

Senator GILLIBRAND has also been working in this area, and I want to thank her. Overall, it is a good effort in which everyone came together and agreed on a plan for mandatory training.

#### VETERANS DAY

Mr. President, I will now turn to a completely different subject, and that is the subject of Veterans Day.

I rise to honor and thank our veterans, servicemembers, and their families as we celebrate our veterans on Veterans Day. These brave men and women represent the best among us. Whether you served 50 years ago or still wear the uniform today, we thank our veterans for their service and sacrifice on behalf of this great Nation.

No matter when they served, all veterans have one thing in common: a deep love of our country and a patriotism that goes beyond simply feeling pride. All veterans were willing to lay down their lives in defense of this Nation, and many continue to live the spirit of service in their communities once their time in the military is over.

Last week, I attended the change of command ceremony, where we honored outgoing MG Richard Nash for his decades of service and saw him pass the leadership torch to MG Jon Jensen, who was sworn in as the new adjutant general of Minnesota's National Guard.

As General Nash said earlier this year, "Our Minnesota National Guard and the entire state has contributed greatly in a period of history that will be looked back upon as a remarkably important time."

He continued: "We were always ready, always there."

He was right. Our servicemembers are always there for us, and, in turn, we must honor their service.

At a time marked by the volatility of our politics, our commitment to our servicemembers and veterans remains steadfast. We stand united regardless of our politics. Our veterans fought for our freedom, and we need to be there for them.

When our servicemembers put their lives on the line to serve our country, there wasn't a waiting line. When they come home to the United States of America, when they need healthcare or they need a job or they need a house, there should never be a waiting line in the United States of America.

We still have a great deal of work ahead of us to honor this commitment. Here is an example. Amie Muller of Woodbury, MN, enlisted in the Air Force in 1998. After two deployments to Balad, Iraq, where she was stationed next to one of the war's most notorious toxic burn pits, she returned home. Shortly afterward, she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at age 36, half the average age for this form of cancer.

When Amie passed earlier this year, she left three small children and her loving husband Brian behind. Since then, I have gotten to know and work with Brian. He has made one thing clear to me: We can't let these toxic

burn pits become another Agent Orange. So as part of Amie's legacy, we are working to create a Center of Excellence within the Department of Veterans Affairs to deal with the mounting evidence that thousands of veterans have gotten sick after being exposed to toxic substances burned in the large pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. This isn't a partisan issue, and I am very pleased to have as a cosponsor of my bill Republican colleague Senator THOM TILLIS of North Carolina. We have been working together to get this bill passed. We are very pleased it was in the National Defense Authorization Act that came out of the Senate.

While our National Guard and Reserve component members often serve with their Active-Duty counterparts on the exact same missions, they are not always ensured the same compensation and benefits for their service. When they return home, our National Guard and reservists are often denied the education and healthcare benefits they counted on during their deployments. We need to close that loophole and make sure that members deployed on the same missions who take the same risks receive the same benefits.

Just as we have made a commitment to serving our servicemembers, we have made a commitment to looking out for their families. Since September 11, 2001, the Minnesota National Guard soldiers and airmen have deployed more than 26,000 times. Actually the Red Bulls, one of our units, is one of the longest serving units in Iraq.

That service can take a toll on families—especially kids. That is why it is important for students and teachers to know which students' parents are servicemembers so they can help make special accommodations like setting up Skype during the schoolday so a young girl can talk to her dad who is serving abroad. That is what happens for students whose parents are on Active Duty in the military but not for those whose parents are in the Guard or Reserves. That makes no sense. Some say it was just an error—some say maybe not. Whatever it is, we need to fix it. I am leading bipartisan legislation to make sure our Guard and Reserve Forces and their families are treated equally.

When our veterans signed up to serve and defend our country, there wasn't a waiting line, as I noted. That is why, on this day tomorrow, we will be honoring them by telling them we believe they deserve the best.

I was reminded of that a number of years ago when I greeted one of the World War II Honor Flights that was coming back filled with veterans from Minnesota who saw, maybe for the first time or the last time, the World War II Memorial. They had gotten up incredibly early in the morning, boarded a plane, spent the day, and flew back. There were hundreds and hundreds of family members waiting for them late at night in the airport terminal with balloons and signs with their names on

them. They got off that flight on walkers and wheelchairs, and they came down to where the families were, tears running down their faces. It was an amazing sight to see.

In typical Minnesota tradition, a polka band was playing by the luggage carousel, and one of the older veterans, who I later found out was in his late eighties, asked me to dance.

I said: Well, I would love to dance. Then the band stopped playing because it was at the end.

Then he said: Oh, that is OK.

I said: I am sorry. I will have to take a rain check.

I don't know why I said that to someone his age, but that is what I said.

Then he said: That is OK. I have a great voice.

He started singing that Frankie Valli song, "You're just too good to be true. Can't take my eyes off of you," and he danced me around and around that luggage carousel.

As I danced with that man, I thought to myself, this is how our veterans should be treated every day. They should be greeted with balloons and signs at the airport, and they should be dancing with their Senators by the luggage carousel.

That is the spirit we have to remember as we go forward into Veterans Day. We are reminded of the exceptional commitment and extraordinary service our democracy demands of all the brave men and women who have stepped forward to protect it. That same democracy demands that we fight for our servicemembers as they fought for us. As General Nash said, they were "always there" for us, and we must be there for them too.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUNT). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### TRIBUTE TO ALASKA NATIVE VETERANS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, as you know, I have been coming to the Senate floor pretty much every week for month after month to highlight someone in my State whom we call the Alaskan of the Week. It is someone who does something important, either for their community or the State or the country, and oftentimes they don't get a lot of recognition. The purpose of this is to say: Look at what these people are doing for Alaska, for America, for their community.

My State is known for many things: its physical beauty, incredible hunting and fishing, adventuresome spirit, size—you don't want me going there. I have difficult conversations with my colleagues from Texas on occasion about the different sizes of our respective States, but I will not go into detail

here. These are all things we have in Alaskan space, but the thing that really makes us a great place to live is our people—strong, resilient, kind people all across our State who look out for each other, often in harsh weather conditions.

We are a patriotic State. I know everybody here claims that, and that is great. We all are.

Nowhere is the spirit of sacrifice and patriotism more apparent than in our veterans across the State. In Alaska, in Missouri—the Presiding Officer's State—we are all celebrating that, and we are going to celebrate that this weekend, going home for Veterans Day.

In Alaska, we like to talk about our veterans. We also like to talk about the fact that we have more veterans per capita than any other State in the country. So it is a very patriotic place—full of service.

In every city, village, and every community across Alaska, you will find proud veterans, many of them working tirelessly together to make sure they get the help and support that our veterans need. A lot of times that happens with the older vets—Vietnam-era vets. They come to make sure the new vets get the help they need.

To all of them: I salute your service and your sacrifice. Thank you so much for all you have done and continue to do for our country. Happy Veterans Day to all of Alaska's veterans. I can't wait to get home to celebrate in Fairbanks and Anchorage this weekend.

It is not just Veterans Day that is approaching in Alaska. This month we are also celebrating Alaska Native Heritage Month, where there is much to celebrate. Almost 20 percent of the population of our great State is Alaska Natives. This is a group of people who, generation after generation, have what I call a special patriotism.

What do I mean by that? Well, Alaska Natives serve at higher rates in the military—just like the lower 48. Native Americans have higher rates in the military than any other ethnic group in the country. This has been going on for generations—World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, Iraq, and Afghanistan. When you think about it, it is special.

Let's face it. In the forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies, even sometimes, unfortunately, today, the Federal Government has not always treated Alaska Natives well. Yet, generation after generation, they go off to the front to fight for this country. It is truly a special kind of patriotism and a unique tribute to the Alaska Native heritage we are supporting and celebrating this month.

I thought it was fitting today to name as our Alaskan of the Week—to make it a collective tribute for all Alaska Natives who have served their country in the military, and it is thousands, to make them collectively the Alaskans of the Week as we look to celebrate Veterans Day.

Mr. President, here is a little bit of history. I know you know this, but a

lot of Americans don't. During World War II, Alaska was the only State in the Union to be invaded and occupied by the Japanese, so we had big military battles in the Aleutian Island chain of Alaska to throw off the invaders of our American territory. Thousands of Alaska Natives volunteered to protect their homeland and to defend their country overseas. Across the State, whether they were in the Alaska Territorial Guard, warriors overseas, code talkers who served with the Marines and others—they were as old as 80 and as young as 12.

This is a great story. It shows the warrior ethic. Alaska Native women, after the outbreak of World War II, originally enrolled in the Alaska Territorial Guard before they realized that women weren't allowed to enroll. In fact, the best sharpshooter in Alaska's Territorial Guard was a woman named Laura Beltz Wright of Haycock, AK.

Here is how the late, great Jerome Trigg—an Alaska Native and a marine—put it in 1968, at the height of the Vietnam war, when he was testifying in front of the U.S. Congress on a very important piece of legislation called the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. He was the president of the Arctic Native Brotherhood and, as I mentioned, a proud marine.

In front of a bunch of Senators, he stated as follows:

We have showed our patriotism as proudly as any Americans on earth. We have answered the call of duty with pride in serving [our country]. We answered the call in [World War] II 100 percent. Every man in every village—old and young—volunteered with the Alaska National Guard.

Remember, this was in 1968 that he was testifying. Then he said:

I have never heard of an Alaska Native burning the draft card or burning our nation's flag.

We are patriots. That service, as I mentioned, didn't end after World War II. Alaska Natives have served in every conflict—the Korean war and in droves during the Vietnam war.

I was honored to be in Southeast Alaska this past summer in a Native village called Hoonah. It is a beautiful place. There was a documentary I saw recently. It documented the classes in 1968 and 1969 in that small Native village in a film called "Hunting and War-time." It was about how almost every single male high school student in Hoonah—every one—went to go fight in Vietnam. That is incredible. It is special patriotism.

Let me tell you a quick, more up-to-date story. We had the Secretary of Interior, Ryan Zinke—a combat vet, a Navy SEAL, a heroic man himself—come to Alaska this summer. I asked him to meet with a bunch of Alaska Native veterans, particularly our Vietnam veterans, who had an issue that the Department of Interior has been working on for years. I wanted him to hear about it firsthand.

It was a very touching meeting. Some in the room talked about what it

was like to be in their villages—places they had never left—when they were 17 and 18 and 19. Then, a few days later, they were in a steamy jungle, thousands and thousands of miles away, in Vietnam. Some talked about what it was like coming back and not feeling that they had the support of their country, others talked about the difficulty of readjusting to life back in Alaska after their service in Vietnam and some of the discrimination they received when they came back home, but even though they went through this hardship, even though they went through some of these very difficult times in the late sixties and early seventies, not one of them said they had made a mistake in serving their country. They were proud, patriotic warriors, and to this day that is what they are.

Secretary Zinke said, after he left that meeting, he began it as their Secretary of Interior, and he left as a brother in arms.

I am so honored to be able to serve these great Alaskans and to celebrate them as our Alaskans of the Week, just like I know everybody in America is going to be proud to go home and celebrate with their veterans.

Once again, for our Alaska Native veterans, thank you for all you have done for our country, and thank you for being our Alaskans of the Week.

#### ENERGY

Mr. President, I just want to come down to the floor and say a few words about a debate that has been going on in the Congress right now, and that involves the importance of more energy for the United States.

We had a hearing last week on the possibility of opening a very small portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge called the 1002 area—you see it here in the picture—which would be a win-win-win for the United States. It would help create jobs, it would grow the economy, it would increase energy security, and it would also help protect the global environment and strengthen our Nation's national security. These are the two issues I want to touch on this afternoon.

We have the highest environmental standards regarding responsible resource development anywhere in the world. I was actually in charge of these standards as Alaska's commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources. I could tell you, whether it was no impact exploration—what we call that in Alaska—or specific requirements relating to our incredible species, like polar bear or caribou or mandating the best available technology, we have an over 50-year record of responsible resource development in our State.

Let me just give you one example, what we call no impact exploration. On the North Slope of Alaska, we only allow for exploration activities during the winter months. So what does that mean? Companies actually create ice roads and ice pads, where they drive along the tundra with equipment and