

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. REID. Madam President, today the Senate continues its consideration of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill. This appropriations bill is a modest step in the right direction. It provides resources and will address the veteran care backlog, including 770 new claims processors and 200 new appeals adjudicators. It expands medical treatment for veterans, and it provides State grants for extended care homes in rural areas, which is extremely important.

I want to make sure one thing is understood and is very clear. If it had been up to Republicans, this legislation would have shortchanged America's veterans. Let's remember that Republicans' original appropriations bill for the VA was a far cry from this funding measure today. They ranted and raved, but in the process, would have cost the veterans \$2 billion. The Republicans' bill included devastating sequester caps that would have underfunded the Veterans' Administration by billions of dollars. If Republicans had passed their bill, 70,000 vets would not receive the care they deserve—70,000.

The reason the Senate is considering this much improved appropriations legislation is because Democrats refused to go along with Republican efforts to underfund veterans and our middle class. Instead, Democrats held firm to stop devastating sequester cuts from hitting America's domestic priorities. Because we refused to let Republicans undermine care for our veterans, funding for the Veterans' Administration is more than \$2 billion over what it would have been.

Democrats refused to let congressional Republicans do what they always do: disregard the needs of the middle class—in this case middle class veterans—those people at home we so try to protect. In the aftermath of President Bush's two unpaid-for wars, Republicans have made little effort to meet the Nation's obligations to its veterans. The work that has been done in recent years to do a better job for our veterans, including wounded warriors legislation and on and on, are things that we on this side of the aisle proposed and passed.

This is symptomatic of today's Republicans. They want to start and fund wars overseas, but when the bill comes—when the time comes to make good on the promises to our servicemembers, many Republicans are nowhere to be found.

Taking care of our veterans is one of the prices of war. It is one of the costs of a robust defense that keeps America safe. To neglect that responsibility is callous, and some say immoral.

We can do better by our Nation's veterans. This appropriations bill is a start. We still have a long way to go in meeting our commitments to the brave men and women who defend our country and have defended our country.

FOREIGN SERVICE NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Madam President, for more than 3 months, the senior Senator from Iowa has been blocking the confirmation, the promotion of more than 20 career Foreign Service officers.

These Foreign Service officers are career diplomats. They are some of the finest people in our government. They are brave. They work in some of the most remote, difficult, and crime-ridden war zones in the world. Many of these Foreign Service officers are always ready to serve at a moment's notice in hotspots throughout the world—hot spots like Iraq and Afghanistan.

These diplomats are not partisan; they are diplomats. They are not political appointments. That is why it is troubling to see the senior Senator from Iowa politicize their promotions. He admits that he is blocking the promotion of these Foreign Service officers until he gets answers about Secretary Hillary Clinton's emails and her aide, a woman by the name of Huma Abedin.

I have told Senator GRASSLEY he is making a mistake by targeting these fine public servants. They have worked all over the world. With rare exception, they know multiple languages. But instead of changing course and doing what is right by these diplomats, Senator GRASSLEY seems to be doubling down on his obstruction.

As the Senator from Iowa digs in on this failed policy, more innocent people—these diplomats—are being caught in the resulting backlog. Last month, the Senate received several letters containing more than 600 Foreign Service promotions. In years past, it didn't matter if Democrats controlled the Senate or Republicans, they would have passed that list quickly in a matter of a day or two, with no opposition, of course.

Times have changed, and these lists of 600 career Foreign Service officers sit unpassed before this body. Among the 600 individuals on this promotion list are two people from Iowa. These Iowans—that is right, two of the constituents of the senior Senator from Iowa are being denied a promotion.

Why are nonpartisan public servants being used as political pawns, especially if they are being blocked just because Senator GRASSLEY doesn't want Hillary Clinton to be the next President of the United States. I haven't heard who he is supporting—Trump, Carson, CRUZ, RUBIO, Bush, Christie, or a long list of others. But, obviously, he doesn't want Hillary Clinton to be elected.

So I ask the senior Senator from Iowa: Is he blocking two of his own constituents? Why? Should Senator GRASSLEY allow all of the Foreign Service lists to be confirmed by the Senate without further delay? Of course he should. We could confirm them right now.

It is time for my friend from Iowa to end these foolish campaigns to undermine Secretary Clinton. Under Senator

GRASSLEY's leadership, the Judiciary Committee continues to hound the State Department for information about Secretary Clinton and her staffers. He and his fellow Republicans want emails. He wants to see timesheets for State Department employees, as do some other Republicans. Committee staff wants transcribed interviews with email vendors, and they want maternity leave records for one of Secretary Clinton's closest aides, Huma Abedin.

Think about that: Republicans want to know how long a member of Secretary Clinton's staff took for her maternity leave. Is that ludicrous? Of course it is.

Those who know Ms. Abedin best can vouch for her integrity and her work ethic as a close aide to Senator Clinton for decades. When her reputation was attacked in the past—that is Ms. Abedin's—Republicans, including Senator JOHN MCCAIN, defended her.

Here is what Senator MCCAIN said: "an intelligent, upstanding, hard-working, loyal servant of our country . . . the daughter of immigrants who has risen to the highest levels of our government on her substantial personal merit."

Can my colleagues imagine wanting to know if she took off too much time to have a baby?

Let's remember that she is a staff member, not a principal. It is one thing to level charges at an elected Member of Congress or the administration. It is a completely different matter to target a staff member, especially someone who Senator MCCAIN says "represents the best about America."

How much money would a Republican Congress waste to try to bring down Hillary Clinton? We don't know by the numbers. We have already seen that the so-called House Select Committee on Benghazi has wasted 18 months and more than \$5 million. Numerous other committees have conducted similar investigations. We don't know how much they have cost, but it is millions.

How much taxpayer money is Senator GRASSLEY and the Judiciary Committee wasting on its anti-Clinton campaign? We know how much money and staff are being devoted to investigating Secretary Clinton in the House—\$8,000 to \$10,000 a day, and that is low-balling. How many millions of dollars are the American people paying for the Judiciary Committee to duplicate the House's wasteful political attacks?

The senior Senator from Iowa is always talking on the floor about the proper use of taxpayer resources. He should walk into his bathroom, look into the mirror, and find out what he is doing about the proper use of taxpayer resources. He should be willing to tell us about the resources his committee has used to investigate Secretary Clinton.

The American people deserve to know how much money is being spent on these investigations, especially if

600 honorable Foreign Service officers are going to be used as political pawns in a crusade to keep Hillary Clinton from being elected President. I hope he will drop his opposition to career diplomats and other important nominations so we can give these good people the promotions they have earned.

As I travel the world through these many years, Madam President, I always go to the embassies, and I always ask them to see as many of the staff there as possible. I tell them there is no finer group of people representing America today than our Foreign Service corps, and I stand by that. It is a shame that I have to come to the floor and talk about this. We should pass these nominations tonight with no further delay.

Would the Chair tell us the schedule of today's business in the Senate.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2029, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2029) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Kirk/Tester amendment No. 2763, in the nature of a substitute.

Kirk amendment No. 2764 (to amendment No. 2763), to clarify the term "congressional defense committees."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 5:30 p.m. will be equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I will defer my remarks until the chairman of the VA-MILCON appropriations subcommittee comes, and after he speaks, I will.

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. TESTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. TESTER. Thank you, Madam President.

It will be some time before Senator KIRK arrives, so I do want to give my remarks for the purpose of other folks who would like to talk about this bill.

I rise today along with Senator KIRK to usher the legislation through this

Chamber, the VA-MILCON appropriations bill, as quickly as possible. I want to thank Senator KIRK for his work on this bill. As I said last week when we began debating the VA-MILCON appropriations bill, this legislation has huge significance. It marks a good-faith effort on behalf of this body to move forward with an appropriations bill that responsibly invests in our national security, our economy, and our country.

I also think that, among all the appropriations bills to move forward, it is right and just that a bill to honor our commitment to our Nation's veterans be the first one to break the gridlock.

I recognize that the VA-MILCON appropriations bill that came out of the committee last spring fell far short of what the VA needs to provide the care our veterans have earned. But now that Congress has passed the budget agreement, we have crafted a substitute amendment that will bring this bill closer to where it has to be to meet the needs of the brave men and women who have served this country. This amendment will provide an additional \$1.9 billion for VA medical services. This amendment fixes a flawed bill.

The bill passed out of the committee in May grossly shortchanged our veterans and undermined the ability of the VA employees to do their jobs, and that is one of the reasons I voted against it. Now, 6 months later, we are about to right the committee's wrong and make investments that we have known all along the VA needs. The money will help allow the VA to address an increased demand for hepatitis C treatments, bolster health care for rural veterans, and will ensure that we can better recruit and retain VA doctors and nurses in every State of the Union. It also provides better care for Vietnam veterans who are reaching retirement age and treats the physical and mental ailments of veterans returning home after 15 years of war in the Middle East. These are investments the VA desperately needs to do its job.

Now, I know the VA has been under a microscope, and it should be. It is responsible for honoring a promise, and when that promise is broken, we need to do more than to say "I am sorry." We need to fix it. This substitute amendment before the Senate will begin to right these wrongs, and you have my word that I and others will be scrutinizing how every dollar is spent because we can't afford to make these investments without knowing they are producing real results for the courageous servicemembers who have earned it.

Colleagues are encouraged to provide amendments in a timely manner because we all would like to pass this bill before Veterans Day. Once we pass the bill, it will prove we are serious about living up to promises that we make to our Nation's veterans. It will empower VA employees to do their jobs and provide veterans with the care they have earned.

It is not just health care. This bill will improve consideration of com-

pensation claims for injuries suffered during their service. It gives the VA the tools to maintain our national cemetery system. It supports the Office of the Inspector General, which we need in order to ensure that the VA is living up to the demands that we have placed upon it.

It adds \$170 million for military construction. These funds will go toward additional projects to enhance our military readiness, particularly for the Air Force and its Reserve elements, and it will set the stage for future appropriations bills that responsibly invest in education, energy, infrastructure, and in our public lands.

I am very happy that we are considering this bill today. Hopefully, we can finish this bill tomorrow, as we should. It will take some cooperation, but I think the Senate is finally ready for some cooperation. I look forward to that.

I yield the floor.

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. COATS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I am back on the floor once again for my "Waste of the Week." I have been doing this for well over 20 weeks—highlighting waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayers' money. It is said we cannot afford to cut another dime, that programs are too important.

I question that since the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and the congressional accounting office have all looked at various Federal programs and said: Why in the world are you doing this in the first place? It is no longer relevant. It is a waste of money. The function has already been taken care of.

Today we are going to highlight yet another situation where this money ought to be going into either higher priority uses—such as Department of Defense or funding soldiers or veterans or something such as that—or not take it from the taxpayer in the first place. And as we document each week, our account keeps growing in terms of money that falls clearly into the category of waste, fraud, and abuse.

Today's situation is a little bit different because the money is not being spent. Then the question is, OK, it is reserved for something, right? It was, but that action has been fulfilled. So why is that money still sitting there and who is using it or if it is not being used, why isn't it redirected and returned to the taxpayer?

Let me talk about this program.

Throughout our Nation's history, the United States has pursued various paths of energy development in order