



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 161

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2015

No. 167

House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Monday, November 16, 2015, at 2 p.m.

Senate

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2015

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, inspire our lawmakers to give You their best. Striving to serve You and country, may they refuse to bring You the leftovers of their time, talents, and trust. Inspired by Your providential movements in our world, help them to raise the bar of their expectations. Remind them that You can accomplish through them more than they can ask or imagine.

Lord, today we pay tribute to all American veterans, living or dead. We praise You for the gift of people who are willing to serve their country honorably during times of war and peace. Inspired by their exemplary lives, grant to us all a new dimension of compassion, courage, and competence. Use us to touch Your world and leave it better than we found it.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, for the information of all Senators, this morning the Senate will resume consideration of the MILCON-VA appropriations bill. Several amendments were agreed to yesterday, and we expect more to be considered before we complete action on the bill. Senator KIRK and Senator TESTER expect to wrap up consideration today, so any Senators with amendments to the bill should be talking to the two managers.

We will have a rollcall vote on the NDAA at approximately 11:20 a.m., and I hope to vote on passage of the MILCON-VA appropriations bill shortly thereafter.

If we complete action on NDAA, MILCON-VA, and send the long-term highway bill to conference later today, that will allow the Senate to adjourn for the Veterans Day holiday.

COMMEMORATING VETERANS DAY AND PASSING LEGISLATION SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS AND TROOPS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, like many of my colleagues, I plan to commemorate Veterans Day with the people I am honored to represent here in the Senate. I will join Kentuckians at a ceremony in Shelbyville's Vet-

erans Memorial Park. Hands will be put to heart as the "Star Spangled Banner" is played. Heads will bow in reverence as 106 names are read aloud, each a Kentuckian who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of others, and each a reminder of our enduring debt to America's men and women in uniform.

I am proud to represent the nearly 330,000 Kentuckians who have served in the Armed Forces. I am also proud to represent the many thousands of soldiers and their families who reside in or hail from our great Commonwealth, whether at Fort Knox, Fort Campbell, the Blue Grass Army Depot, or beyond.

I recently had a chance to meet some of Kentucky's brave soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who currently serve in Afghanistan and Iraq. Sadly, a NATO helicopter had just crashed in Kabul, killing five people, including two American servicemembers. I was honored to take part in a prayer service led by a chaplain from Lexington, KY, and I note that the occupant of the Chair was with me at the time.

What an incredibly humbling moment it was. The tragic crash is a stark reminder of the incredible danger our service men and women face every day, and a stark reminder of what all Americans owe them.

Veterans should know that they have many champions fighting for them here in the Senate. One of them is Senator ISAKSON, the chair of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Under his leadership, the committee has actively sought to do right by the men and women who never hesitate to do right

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



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by us. He has sent important legislation to the Senate floor that we have been able to pass on a bipartisan basis and that the President has signed into law.

One law we passed would improve the Veterans Choice Program, for instance, while another, the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, would help reduce the tragedies that befall too many of our heroes and the heartbreak that befalls too many of their families.

Important Veterans' Affairs Committee oversight has also been brought to bear on an agency that has lost the trust of many it serves; that is, the VA.

Of course, there is much more to be done. Veterans deserve the very best, and the VA crisis will not be resolved easily or quickly, but working together, there is a lot we can do for the men and women who risk their all for their country.

One way to do so is by passing the Veterans funding bill that is before us. It is a result of great work by another champion of veterans, Senator KIRK, chair of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. Just like Senator ISAKSON's Veterans' Affairs Committee, the subcommittee led by the Senator from Illinois has done great work for veterans in sending important legislation such as this to the floor. We will pass one important measure today.

Senator KIRK's bill would fund the health care and the benefits our veterans rely on. It would support military families by funding the housing, schools, and health facilities that sustain them. It would provide support for medical research, for women's health, and for veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury. And in Kentucky, it would provide funding for a special operations headquarters at Fort Campbell, for educational facilities at Fort Knox, and for design work for a new medical center in Louisville.

Senator KIRK's bill would also fund reforms designed to help address the crisis we have seen at the VA. These reforms would allow for greater national and regional progress in reducing claims backlogs, and they would deploy important protections for whistleblowers as well.

It is obvious why our veterans deserve this bill right now, so let's not wait a moment longer. Let's pass this important legislation later today. The men and women who have worn our uniform have had to wait long enough for it already.

We will also turn to legislation today for the men and women who currently wear our uniform and have had to wait too long for it.

When Senator McCAIN says that it is the first duty of the Federal Government to protect the Nation, he means it. He knows what it means to serve. He knows what it means to sacrifice. And in his role as chair of the Armed Services Committee, he worked hard to craft a bipartisan Defense authorization bill with input from both parties.

It would transform bureaucratic waste into crucial investments for our troops and their families, like the raises they have earned and the quality of life programs they deserve.

It would provide hope for wounded warriors and extend a hand of compassion to heroes who struggle with mental health challenges.

It would also authorize a new medical facility at Fort Knox, an important project I have championed literally for years.

And at a time when our country faces the most "diverse and complex array of crises" since the Second World War, as Henry Kissinger observed, Senator McCAIN's bill would help position our military to confront the challenges of tomorrow as it offers support to the men and women serving in harm's way today.

The Defense authorization bill is legislation we typically consider every year. It is legislation that typically passes with broad bipartisan support. We expect that to finally happen again today. We expect the President to finally sign it this time.

This should have been allowed to happen a whole lot sooner. We all know the unfortunate and unnecessary roadblocks the Defense authorization bill has faced this year. We all know the President decided to veto the version of the bill we passed last month. That veto is particularly unfortunate and puzzling, given the two chief concerns the President cited when he vetoed it. No. 1, he said he was concerned that the bill relied upon contingency funding to meet the Department's operational costs. No. 2, he said he was concerned that the bill again contained a clear, bipartisan prohibition on moving Guantanamo Bay terrorists into our local communities.

But the bill really hasn't changed much since then, and the top line has now been settled by the bipartisan budget agreement. Either way, we look forward to the Senate passing this essentially unchanged legislation and the President's signing the bipartisan bill, along with—along with—its restrictions against bringing terrorists into the United States, into law.

This bill will include restrictions on bringing terrorists into the United States, and he is going to sign it. That is the right thing for our men and women in uniform, and that is the right thing for our country.

Before I leave the floor, I wish to underline a point I just referenced. This morning the Senate will pass two bills. It will pass a Veterans funding bill that supports Americans who have already served their country, and it will pass a Defense authorization bill that supports Americans who are currently serving. Each of these bills contains a clear, bipartisan prohibition on the President moving Guantanamo Bay terrorists into the backyards of the American people. Both of these bills include restrictions on moving terrorists into our country.

The Senate has voted many times over the years to enact these bipartisan prohibitions. We have enacted them in Congresses with split party control. We have enacted them in Congresses with massive, overwhelming Democratic majorities. And, today, the Congress elected by the American people will express itself clearly one more time—not once, but twice—today.

The President may not like this bipartisan action. It may conflict with a campaign slogan from 8 or 9 years ago. But here is how one Senator put it: "Congress' job is to pass legislation. The President can veto it or he can sign it." That was then-Senator Obama as he was criticizing the idea of doing an "end-run around Congress."

"I believe in the Constitution," he said at the time—Senator Obama—"and I will obey the Constitution of the United States," said Senator Obama. Those were his words then. They should guide his actions now.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. REID. Madam President, as I mentioned yesterday morning, the Republican leader is right about a lot of what he talked about regarding the Military Construction-VA-HUD legislation, but the one thing he just glossed over is that as a result of our holding firm—we as a Democratic caucus holding firm—the veterans now have \$2 billion more than they would have, had we followed the Republicans' lead—\$2 billion more—allowing 70,000 veterans to be treated who wouldn't have been otherwise. So we are satisfied that this bill is a good bill, and it is a good bill because veterans are getting \$2 billion more. There are other reasons, of course. I think the bipartisan support we got for the bill was important, but for our veterans, the most important part was \$2 billion extra.

FIFTH CIRCUIT COURT IMMIGRATION DECISION

Mr. REID. Madam President, the Fifth Circuit Court's decision yesterday was a political move that ignores past precedents on Executive action on immigration.

The Republicans have spoken out against the President's action on what he has done on immigration. Why did he do it? Because he was trapped. He had to do it because the Republicans refused to legislate.

And like every President before him, President Obama has a legal right to establish clear immigration enforcement priorities and allocate resources accordingly.