

country. He urged us to put politics aside.

That is what Senator TESTER and Senator GILLIBRAND and Senator ISAKSON have asked us to do. Last year, we introduced the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which would guarantee that all Vietnam veterans exposed to toxic Agent Orange chemicals have equal access to the care and benefits they have earned.

A number of us, myself included, raised the issue with VA Secretary Wilkie, both in private meetings in our office and in the Veterans' Affairs Committee, pressing him to expand benefits to all veterans.

Mr. Kvintus and Mr. Benedict and all of the veterans in our States—Georgia, Connecticut, Montana, New York, and Ohio—we all hear this. We all know that these veterans put themselves in harm's way. It is the cost of war.

We need to show the American people we can work together. We should start by putting partisanship aside, passing this bill tonight, and finally getting the care for veterans that they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleagues Senator BROWN, Senator TESTER, most importantly, Senator GILLIBRAND, and our good friend Senator ISAKSON.

Senator ISAKSON and Senator GILLIBRAND and I worked together closely on this issue when I was the ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. We engaged the VA through hearings, through meetings, through any way that we could reach the VA so that it would grant the presumption to all veterans who served in the territorial waters of Vietnam during the Vietnam war and were exposed to Agent Orange, to give them simple justice, and to treat them with the same presumption of service-connected disability as their fellow veterans who served in the Vietnam conflict with boots on the ground. If they served in those territorial waters, they deserve that same presumption.

Beyond the abstraction here, I want to talk about the face and voice of this problem, which, for me, is my good friend Gerry Wright.

Gerry Wright rode across this country on a motorcycle. The mantra on the motorcycle was "Sprayed and Betrayed." Gerry Wright is a victim of Agent Orange. He suffers from some of the same conditions as those brave veterans who served with boots on the ground. He joined me, along with Paul Scappaticci, Cynthia Johnson, and Gary Monk on Veterans Day. Just as he rode across the country, we came together to raise awareness about this issue.

If Americans saw and heard those faces and voices, if my colleagues heeded their call, there would be no objection in this body to this legislation. It is all of us who share a responsibility, and it is the VA that has to acknowl-

edge responsibility, as well, for its opposition over the years and its actions blocking simple justice for these veterans.

In the absence of justice from the VA, we have fought over these years—just as the blue water Navy veterans have fought for decades—to achieve that justice, and 5 months ago, that justice seemed within reach when the House unanimously passed, 382 to 0, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act.

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing on this legislation in August. Members had more than sufficient time to consider the language. There are more than ample funds to cover it. There is no reason—none whatsoever—for delaying this legislation, which has such broad support from the Veterans Service Organizations, stakeholders, and members of this body.

I want to remind my colleagues that this legislation also includes a provision that I led with Senator MORAN and Senator TESTER that would treat with fairness our Korean veterans. It is called the Fairness for Korean DMZ Veterans Act, ensuring all veterans who served in the Korean DMZ, when Agent Orange was used there, that they will also receive the healthcare and benefits they deserve. This measure is about justice for our Vietnam veterans, for our Korean war veterans, and it is a symbol, as well as a tangible and profoundly significant benefit of our commitment to cover the cost of war. This measure is not about a gift. It is not about charity. It is about what we owe the veteran. It is about keeping faith, making sure that we leave none of those veterans behind, and that we give them the simple justice they deserve. They have fought for this recognition over years, and "sprayed and betrayed" will be the appropriate designation if we fail in this duty for them.

Again, I thank Senator GILLIBRAND and Senator DAINES for their leadership, and I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, in 1948, in the wake of two World Wars that caused death, destruction and atrocities on a massive and unprecedented scale, the world came together at the nascent United Nations to establish the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These rights, envisioned as the "foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world," included article 19, the right of everyone to freedom of opinion and expression. This, of course, mirrors our First Amendment, which for more than two centuries has served as the cornerstone of our democracy. Article 19 also includes the ability to "receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers," as necessary to the realization of that right. The free and independent press has fulfilled this essential role around the world ever since.

Today is the 70th anniversary of that landmark declaration; yet as we commemorate that historic achievement, I have never been more concerned about the state of freedom of the press. Increasingly, around the world and even here in the United States, governments are actively trying to intimidate and silence the independent media. This year alone, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, over 43 journalists have been murdered for nothing more than publishing facts and informing the public. Countless others have been harassed and threatened. President Trump, who has called the press an "enemy of the people" and routinely denigrates journalists who do not portray him in a favorable light, has inspired the world's autocrats to decry "fake news" and imprison and even assassinate journalists who courageously report on corruption and other government misconduct.

Eleanor Roosevelt, one of our country's greatest defenders of human rights, served as chairwoman of the UN commission that wrote the Universal Declaration. Its commitment to the "inherent dignity" and "equal and inalienable rights" of all people is a testament to her vision of a more humane, just, and peaceful world, but like any such statement of principles, the declaration is aspirational. It has tangible meaning only to the extent that people apply it in practice. As the oldest democracy whose First Amendment has inspired countless people on every continent, it is incumbent on us all to defend the right of free expression enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration, here and around the world.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, last week the Senate passed a second continuing resolution for fiscal year 2019, providing short-term funding for

many Federal Government agencies that have not yet received full year funding.

Several outstanding issues need to be resolved in order to complete the final seven appropriations bills, and I am hopeful that the hard work of the Appropriations Committee will not be in vain by resorting to a year-long continuing resolution for the remaining bills.

Congress must act in order to fully fund essential transportation and housing programs, environmental protection efforts, the Appalachian Regional Commission, NASA programs, the Census, FEMA relief programs, and to prevent President Trump from freezing the pay of over 2 million Federal civil servants, by enacting the 1.9 percent cost of living increase for Federal workers that the Senate passed on a broad bipartisan basis.

While I am glad this short-term continuing resolution will provide for an extension to keep the flood insurance program from unnecessarily lapsing, I want to see Congress enact a long-term reauthorization. This year's flooding of Ellicott City shows that we need a long-term solution. That is why I am an original cosponsor of the SAFE act, which provides for a 5-year extension for the program, in addition to important program enhancement as well as the Federal Flood Risk Management Act that ensures that federally owned or funded buildings, housing, and infrastructure, be made more weather-resistant and resilient so that we can protect our communities and our investment of Federal tax dollars.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I look forward to working with my colleagues over the next 2 weeks to complete the committee's fiscal year 2019 work.

BLUE WATER NAVY VIETNAM VETERANS ACT OF 2017

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the November 29, 2018, letter from the Congressional Budget Office regarding H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017, be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

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

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
U.S. CONGRESS,
Washington, DC, November 29, 2018.

Hon. MIKE ENZI,
Chairman, Committee on the Budget,
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On May 15, 2018, the Congressional Budget Office transmitted an estimate of the budgetary effects of H.R. 299, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on May 8, 2018. Among other things, the act would provide disability compensation to more of the veterans who served in the territorial seas of Vietnam during the Vietnam

War under the assumption that they had been exposed to Agent Orange, a blend of herbicides used by the Department of Defense to remove dense tropical foliage. CBO estimated that those provisions would increase direct spending by about \$900 million over the 2019–2028 period.

The bill that was passed by the House amended the earlier version to expand the nautical area in which veterans would be presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange. That change would increase CBO's estimate of the costs of the legislation by about \$250 million to account for the additional veterans that would be affected.

Since the original estimate was prepared in May, CBO has obtained new information that would affect future estimates of similar legislation. In total, we expect that accounting for this new information would increase the estimate of the legislation's effect on direct spending by at least \$1 billion over 10 years.

First, CBO now expects that more veterans would be affected by enactment of the bill than previously estimated. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) already presumes that veterans who served aboard certain U.S. Navy ships on the dates they were near the coast of Vietnam were exposed to Agent Orange. Using information about the crew size of those listed ships, CBO estimated that about two-thirds of veterans who served in the geographic area covered by the bill would obtain compensation under current law. Thus, in its estimate for H.R. 299, CBO projected that only one-third of veterans in the covered population would be newly eligible for disability compensation under that bill.

We have since learned from additional discussions with VA that there is considerably more uncertainty than we originally anticipated about the number of veterans that, under current law, VA would presume to have been exposed because of service aboard those vessels. Specifically, there is a greater likelihood that less than two-thirds of veterans who served in the geographic area covered by the bill would obtain compensation under current law.

To account for that uncertainty CBO would, in future estimates expect that half of affected beneficiaries would obtain benefits under current law, and thus would not be affected by enactment of H.R. 299. That estimate is in the middle of the range of possible outcomes. Using that updated estimate would mean that fewer veterans would be expected to receive benefits under current law and more would get benefits as a result of H.R. 299. The increase in the number of affected veterans would result in additional retroactive payments to veterans whose disability claims previously have been denied by VA and also would increase the number of recurring disability payments.

In addition, on the basis of new information from VA, CBO also would increase its estimate of the number of surviving spouses of deceased veterans who would receive compensation because the cause of those veterans' deaths would be presumed to have been caused by exposure to Agent Orange.

Finally, CBO would estimate that spending subject to appropriation would increase for additional personnel to process disability claims. Such spending would allow VA to handle new claims more quickly. Although H.R. 299 would not require VA to hire more personnel to process these additional claims, the department has indicated that it would need to do so in order to avoid a lengthy backlog.

CBO will incorporate this new information into its future estimates of the budgetary effects of such legislation.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Logan Smith.

Sincerely,

KEITH HALL,
Director.

REMEMBERING LYUDMILA ALEXEYEVA

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, today I wish to pay tribute to Lyudmila Alexeyeva, a true giant for human rights in Russia and around the world. Ms. Alexeyeva passed away over the weekend in Moscow and left behind children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, but that was just her immediate family. Lyudmila's leadership and fearlessness inspired a generation of human rights and democracy activists in Russia; she was the grandmother of human rights in the country, and her stalwart leadership in the face of repression will truly be missed. Today is International Human Rights Day, a fitting moment to pay tribute to this incredible leader.

In thinking about Lyudmila's legacy, three words come to mind: vision, tenacity, and courage.

Starting from her days drafting a Samizdat journal called the Chronicle of Current Events that scrutinized the Khrushchev regime, Lyudmila had the vision of a Soviet Union in which all of its citizens played a role in ensuring accountable governance and democratic principles. She saw the opportunity to fulfill this vision in the 1975 Helsinki Accords, especially those tenets which enshrined the critical notion that signatory countries' respect for human rights inside their borders was integral to security in the transatlantic region. The Brezhnev government at the time had no intention of honoring those elements of Helsinki, but Lyudmila worked together with her compatriots to set up the Moscow Helsinki Group to monitor implementation of the Accords. The Moscow Helsinki Group inspired the proliferation of sister organizations in other countries whose governments had committed to Helsinki principles, including here in Congress with the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This platform inside of the Soviet Union and across the transatlantic space was critically important to build those bonds of international solidarity among so many likeminded democrats and human rights defenders. She was indeed a true visionary for open, democratic societies, and the bonds she built with and among activists who shared that vision stand strong to this day.

Second, tenacity—Lyudmila faced so many obstacles during the Soviet period and the Putin era. After starting Moscow Helsinki, the pressure from the Soviet regime grew so great that she had to seek exile in the United States for 16 years. During that time, she became an American citizen, a proud moment for us here in this country. While in exile, she remained committed to