

Federal lands in their State. For the first time in modern history, this program will receive full funding, and it will result in additional support for each county with Federal land.

I note at this time, particularly, the exceptional work done by the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator BAUCUS, who, with Senator BINGAMAN and so many of our colleagues of both political parties, has been involved in these efforts. As a result of those combined efforts, this amendment is paid for with all funding beyond 2007 paid for by closing tax loopholes that have been identified by Senator BAUCUS, the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

This bipartisan amendment is supported by a diverse coalition, including the National Association of Counties, many labor organizations, and education advocates across the country. I urge the Senate this afternoon to recognize the exceptional urgency of this situation and to support the bipartisan effort to reauthorize the County Payments Program and to strengthen the Payment in Lieu of Taxes Program.

Rural communities across this country have been hit with a wrecking ball. With the change in environmental values, we have seen many of them, as they look to diversify their economies, reach out and find new industries, yet they have still had great difficulty in paying for essential services.

As they try to meet these challenges—and I am committed, as chairman of the Forestry Subcommittee, to work on finding new economic opportunities for these rural communities—the country should not turn its back on rural America as it looks to come up with vibrant, new economic prospects for the future.

These laws—the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act and the law that puts in place the Payment in Lieu of Taxes Program—provide essential funding and will be a lifeline as these communities work to transition into additional areas that make sense for resource-based economies.

Today, these small communities are asking the Senate to help them from falling into the abyss. The blow to rural communities, if they lose county payments, will be a crippling blow that, in my view, some rural counties simply will not be able to recover from.

Mr. President and colleagues, let us remember rural America as we consider this legislation. I hope Senators of both political parties will join the very large block of Democratic and Republican Senators who offer this amendment today.

Mr. President, we are waiting for a manager on the other side. A number of colleagues, particularly the Senator from Illinois, has been very gracious and very patient. I think what I wish to do is yield at this time. When a manager comes, we will resume deliberations.

I thank the Senator from Illinois for his patience.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator yields the floor.

Who seeks recognition?

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, it is my understanding that at this point we cannot set aside the pending amendment because we are waiting for a floor manager.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair will advise the Senator from Illinois, unanimous consent needs to be sought and granted in order to proceed while the Cochran amendment is pending.

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, why don't I wait to find out whether it is possible for the Senator from Oregon to potentially call up his amendment. If not, then what I would like to do is speak on my amendment and find out when I can call up my amendment.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, the Senator from Illinois has indicated he would speak very briefly. I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Illinois could speak for his 5 minutes, and with the floor manager coming on to the floor, that we could then turn to the county payments legislation after the Senator from Illinois has spoken for 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator from Illinois is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that after I speak, if the Senator from Oregon is able to call up his amendment, I be able to call up my amendment as well thereafter.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 664

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, toward the end of World War II, Norman Rockwell created a cover for the Saturday Evening Post titled "Homecoming GI." It is a picture of a soldier returning from war. He has a duffle bag clutched in his left hand. He is looking up at the back of a brick building with laundry hanging from the back porch. A woman in an apron sees him with outstretched arms, and a young child races down the stairs. Everyone sees that soldier—the neighbors' kids, the man fixing the roof, faces from another window—and everyone welcomes that soldier who has come home from war.

That is what our Nation did for the millions of servicemembers who returned from the Atlantic and the Pacific. We watched them come home in waves. Some were just as strong as their first day in battle; others limped. We saw them crowd Times Square. We saw them walk down Main Street and sit on stoops. My grandfather, who fought in Patton's army, would often speak about this time as America at its finest. That homecoming didn't just happen; we were ready for it.

Long before the beaches of Normandy were stormed and the last battle was fought, in 1943 President Roosevelt said:

Among many other things, we are, today, laying plans for the return to civilian life of our gallant men and women in the armed services. They must not be demobilized into an environment of inflation and unemployment, to a place on a bread line, or on a corner selling apples. We must, this time, have plans ready instead of waiting to do a hasty, inefficient, and ill-considered job at the last moment.

These are the words of wisdom that we ignore at our peril.

Today we have more than 631,000 veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and other parts of the global war on terror. According to a recent VA health care report, one-third—more than 205,000—have sought treatment at VA health facilities.

Even if the war in Iraq comes to an end soon—and I hope the Senate takes action this week to accomplish that goal—the war will live on with our servicemembers and their families for the rest of our lives.

Unfortunately, over the past month, we have all seen the disturbing pictures of neglect at Walter Reed. We have read about bats and bureaucratic redtape at the VA. We have seen too many stories about our veterans who have been forgotten—not greeted by the Nation that asked them to serve. The time has come for us to see this generation of veterans in all their valor and pain. We should provide them with a plan that is worthy of their courage and will help build back the military they love.

That is what Senator MCCASKILL and I are trying to do with the amendment we offer today.

First, we provide an additional \$41 million to hire more caseworkers to assist servicemembers navigating the military's bureaucracy. The last thing a wounded servicemember should have to face when they return home is a front line of paperwork and delay. Right now, the caseworker-to-servicemember ratio at Walter Reed is 1 to 50. Caseworkers help recovering soldiers schedule appointments, take care of their everyday needs, and fill out paperwork. Military caseworkers are overwhelmed. I understand the Army is reducing the caseworker-to-servicemember ratio to 1 to 17, and I applaud this move. Our amendment would help the military achieve this goal at all military hospitals.

Our amendment also provides \$30 million for the Armed Forces to create an Internet-based system for servicemembers to submit their paperwork electronically. No longer will amputees and servicemembers in wheelchairs have to go to countless offices to fill out duplicative forms only to learn that the forms have been lost in Government bureaucracy.

We also need to do more to increase the number of mental health crisis counselors available to assist recovering servicemembers and their families. Too many servicemembers are returning home with unmet mental health needs—stresses that are often experienced by their family members.

That is why our amendment provides \$17 million for more mental health crisis counselors.

While we all praise how our country treated the servicemembers returning from World War II, we must remember the lessons after Vietnam. The landmark National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study was congressionally mandated in 1983, 15 years after the height of that war. The completed report showed the vast majority of Vietnam veterans had successfully acclimated to postwar life.

We can't wait 15 years to plan and prepare for the readjustment needs of the servicemembers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The average age of a servicemember deployed since September 11 is 27. The average age of our Guard and Reserves is 33. Sixty percent of those deployed have family responsibilities, and 47 percent of those who have died have left families. Mr. President, 160,000 women have been deployed, and 10 percent of those women are single mothers. These men and women are going to face real challenges in readjusting to normal life.

Our amendment would provide for a study by the National Academy of Sciences of the mental health and readjustment needs of returning servicemembers. This study will assist the Department of Defense, the Veterans' Administration, and Congress in planning for the long-term needs of our veterans.

Last week I met a woman at Walter Reed. She is one of the 160,000 women who have been deployed, and she suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Most of us associate PTSD with men in combat, but many of the women in theater face firsthand dangers in their combat support roles. Driving a truck in Baghdad is one of the most dangerous missions around, and it is considered a support role. Women are witnessing the horrors of improvised explosive devices and the horrors of losing fellow servicemembers, and too many are experiencing the trauma of sexual harassment or abuse.

This young woman was very scared, and she trembled as we spoke. I asked her what we could do to help. She said that she could not handle group therapy sessions; she could only tolerate one-on-one sessions with counselors. Her experience is shared by many women. Treatment for women with PTSD, especially sexual abuse victims, is very different from treatment for men.

That is why as part of our amendment we want to provide \$15 million to address the unique mental health needs of women. This funding will ensure the development and implementation of a women's treatment program for mental health conditions, including PTSD. It will also include the hiring and training of sexual abuse counselors so that the servicemembers who suffer from this trauma do not have to suffer in silence. We can do this for the woman I

met at Walter Reed and the thousands who suffer like her.

The total cost of our amendment is \$103 million—less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the total cost of this bill. This is the least we can do for our servicemembers recovering at Walter Reed and other military hospitals.

I am proud that Veterans For America has endorsed our amendment, and I ask unanimous consent that their letter of endorsement be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

VETERANS FOR AMERICA,
March 27, 2007.

DEAR SENATOR OBAMA: Veterans for America commends you for fighting to ensure that the service-related needs are met of the one and a half million men and women who have been deployed in our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We commend you for fighting to enact an amendment—based primarily on the provisions of the Dignity for Wounded Warriors Act (S. 713)—to the current emergency supplemental appropriations bill (S. 965).

This is the most important piece of legislation offered since the start of our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Today's military is drastically different from any other we have ever sent to war. Too many of our troops are returning to a system that completely ignores their most urgent service-related health and readjustment needs.

One fact is quite striking: of the tens of billions of dollars spent to meet the needs of America's veterans, less than one percent is spent on this generation.

We waited almost 15 years after the end of the Vietnam War to examine the specific needs of my generation through the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study. We fought hard for this study, and while we waited for its completion, tens of thousands of lives were shattered.

We cannot wait that long this time. The study included in your amendment will prevent us from failing thousands upon thousands of our service members and veterans. We must stop throwing money at a broken system that does not address the most urgent unmet needs of today's service members and veterans.

I also want to commend your efforts to recognize the challenges faced by women service members and veterans. The needs of women troops are being effectively ignored. This is a national disgrace.

Again, you have my sincere thanks and the thanks of millions of others who have proudly served our country.

Sincerely,

BOBBY MULLER,
President.

Mr. OBAMA. I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this amendment. At this point I turn the floor back to the Senator from Oregon, Mr. WYDEN, and I ask, if the floor managers are prepared, that I be able to call up this amendment after the Senator from Oregon does so with his amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak to the Obama amendment and then go back to regular order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I apologize. I should have allowed—

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, if I could just clarify for all of us, could you tell us what the current unanimous consent agreement has in it?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The pending amendment before the Senate is the Cochran amendment. The Senator from Illinois had asked unanimous consent to address the Senate for 5 minutes, and then when he completed, to yield back to Senator WYDEN to continue to discuss his amendment. There was no objection. Further, after the Wyden amendment was brought up, the next amendment to be offered would be that of the Senator from Illinois, Mr. OBAMA. There was no objection.

Mrs. MURRAY. Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the Senator from Missouri is recognized.

AMENDMENT NO. 664

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Mr. President, I rise to speak in favor of the amendment that will be offered by Senator OBAMA. Our amendment takes part of the legislation we have introduced, the Dignity for the Wounded Warriors Act, and moves it to the front of the line.

The question which has to be asked is, Why? Why is it important that this go into this bill at this time? There is a lot of talk about what should and shouldn't go into the supplemental. I think it is important we realize if we don't act immediately to begin to take the kind of care of our wounded they need to have, that they should have, that we are morally bound to give them, then we shouldn't be passing any more supplemental funding for any more activities in this war.

It is of primary importance to us that we take care of the men and women who have been wounded, who have given more than most Americans will ever give as it relates to this conflict in the Middle East.

I have to say, if you step back and look at this problem, it is not just the active military hospitals that this amendment deals with, but it is the entire system of medical care for our wounded and for our veterans.

I was struck last week when a report came out on all the veterans facilities around the country. This was an internal report done by the Veterans' Administration but contained in that report was a startling revelation. In that report they found there was a bat infestation in a veterans hospital in the State of the Senator from Oregon.

Now, one would think that if you found a bat infestation in a hospital alarms would go off, lights would signal, and the head of that hospital would step up and say: I failed. Oh, no. The head of that hospital said the bats had been helpful to the insect population. Understand that with this particular species of bat, there is more bacteria contained in an ounce of the droppings from this animal than any other species of bat. Microbiologists

yearn to study these droppings because of all of the bacteria that is contained in them.

Something is terribly wrong when we have a veterans hospital in this country that is putting up with an infestation of bats, and if we don't have it in us to fix this medical facility and all others like it in this country, then shame on us. Shame on our Nation that we can't do what we must do to take care of those who have taken care of us.

All the rhetoric about "support the troops"—forget about it if we can't do basic medical care for those who are coming home who are wounded. We specifically deal with that in our amendment, with the additional funds in this supplemental that we have added to the President's budget to care for our veterans and veterans facilities.

There is no job we have here that is more important. I hope my colleagues will support this amendment and the addition of about \$1.7 billion in funding to the supplemental for veterans care. They are both important. They are both moral imperatives. It is time we make that phrase—"support our troops"—more than a political phrase.

Mr. President, I yield to the Senator from Oregon, or to go back to regular order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon is recognized.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment, and I call up my bipartisan amendment on county payments and the payment in lieu of taxes.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I do not intend to object but for the purpose of asking if there would be any objection to my offering an amendment on behalf of the Senator from Indiana, Mr. LUGAR, and then yielding to the Senator. We wouldn't have any debate, but we would just offer this amendment so it would be pending in the regular order.

Mr. WYDEN. I would be happy to proceed, but I recognize the manager on our side.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, if I could just clarify, is it amendment No. 690?

Mr. COCHRAN. It is amendment No. 690.

Mrs. MURRAY. Then we would not object.

AMENDMENT NO. 690

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I send to the desk an amendment on behalf of the Senator from Indiana, Mr. LUGAR.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Mississippi [Mr. COCHRAN], for Mr. LUGAR, proposes an amendment numbered 690.

The amendment is as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 690

(Purpose: To provide that, of the funds appropriated by this Act under the headings "DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR PROGRAMS" and "ECONOMIC SUPPORT FUND" (except for the Community Action Program), up to \$50,000,000 may be made available to support and maintain a civilian reserve corps)

On page 56, after line 18, insert the following:

CIVILIAN RESERVE CORPS

SEC. 1713. Of the funds appropriated by this Act under the headings "DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR PROGRAMS" and "ECONOMIC SUPPORT FUND" (except for the Community Action Program), up to \$50,000,000 may be made available to support and maintain a civilian reserve corps. Funds made available under this section shall be subject to the regular notification procedures of the Committees on Appropriations.

Mr. COCHRAN. I thank the Chair, and I thank the distinguished Senator from Oregon.

AMENDMENT NO. 709

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and to call up our bipartisan amendment on County Payments and the Payments in Lieu of Taxes Program.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Oregon [Mr. WYDEN], for himself, Mr. REID, Mr. BAUCUS, Mr. BINGAMAN, Mr. SMITH, Ms. CANTWELL, Mr. DOMENICI, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. CRAIG, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. CRAPO, Mr. TESTER, Mr. STEVENS, Mr. BENNETT, and Ms. MURKOWSKI, proposes an amendment numbered 709.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, a great many Senators of both political parties have signed on as cosponsors of this legislation: the distinguished Senate majority leader; the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Chairman BAUCUS; chairman of the Energy Committee, Senator BINGAMAN; Senators SMITH, DOMENICI, CRAIG, STEVENS, BENNETT, CANTWELL, BOXER, MURRAY, CRAPO, TESTER, and MURKOWSKI. A great many Senators have agreed to be cosponsors.

My understanding is that, perhaps, in a few minutes the Senate is going to be given a choice of two approaches on how to deal with this issue: the approach that I and a large bipartisan group of Senators are offering this afternoon or an approach that will be offered by the distinguished Senator from North Carolina, our colleague, Senator BURR, which, in my view, is very restrictive and, unfortunately, it is not in line with what Senator CRAIG and I sought to do on a bipartisan basis back in 2000.

Our law that was enacted at that time was called the Secure Rural

Schools and Community Self-Determination Act. Unfortunately, as I understand it, the proposal offered by the distinguished Senator from North Carolina would, for example, make it very difficult for local law enforcement to get some of these essential dollars that have been absolutely critical to public safety for all these years.

My view is that, under our bipartisan proposal, local law enforcement would have at least a fair measure of the resources they need to fight methamphetamine in local communities across the country. Our colleague from North Carolina, in his approach, would not make that possible.

So I hope that, as colleagues consider this debate, they will vote in favor of the amendment I offer this afternoon, on behalf of the large group of Senators of both political parties who have been intimately involved in this program for many years.

Our amendment is fully paid for through the good work of the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and I hope our colleagues will vote for our amendment and will reject the amendment of the Senator from North Carolina, which is much more restrictive and, unfortunately, forgets the second part of the legislation that is so vital to rural communities and that is law enforcement and roads and other essential services.

I had a chance to speak on this earlier, so I will be brief. Other colleagues would like to speak as well. The reality in rural America and the rural West is that communities are about to fall off a financial cliff.

They are going to lose these essential funds that have been part of a Federal obligation for more than a hundred years. It is not a welfare program. It is not some kind of a handout that goes to rural communities in the West. These are communities where the Federal Government owns most of the land. The local community is not allowed to maximize its revenues on those lands because the Federal Government has essentially said we are not going to treat them as private property, where you generate a sale and revenue and you pay for essential services.

So the Federal Government entered into an agreement more than a hundred years ago to provide compensation to those local communities where the Federal Government owned most of the land. What our bipartisan group wants to do is update and modernize that obligation that was incurred more than a hundred years ago when the Federal forest system was established.

Our amendment would resolve the budget crisis that is confronting rural communities by fully funding the County Payments Program for 2007, and then we set in place a formula that was negotiated for many months through a large group of Senators.

I have the chart indicating the new formula that has been put into place. It makes it very clear that Senators understand this program, because of the