

Terror. Together, they have earned some of our Nation's most prestigious honors and commendations, including the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Legion of Merit, and the Silver Star Medal for gallantry.

I also had the opportunity to present three Arkansas veterans with the medals and commendations they had earned when I attended the Veterans Day celebration in Fort Smith, AR. I am proud of the work that we do to obtain the service medals and recognition that these heroes have earned.

We have also worked hard to honor the efforts of Mr. Errol Severe, of Eureka Springs, AR, as he strives to preserve and promote the role of joint service aviation cadets in the 20th century. Mr. Severe, an Air Force veteran, operates the Aviation Cadet Museum, which is the only museum in the United States that exists exclusively to celebrate the teamwork, collaboration, patriotism, and courage of the individuals who trained for and fought in the national aviation effort from 1917 to 1965.

As we recognize our veterans and honor the sacrifice and heroism of those who have been called to serve our Nation in uniform, we must recommit ourselves to fighting on their behalf. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am committed to honoring the promise made to our veterans.

We have made tremendous progress during this Congress. In June, President Trump signed the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act. This strengthens accountability at the Department of Veterans Affairs by allowing the VA to dismiss bad employees while protecting those who expose wrongdoing.

We are also continuing to improve the Choice Act. Earlier this year, we hosted listening sessions with Arkansas veterans to obtain their input on the strengths and the weaknesses of the program, as Congress continues to expand access to adequate healthcare options for veterans.

In addition, we enhanced the post-9/11 GI bill benefits to increase educational opportunities. I am proud to have played a role in crafting this law, along with my colleague from Oregon, Senator WYDEN. I am pleased that he can join me on the floor to recognize the importance of the provision we have championed for several years to fix an oversight that prevented combat-injured members of the National Guard and Reserve from receiving the same GI bill benefits as Active-Duty military members. This is a great example of Senators on both sides of the aisle working together to get things done.

Fixing this clear oversight in the law that unfairly penalized wounded and injured servicemembers and kept them from accruing educational benefits they rightly earned while in recovery was a priority for both of us because

these men and women deserved better. To correct this injustice, we introduced legislation earlier this year, as well as in the last Congress, and I am pleased that it was included in the comprehensive GI reform bill that was signed into law this summer.

While we have made improvements, there is still more that needs to be done, including the expansion of VA services for female veterans. I encourage my colleagues to support the Deborah Sampson Act to address these concerns, and I urge VA Secretary Shulkin to implement reforms written in the bill that don't require congressional action. Our work must continue.

Today, my colleague from Indiana, Senator DONNELLY, and I will introduce legislation to allow veterans who served in Thailand during the Vietnam war era the opportunity to prove toxic exposure in order to qualify for VA benefits.

Let me take one more opportunity to thank our veterans and their families. This country made a promise to our veterans that we must live up to, and I am proud to be able to work for them to ensure that we follow through with our commitment.

The men and women who put their lives on the line in defense of our country deserve our undying gratitude. They also deserve our support when they transition back into civilian life, which is why we must support efforts to improve their health, their ability to further their education needs, and to pursue their dreams, just as they fought to make that possible for their fellow Americans. That sentiment is shared throughout this Chamber. For all of our disagreements in Washington, we truly do come together in support of our veterans. That is one area of agreement.

I thank Senator WYDEN for his leadership to ensure equal treatment of education benefits for wounded guardsmen and reservists. I was very proud to work with him in support of this effort, and I look forward to working with him in the future.

Our guardsmen and reservists are called to defend and protect our Nation, exactly like Active-Duty members. So it is only right that they receive the same GI bill benefits.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

RECOGNIZING THE NEBRASKA NATIONAL GUARD

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the men and women of the Nebraska National Guard. For more than 150 years, the Nebraska National Guard has been protecting our State and keeping our Nation safe.

Established in 1854, the Guard predates the founding of the State of Nebraska by 12 years, and those who serve in its ranks today carry on a proud tradition. Whenever the Nation calls, Nebraska Guard men and women have been at the leading edge, responding in times of military need and national crisis.

When the shadow of fascism spread across Europe in World War II, Nebraska's 134th Infantry Regiment was there to bring the light of democracy back to the continent, liberating the French city of Saint-Lo from Nazi occupation.

When terrorists struck on September 11, the Nebraska National Guard was there to answer the call. In the time since, over 10,000 Nebraska Guard soldiers and airmen have deployed to fight the War on Terror and serve in defense of our Nation. This means that in the last 16 years, there have been only 3 days when every Nebraska soldier and airman was at home with their loved ones. Saying no is not part of the culture of the Nebraska National Guard. When the Nation calls, there is no hesitation. They go where the mission requires them to go.

At this very moment, we can find Nebraska soldiers and airmen deployed all across the globe, protecting our great Nation. Whether it is the dozens of National Guard men and women who are currently conducting detainee operations at Guantanamo Bay or those preparing to deploy next year to key positions in the Pacific and the Middle East, our Guard stands ready to answer the call.

The Guard is also playing an important role in working with our allies abroad. Since 1993, the Nebraska National Guard has been linked with the Czech Republic through the State Partnership Program. As Eastern Europe emerged from the heavy hand of communism, the Nebraska National Guard was there working side by side with their military to collaborate, share, and assist, forging a lasting bond that remains strong to this day. This year marks the 25th anniversary of that partnership, and we are all extremely proud of the work our Guard is doing to help bring our democracies together.

That spirit of service extends to their operations here in the homeland as well. When hurricanes so tragically struck our neighbors in Texas, Florida, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico, the Nebraska Guard was there to help. The numbers speak for themselves. In Texas, they rescued 461 people and delivered 142,000 pounds of cargo, 6,000 pounds of bottled water, and 1,000 pounds of medical supplies. During Hurricane Irma, 102 members participated in an aviation task force for support operations. Right now, 58 soldiers and airmen are providing assistance to the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

The scope of their response to these disasters is a testament to their dedication and showcases the flexibility of the Guard's mission. Whether it is responding to domestic emergencies, overseas combat, or reconstruction missions, these men and women are there to respond with speed, efficiency, and strength.

One of the most impressive things about the Nebraska National Guard is that these are regular, everyday citizens who decided to answer the call to serve. They are our neighbors, our

friends, our spouses, sons and daughters, ordinary Nebraskans from every background who decided to put on the uniform and make a difference. That is why I am so honored to have a group of the Nebraska National Guard's men and women visiting Washington today. I wish to take this opportunity to personally thank them, their families, and loved ones who support them, and all of our National Guard soldiers and airmen for their good service. The Nebraska National Guard has seen a lot of change in its history, but one thing remains the same: They stand ready to serve.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

GI BILL FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, one of the great privileges of this job and the honor of representing Oregon in the U.S. Senate is seeing the way Oregonians of all backgrounds and beliefs come together to support those who wear or have worn the uniform of the U.S. military. When it comes to honoring our veterans, Oregonians and so many across the country think in terms of patriotism, not politics and certainly not partisanship. There is not a Democratic or a Republican way to support our veterans; there is an American way.

Recently, I was very pleased to join Senator MORAN and Senator TESTER to introduce bipartisan legislation that would expand the presumption to veterans exposed to Agent Orange in the Korean Demilitarized Zone. The VA currently presumes that veterans who served in the Korean DMZ from 1968 to 1971 were exposed to Agent Orange, but there is evidence that veterans were exposed to toxins all the way back to 1967. Our bipartisan bill would extend the presumption date back, making it easier for veterans to apply for and receive care and benefits.

It is a good bill. It is a bipartisan bill. As we head to Veterans Day, I want to make it clear that I am going to do everything I can to make this bill law soon.

Given the fact that we will all be home this weekend, I also want to take a few minutes to discuss another bipartisan piece of legislation that is important to the welfare of our veterans and a proposal that recently became law.

A few years ago, I learned that wounded members of the National Guard and Reserve were losing out on benefits under the GI Bill for time they spent in rehabilitation and recovery. These are men and women who put their lives on hold to serve our country abroad, and when they suffered injuries in the line of duty, their time spent recovering didn't count toward GI Bill benefits, even though it did for Active-Duty servicemembers in the same situation.

I think it is an understatement to say that is certainly a real head-scratcher, to not stand up for our Guard and Reserve to make sure they

are not losing out on benefits under the GI Bill for the time they spend in recovery and rehab. In effect, the Federal law was adding insult to injury by robbing wounded guardsmen and reservists of benefits they earned and should have been receiving all along. Estimates show that more than 20,000 servicemembers across our country were affected.

I approached our friend and colleague from Arkansas, Senator BOOZMAN, and he graciously agreed to team up with me. Senator BOOZMAN made it clear that a fellow from Arkansas and a fellow from Oregon were going to team up, leave the politics behind, and fix an injustice. We brought together a bipartisan group. We worked with the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and we were able to get the bill across the finish line. As of now, wounded guardsmen and reservists will get the education benefits they have rightly earned.

Especially today, when people are asking about the divisiveness and polarization that now consumes so much of the political debate, I wanted Senators to know that I really appreciate Senator BOOZMAN always trying to be constructive and a problem-solver. And this is one problem that is getting solved.

The law will apply retroactively, meaning that eligible veterans who already lost out will be made whole. Because it is so counterintuitive for servicemembers to lose benefits for being wounded—just think about that, servicemembers losing benefits for being wounded—many of our veterans haven't learned they were missing out. They never knew they were missing out. That is why I am very pleased, as I know Senator BOOZMAN is, that our law applies retroactively to all service after the 9/11 attacks.

I think it is true that success has a thousand parents, and if I thanked everybody on both sides of the aisle for all the work that went into this important bill, we would be here until suppertime tonight. But I do especially want to thank our colleagues, Senators MARKEY and MCCAIN. They lent important support along the way, as did Chairman JOHNNY ISAKSON and Ranking Member JON TESTER. Representative MARK TAKANO of California has also been an exceptional advocate in the other body.

I also wish to give a special thank-you to MAJ Steve Warren, a Department of Defense fellow in my office at the dawn of the process. He is considered a real rock star in terms of working for veterans. He did so much to bring this injustice to light and then worked diligently toward a solution. I think it is the judgment of everybody involved that without Steve's inspiration and perspiration, it would have been hard to see this injustice fixed and our even being here today, as we head to Veterans Day, to talk about it.

I close by way of saying that in this time of partisan rancor and the back-

and-forth that consumes so much of the political debate in Washington, I think what we have shown with this piece of legislation and its importance is that our veterans continue to be a unifying force. This good will comes from a deep respect for the All-Volunteer Force and for the sacrifices made by military families. It also stems from an appreciation for the role our veterans play in so many communities. In Oregon, our vets are small business owners, coders, mill workers, and educators. They help students at the Youth Challenge Program in Bend, and they help us fight fires. And suffice it to say, this year those fires were big, they were long, they were brutal, and we saw fires nobody could have even believed could happen, such as the one that jumped the Columbia River.

It doesn't mean that Congress, even with this legislation, always gets it right with respect to veterans. There is a whole lot more to be done, particularly ensuring timely access to top-quality healthcare through the VA or outside of it and ensuring that guardsmen and reservists get treated fairly and equitably.

I want to say this again on the eve of our taking time out specifically to honor veterans—although in our State, we believe that every day is really Veterans Day—I want to renew my pledge to the people of Oregon that I and my staff will keep working until our vets receive the care and treatment they have earned. We hope the success of our GI Bill Fairness Act demonstrates what can be done when the Congress sets aside all this business of trying to point score on partisanship and puts veterans first.

Mr. President, 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.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor to do what the Trump administration has failed to do; that is, to stand up for working families and fight for an economy that actually works for all, not just for the richest among us.

On the campaign trail, President Trump made promise after promise to workers. He promised to put them first and bring back good-paying jobs to their communities. Yet, since day one of his Presidency, we have seen him do just the opposite. His administration has rolled back protections for workers and families and prioritized corporate profits over working families' financial security.

He has put forth nominee after nominee who puts industry interests above the needs of families, like William Wehrum, President Trump's nominee to lead the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation. Mr. Wehrum is someone who