger Action Month, I want to say a few words about the real and lingering problem of hunger and food insecurity. Hunger has no boundaries. In a Nation that prides itself as the land of plenty, more than 47 million people—

including more than 1 in 5 children—do not know how they will put food on their table.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, is one of our most important antihunger programs. More than 80 percent of SNAP households have incomes below the poverty line, which is less than \$500 a week for a family of four. Seventy percent of SNAP participants are in families with children, and more than 25 percent are in households with seniors or people with disabilities. Basic sustenance ought to be a guarantee in a civilized society, not a gamble. If children or adults are hungry in America, that is a problem for all of us, and it is a problem we can do something about.

I have traveled across my State and met families and parents that rely on food assistance and heard their stories. They are our neighbors, they are hard-working people who lost their job or got sick. They are seniors living on a limited income.

They are people like Maureen, who works cleaning houses. Her husband fell ill and had to stop working due to a disability. Maureen struggles to put food on the table for her two daughters in high school. Her husband's doctor says he needs to eat more vegetables, but Maureen says they are just too expensive. The \$126 a month in SNAP benefits Maureen receives help, but she still struggles and relies on a food pantry to feed her family. Unfortunately, Maureen is just one of the more than 1.8 million Illinoisans who do not know where their next meal will come from.

The millions of Americans, like Maureen, who rely on safety net antihunger programs, may not have the loudest voice in the debate or big public relations firms, but we must protect these programs and work to improve the lives of vulnerable families, children, and seniors at their time of need.

Hunger in America is not something we can ignore. No family should have to wonder where their next meal will come from. As a co-chair of the Senate Hunger Caucus, I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues and those in the antihunger community to shine a light on this important issue and eliminate domestic hunger.

TRIBUTE TO JOSUE ROBLES

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, today I would like to pay tribute to a great American veteran, businessman, and leader, MG Josue Robles, Retired, or, as he prefers to be called, Joe. Joe is stepping down at the end of this year as the CEO and president of USAA, a great American institution based in San Antonio. His retirement marks a milestone in an inspirational and remarkable American story and the conclusion of an impressive career. He will be sorely missed not only by the employees at USAA but by the greater San Antonio community and beyond.

The eldest of nine children, Joe was born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, in 1946. His father was working as a waiter when he was approached by a group of Americans who were recruiting for steel mills in the United States. His dad went to work for U.S. Steel in Lorain, OH. Eighteen months later, when Joe was 3, his dad had saved enough money to send for the family. Their house in Ohio was six blocks from the steel mill, where his father worked for the next 35 years, in addition to part-time work as a carpenter and plumber to supplement his income.

Starting at age 11 and throughout high school, Joe worked a variety of jobs at a local grocery store and in the neighborhood doing yard work. He worked in the steel mill one summer and learned very quickly what a hot, dirty, dangerous place it was. One summer there was enough, and it motivated Joe to go to school and get a good education so he would never have to shovel slag again.

While in high school, Joe was awarded a medical school scholarship sponsored by the local medical society. They would pay for his education if he agreed to come back and practice medicine in his hometown. But first he had to earn an undergraduate degree. Joe graduated from high school in 1964 and worked that summer painting a house. The job paid enough to cover his first year of tuition at Lorain County Community College. Joe married that year and went to work full time at a nuclear plant, where he monitored radiation levels. Within 2 years, his long hours forced him to drop a few classes and switch his student status to part time. Then, in 1966, his country came calling, and Joe was drafted into the U.S. Army.

By any measure, Joe's military career was stellar. His awards and mission-critical positions and assignments are too numerous to fully recount, but let me share a few highlights. Joe completed his basic training at Fort Jackson, SC. While there, he earned a recommendation for the Artillery Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill, OK. Once commissioned as a second lieutenant, he was sent to Korea in 1967 and 1968, followed by assignment as an executive officer at Fort Knox, KY, and then 12 months as a battery commander in Vietnam.

In the latter part of his career, Joe served as the chief of the Program and Budget Office at the U.S. Army Headquarters, the division artillery commander of the 1st Infantry Division, Mechanized, at Fort Riley, KS; and the Army planner and director for operations and support at Department of the Army Headquarters. As assistant division commander of the 1st Cavalry Division in Fort Hood, TX, he prepared and deployed the division for Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. He then served as the director of the Army budget and as commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division, Mechanized, out of Fort Riley, KS—the legendary “Big Red One.”

As is the case in any military career, Joe had to move his family many times. He has a son who is autistic, and each move meant adjustments to new schools, teachers, and therapists. In 1994, Joe decided it was time to retire from the Army so that his family would have a more stable life. After a stint as a USAA board member from 1990 to 1994, Joe joined USAA full time in 1994. He assumed the position of president and CEO in 2007 after serving as the CFO for a number of years.

Under his leadership as CEO, not only has USAA seen exponential growth, it was ranked No. 1 for customer service, satisfaction, or advocacy by Bloomberg Businessweek, MSN Money, the American Association of Individual Investors, Forrester Research, and J.D. Power. Committed to advocating for military families, Joe has guided USAA to become a national leader in hiring veterans and military spouses and offering them careers in the private sector. Joe was invited to the White House and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to be recognized for USAA's efforts in this area and demonstrating its commitment by ensuring that veterans and military spouses comprised 30 percent of USAA's new hires in 2013.

Beyond those astounding achievements, Joe has also been a dedicated and active member of his community throughout his career. In 2011, Joe was inducted into the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans. Horatio Alger Award recipients are dedicated community leaders who demonstrate individual initiative, a commitment to excellence, and remarkable achievements through honesty, hard work, self-reliance, and perseverance over adversity.

Joe has left some big shoes for future leaders of the military, USAA, and the San Antonio community. His is the quintessential American story—one of perseverance, work ethic, and fortitude. But if you ask most people who know Joe well, they will tell you what stands out most about him is that he is simply a great human being. He views himself as not just a leader but part of a greater community—a community of people to which he is dedicated and about which he cares deeply. That is really what sets Joe apart from many other hard-charging leaders, and it is why he will be profoundly missed. I offer my congratulations to Joe Robles on a commendable career, a lifetime of achievements and his ability to maintain humility and compassion through it all.

COMMEMORATING NATIONAL POW/ MIA RECOGNITION DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I wish to honor all of those brave American men and women who have suffered as prisoners of war, are missing in action, or remain unaccounted for with respect to their service to our Nation. Since 1998, we take the third Friday of every Sep-

tember—this year, the 19th—as a day to acknowledge and remember with these extraordinary men and women. Our servicemembers provide the blanket of security that allows us to sleep safely at night. We cannot thank them enough. But what we can do is pledge to all of the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines never to forget them and their sacrifice.

During the course of the Vietnam war, over 2,500 military personnel were declared either a prisoner of war or missing in action. In 1971, Mary Hoff, the wife of Lt. Cmdr Michael Hoff, a missing-in-action military officer, saw the need for a flag to honor all of those classified as missing in action, MIA, or prisoner of war, POW. Newt Heisley, a World War II pilot, designed the flag. It is a haunting black flag containing a white silhouette of a servicemember. Behind this servicemember is a single barbed wire and a watchtower in the background, and underneath this image are the words “You are not forgotten.” Just as those words are written on the flag, so they are in my heart. As moving and poignant as this flag is, it was still not enough. On 1979, Congress and the President declared the first POW/MIA Recognition Day. On this day, all Americans shall remember those who gallantly sacrificed their freedom so we can remain free. Just 3 years later, this emblem became the only other flag to fly next to Old Glory over the White House. On 1989, it was installed in the Capitol rotunda as a representation of this Nation's vow to take account for all those who remain missing. As I walk past the rotunda and I see that flag, I always take a moment to remember those who have been declared POW or MIA in my thoughts and prayers. And to those who are still missing, I voice our commitment of never-ending support in finding you and bringing you home. No matter what it takes, we will never stop looking.

This day calls for remembrance of those in the past who have endured these awful fates, but it also reminds us to continue our efforts to bring every American home. From World War II to the 1991 gulf war, more than 83,000 Americans have been pronounced missing. That is a hard number to hear. I commend the actions of the Department of Defense, DOD, and of the personnel—military and civilian—who have wholeheartedly devoted themselves to the cause of finding and returning our courageous servicemembers. I honor and thank all of the Marylanders who have dedicated themselves to this cause. That quest is what our servicemembers and their families deserve, servicemembers such as John Call III of Potomac, MD, who served in Vietnam under the Air Force; POW survivor, Dr. Louis Haberer Tankin of Baltimore, MD, who served in World War II under the Army Medical Corps; Paul Carty of Frederick, MD, declared MIA serving in the Korean war under the Army; and Adnan al-Hilawi, DOD

contractor, who went missing on March 3, 2007, while working in Baghdad, Iraq, and still remains missing today.

I have had the honor to work beside Senator JOHN MCCAIN, a survivor of a POW camp—the infamous “Hanoi Hilton”—in North Vietnam for over 5 years. His experience and courage and triumph and service continue to inspire me. I thank my colleague for his service and sacrifice on our Nation's behalf.

It pains me to think about the fate of these men and women, but no matter the pain, we all must stay true to our pledge never to forget them. And we shall never forget the hardships endured by their family and friends who cannot receive the closure of their beloved servicemember's fate. The U.S. Government owes a great deal of compassion, appreciation, and gratitude to these families and friends.

Joseph Campbell once said, “A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself.” Every single soldier, airman, marine, and sailor is a hero in my eyes. I pledge to never forget those heroes who have been held prisoner of war or have been declared MIA, and I pledge to all of our service men and women that if you do go missing or are held captive, we will do everything in our power to bring you home and keep you in our memories. Today, this Nation reminds our servicemembers, our citizens, and the world that America “leaves no man behind.”

CELEBRATING THE AIR FORCE'S 67TH BIRTHDAY

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to celebrate another year of outstanding service from the U.S. Air Force. Through signing the National Security Act of 1947, President Harry Truman awarded our Air Force the respect and recognition it so rightly deserved, highlighting its strategic importance in the U.S. defense system. Sixty-seven years later, the Air Force continues to uphold the freedom and safety of our great Nation, protecting the bastion of democracy that is the United States of America. Today, we express our unwavering admiration and support for an Air Force that fulfills its duties with integrity and excellence. Accomplishing the mission “to fly, fight and win,” the Air Force is a source of national pride, and I have no doubt it will continue in this tradition.

In 1907, the world's first airplane flight soared over the sands of Kitty Hawk, NC, as a soaring, swooping symbol of innovation and technological prowess. The success of this first mission would not have been possible without the pioneering minds of the Wright Brothers, and the same stands today. I commend the skilled airmen of our Air Force: they are the warriors behind our aviation triumphs and their sacrifices and achievements are just as inspiring as those of their 20th-century predecessors. Our airmen are masters of innovation, ensuring the Air Force can