

Congressman COLE knows he should be listening to his constituents, and he is. If we all listened to the people we represent and if the House leadership listens to the people of this country and those they represent, they will pass the bill we sent to them in July.

If taxes go up for middle-class families on January 1, people are going to know who is responsible for letting that happen. I urge House Republican leadership to take up S. 3412, the Middle-Class Tax Cut Act, pass it now, so the overwhelming number of families in this country have certainty going into this important holiday season and into the new year, so they can enjoy the season without knowing that their taxes are going to be going up on January 1. As of today we have 27 days before the vast majority of people in America—98 percent—see tax increases occur. It makes no sense, there is no reason for it to happen, and we have already passed a bill. If the House passes a bill, that is step one. Step one very clearly says we are all together on supporting the middle class continuing their tax cuts. We know there is more to do. We are fully prepared to do that. But step one is to make sure the middle class is not held hostage while the debate goes on about what should happen for the wealthiest few in this country.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will resume legislative session.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2013—Resumed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the pending business.

A bill (S. 3254) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2013 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Kyl modified amendment No. 3123, to require briefings on dialogue between the United States and the Russian Federation on nuclear arms, missile defense, and long-range conventional strike systems.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. AKAKA). The Senator from Virginia.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. WEBB. Mr. President, we are about to wrap up the Defense bill. This is the sixth Defense bill I have had the privilege of working on as a member of

the Armed Services Committee. It is also the final Defense bill I will be working on as a Member of the U.S. Senate. I want to take this opportunity to say what an honor and privilege it has been to serve as a member of that committee and express my thanks to Chairman LEVIN.

As someone who began his time on Capitol Hill as a full-committee counsel on the House side many years ago and then spent 5 years in the Pentagon—often working over here on the Hill—and now after 6 years in the Senate, I can say that Senator LEVIN is a five-star committee chairman. He is what one always hopes for when he or she serves on a committee in the U.S. Congress. It has been a true honor.

This committee is an example of how committee work should be undertaken in the U.S. Congress. People like to say this is the 51st consecutive year we have, hopefully, been able to pass a Defense authorization bill. I would suggest to my colleagues that perhaps that example should be used more broadly in this body. I think it would make for good governance if it did.

I want to also express my appreciation to Senator MCCAIN, the Senator from Arizona. I have known him as a colleague and friend for more than 30 years. He comes from a family that has a long tradition of military service to our country that continues even until today. Senator MCCAIN and I have had occasional disagreements on the conduct of foreign policy, but I think it has been very rare that we have seen differently as to our views of how the Department of Defense should undertake its responsibilities.

As the subcommittee chair of the personnel subcommittee, I want to express my appreciation to my staff, Gary Leeling, Jon Clark, Brie Fahrner, and Jennifer Knowles. They have always been accessible and extremely professional. It has been a great privilege to work with them.

I also want to take a special moment of privilege here to recognize Gordon Peterson, who has been my military assistant throughout my time in the U.S. Senate. Gordon Peterson and I graduated from the Naval Academy in the same year. He was a very fine and respected athlete at the Naval Academy. He went on to become a helicopter pilot in combat in Vietnam. He gave our country 30 years of distinguished service as a naval officer. He was later the editor in chief of Seapower magazine, and was a special assistant to the Commandant of the Coast Guard. He has been unflagging in his attention to detail in everything we have worked on in the last 6 years.

We were talking a few days ago about whether either of us would have thought that during the days of our plebe summers so many years ago we would be sitting on the floor of the U.S. Senate as stewards of the well-being of our country and of the people who served it. I give a special thanks to Gordon Peterson as he moves on to other challenges in his life.

Again, it has been my privilege to serve on this committee.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I wanted to come down and talk about an amendment I am working on to the Defense authorization bill. Last week Senator CORKER and I filed amendment No. 3049, which would create an open burn pit registry in the Defense Authorization Act.

Our veterans and Active-Duty members suffering from exposure to burn pits should not have to wait any longer. The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee agrees and has passed the legislation after holding hearings. However, I understand there is currently opposition to passing this amendment via a managers' package.

I would note that we have already passed two amendments dealing with veterans yesterday, both the Pryor amendment No. 3291 dealing with veterans employment and training and the Reed of Rhode Island amendment No. 3165 dealing with housing assistance for veterans. Both of these were outstanding amendments and help maintain the trust we have made to our veterans and our current servicemembers whom we have an obligation to care for when they have completed their service.

In both Afghanistan and Iraq, open-air burn pits were widely used at forward operating bases. Disposing of trash and other debris was a major challenge. I believe, like the rest of my colleagues, that if we are forever in debt to our veterans for their service, we must be asking this question: How did these burn pits impact the health of our returning heroes? This amendment is a step toward finding the answers we owe them. It is supported by numerous groups, including Burnpits 360, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Association of the U.S. Navy, Retired Enlisted Association, the Uniformed Services Disabled Retirees, and the National Military Family Association.

I am hopeful that we can pass this amendment No. 3049 through a unanimous consent agreement, but I respectfully request a vote at this time if no such agreement can be made.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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