

There is a sufficient second.
The clerk will call the roll.
The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY), the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE), the Senator from Colorado (Mr. GARDNER), the Senator from Nevada (Mr. HELLER), the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. VITTER), and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Colorado (Mr. GARDNER) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR), the Senator from Missouri (Mrs. McCASKILL), the Senator from Maryland (Ms. MIKULSKI), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ISAKSON). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 83, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 300 Ex.]

YEAS—83

Alexander	Feinstein	Murray
Ayotte	Fischer	Nelson
Baldwin	Franken	Perdue
Barrasso	Gillibrand	Peters
Bennet	Graham	Portman
Blumenthal	Grassley	Reed
Booker	Hatch	Reid
Boozman	Heinrich	Risch
Boxer	Heitkamp	Roberts
Brown	Hirono	Rounds
Burr	Hoeven	Sasse
Cantwell	Inhofe	Schatz
Capito	Isakson	Schumer
Cardin	Johnson	Scott
Carper	Kaine	Sessions
Casey	King	Shaheen
Coats	Kirk	Shelby
Collins	Lankford	Sullivan
Coons	Leahy	Tester
Corker	Lee	Thune
Cornyn	Manchin	Tillis
Cotton	Markey	Toomey
Crapo	McCain	Udall
Daines	McConnell	Warner
Donnelly	Menendez	Warren
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Enzi	Moran	Wyden
Ernst	Murphy	

NOT VOTING—17

Blunt	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Klobuchar	Sanders
Cochran	McCaskill	Stabenow
Cruz	Mikulski	Vitter
Flake	Murkowski	Wicker
Gardner	Paul	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

AMENDMENTS NOS. 2772 AND 2766 TO AMENDMENT NO. 2763

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, the ranking member and I have a small package of amendments that have been cleared by both sides.

I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up, reported by number, and the Senate vote on the amendments en bloc: Shaheen No. 2772 and Heller No. 2766.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the amendments by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Montana [Mr. TESTER], for Mrs. SHAHEEN, proposes an amendment numbered 2772 to amendment No. 2763.

The Senator from Illinois [Mr. KIRK], for Mr. HELLER, proposes an amendment numbered 2766 to amendment No. 2763.

The amendments are as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 2772

(Purpose: To require the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct audits relating to the timely access of veterans to hospital care, medical services, and other health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct random, periodic audits of medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Integrated Service Networks to assess whether such facilities and Networks are complying with all standards imposed by law or by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs with respect to the timely access of veterans to hospital care, medical services, and other health care from the Department.

AMENDMENT NO. 2766

(Purpose: To prohibit the use of funds to transfer amounts from the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund to any other account in the Treasury of the United States)

At the end of title II, add the following:

SEC. 247. None of the amounts appropriated or otherwise made available by this title may be used to transfer any amount from the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund to any other account in the Treasury of the United States.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the question occurs on agreeing to the amendments en bloc.

The amendments (Nos. 2772 and 2766) were agreed to en bloc.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

The Senator from Connecticut.

MILCON-VA APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I thank Senators KIRK and TESTER for their bipartisan leadership on a measure that is vastly improved since the vote we had on a similar measure recently. I know this topic is very close to the heart of the Presiding Officer, and I thank him for his leadership as chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. It is truly a tremendous challenge that we are working step by step to address.

About a month ago, I came to the floor to help raise serious concerns about the funding levels in the MILCON-VA appropriations bill that we are now addressing because it contained serious, egregious shortfalls. As a result, I could not support it. Veterans in Connecticut as recently as this weekend asked me how and why I could vote against a measure that provided funding for the VA. My answer is: It wasn't enough. It wasn't good enough. It failed to do the job.

This measure, fortunately, is a profoundly important step toward addressing the needs of our veterans and keeping faith with them, making sure that we leave no veteran behind. This new version provides what many of us have been fighting to achieve—real help for our veterans.

We are about to consider an amendment that would restore much needed funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Kirk-Tester amendment provides a much needed increase in funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, bringing full funding to that agency—\$71.2 billion. That amount is \$2 billion more—to be precise, \$1.97 billion—over the previous reported bill, which will supplement the VA's medical services. This additional funding is not window dressing. It is not a convenience or a luxury. It will allow the VA to more appropriately account for treating hepatitis C, supporting the family caregiver program, and providing care in the community. Demand for care from the VA has continued to grow in recent months, and I will continue with my colleagues and with the Department to ensure that the VA is spending the funds in an appropriate manner, with integrity and responsiveness, to provide high quality, timely health care to our veterans.

This bill also fully funds the operation of the VA Benefits Administration. The VBA has been plagued by problems, some of them attributable to underfunding, and this amount at \$2.69 billion will facilitate the transformation from a paper-based claims process to a digital one. It will allow the VA to hire hundreds of new claims processors, speeding and streamlining the system so that veterans receive the benefits they have earned and are spared the rigamarole and redtape that has so often produced a backlog.

Recognizing increased demands, the bill also provides an increase of \$20

million for funding VA-State extended care facilities. It provides \$20 million in rural health care funding specifically for construction grants, meeting the needs of State extended care homes in rural areas. We are demonstrating here how the VA can partner with States to flexibly and efficiently deliver long-term care to an aging population—like other segments of our population, the VA beneficiaries are aging—sparing them the time and expense of constructing and operating new VA facilities.

I have also filed important amendments to improve the provision of health care and research at the VA, ensuring that the VA is providing gender-specific prostheses, for example—particularly important as we see more and more women serve in combat zones—as well as ensuring that VA research dollars are spent in areas of toxic exposures. These priorities ought to be at the top of the list for all. They are for me.

VA continues to have a significant need for resources and personnel. Secretary McDonald indicated just last Friday that the agency continues to need about 4,300 more physicians and 10,000 nurses. I am working with the VA on legislation to meet this need. I look forward to working with my colleague, the Presiding Officer, as well as the Appropriations Committee to address these priorities and others that are so critically important to final passage of this important bill.

CONDEMNING PALESTINIAN TERROR ATTACKS AGAINST ISRAEL

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, since the beginning of October, Palestinians armed with knives, meat cleavers, guns, and cars have carried out approximately 77 attacks, leaving 159 Israelis wounded and 12 dead. Two Americans have been killed in these gruesome attacks, including Richard Lakin, who was a Glastonbury, CT, elementary school principal and civil rights activist before he moved to Israel in 1984. Connecticut grieves for our dear friend and colleague to our educators there, who perished while seeking peace. That was his goal. That was his mission.

The Palestinian Authority must be held accountable for incitement, and it must work to stem this tide of visceral violence. Repeated, reprehensible attacks on innocent Israeli civilians follow President Abbas' dangerous disavowal of commitments made during the peace process. He has disavowed those commitments, and he has renounced them. These attacks must be stopped with leadership from the Palestinian Authority.

That is why I have introduced bipartisan legislation with Senator AYOTTE, and more than half the Senate has now joined with us to stand with Israel, to condemn these Palestinian terror attacks, and to reaffirm Israel's commitment to the continued maintenance of

the status quo on the Temple Mount. I look forward to returning to the floor to have this resolution passed. It is time the Senate spoke out over this violence that has engulfed Israel and threatens everyday Israelis trying to live their normal lives in peace. It is time for America to speak out, as it is doing now, day in and day out.

I have visited Jerusalem, Israel's capital, and seen how remarkable a place it is, both in terms of being home to three monotheistic faiths and in the remarkable way that Israel has maintained respect and proper access for all religions and for their practices.

Israel stands alone as a nation committed to tolerance and respect for all faiths. This resolution serves as an expression of our support and our solidarity with Israel in bringing this violence to an end and as our resolve to help stabilize security for both Palestinians and Israelis.

I have said before—and I feel more passionately and deeply now than ever before—that Palestinian political goals will never be achieved through violence. As efforts to deescalate this situation move forward—and I support them—this resolution calls on all parties to return to the negotiating table immediately and without preconditions. Israel is already committed to peace negotiations without preconditions. I continue to support a two-state solution that is acceptable to all parties, involving direct negotiations with the active and sustained support of the United States and the international community.

My hope also is that the United States will continue to support Israel by reaffirming our unshakeable commitment to Israel's security. Today, President Obama met with Prime Minister Netanyahu. I hope that meeting will serve to bolster the bonds between our two great countries. I understand it went well. I certainly hope it did.

I joined Senator BENNET, along with 14 other Senators, in writing to the President and urging him to prioritize discussing with Mr. Netanyahu the historic renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding on U.S. Military Assistance to help Israel prepare for, respond to, and defend against threats that are more pressing and dangerous than ever, and to ensure its qualitative military edge.

I note that my wonderful friend and colleague from Illinois is waiting to speak, so I will end here and say that the current MOU provides \$30 billion in assistance to Israel through fiscal year 2018.

As threats in the region continue to evolve, including Iran's potentially malign influence, the administration must engage at the highest level to continue to develop a shared understanding of threats confronting Israel by strengthening the MOU that serves as the foundation of our bilateral security efforts.

I will always fight to uphold Israel's security, and I am committed to oppos-

ing efforts to delegitimize Israel. We can stand together on a bipartisan basis, and this cause must always be bipartisan, must always be above politics. I will continue to work toward ensuring that the partnership in this body and the partnership between the United States and Israel is strengthened and enduring.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, first, let me thank my colleague from Connecticut, Senator BLUMENTHAL. I join him in condemning the violence that is taking place in the streets of the Middle East and Jerusalem and other places. I also join him in calling for a two-state solution so that we can have both the Palestinian people and the people of Israel living safely and securely without fear of any kind of military action from one against the other. That should be our ultimate goal, and we should renew that goal regularly. I join him in what he had to say.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on another topic, you can't serve in the Senate without some level of patience. It takes forever to get things done around here—that is, the big things.

Fifteen years ago, I introduced a bill called the DREAM Act. That was 15 years ago, the year 2000. What were we going to do with these young people who came to the United States—brought here as babies, infants, toddlers, children—when they finished high school and were looking to the future? The DREAM Act said that if they have no serious criminal issues, if they have finished school, we will give them a chance—a chance to work their way toward legal status and citizenship.

I introduced that bill 15 years ago. It has had its ups and downs. At times it has passed in the House; other times it has passed in the Senate. We have never been able to align those two bodies to pass the bill at the same time.

It was June 27, 2013—almost 2½ years ago—when it last passed in the Senate. It was part of comprehensive immigration reform. Sixty-eight Senators voted for that bill—14 Republicans and 54 Democrats. It was a bipartisan bill, comprehensive immigration reform.

We took the bill and sent it to the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, and they refused to call the bill or even debate it on the floor of the House of Representatives. It was frustrating. A group of us had worked for months to put that bill together. The House would not even consider it, wouldn't even debate it, didn't offer an alternative. They were silent. Virtually all of them were silent but not every one of them.

This was a historic meeting in the city of Chicago. These two gentlemen are my friends, one my colleague from Illinois, Congressman LUIS GUTIÉRREZ, and the other the new Speaker of the