

If we expect to recruit and to retain our best, America must provide them with the best: the best pay, housing, medical care, and other benefits. I applaud the President's commitment to improving our military and strongly support his plans to look before we leap. Our resources are limited and they must be used wisely, but we can set priorities. We can have a budget that meets our strategy, if we have a well-run military with a clear strategy.

We should deploy our troops when there is a U.S. security interest, but not over deploy or over demand their deployment. If we remember this, then we will have a military that is well funded, efficient, and will accomplish the goals we have set for them.

Of all of the areas for which Congress is responsible, national security is No. 1. It is our highest priority. It is the responsibility of the Federal Government to make sure all of those who have died in the past 200 plus years, maintaining the freedom of this country, will never, ever have died in vain. The only way we can repay them is to keep the zeal for freedom alive in our generation and in future generations.

We will keep the zeal for freedom alive if we keep our national security a No. 1 priority and we respect the military who have the job to make sure our freedom is intact today and will be for our children and grandchildren.

I applaud President Bush's initiatives. He is going to make sure we take every step in a thoughtful way. We are going to rebuild our national defense. We are going to renew our commitment to national security for the families of our country, for the protection of our allies, and for the protection of democracy, wherever there are people in the world who are trying to become free, with the example for freedom being the United States of America.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, are there time limitations currently in effect for speaking?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Senator THOMAS has time reserved until noon, and then from that point on, 15 minutes have been reserved for the Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. President. I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to use my 15 minutes starting now.

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

HELPING OUR MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I first commend the Senator from Texas for

her excellent statement on the needs of our men and women in uniform. As the Senator from Texas, I had the opportunity earlier this week to accompany President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld, as well as a number of Members of Congress, on a trip to Fort Stewart in Georgia. There we had the opportunity to talk firsthand with our soldiers. We also had the opportunity to tour their barracks.

I must say I was shocked with what I saw. We saw soldiers living three in a very cramped space, 55 square feet per soldier, housing that is an embarrassment to the United States of America.

Mr. President, there is an old statement that nothing is too good for our troops. Well, "nothing" appears to be exactly what they are getting in some parts of this country. We need to recommit ourselves, if we are going to solve our recruitment and retention problems, to providing quality housing, competitive pay, and good health and retirement benefits to our men and women in uniform. For that reason, I applaud the President's initiative and his announcements this week of his commitment to remedy the pay, housing, and benefit problems that were so evident on this trip.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Ms. COLLINS. I am happy to yield.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I want to say how much I appreciate the statement that has been made by the Senator from Maine. I also appreciate that she took the time to go and see for herself. She is a new member of the Armed Services Committee and she wanted to see the conditions in which our soldiers are living. I know this is now going to be a priority for her to make these improvements.

I talked to the President after that visit he made, and he was so touched by the response he got from our troops. I know he has recommitted himself to making sure our troops have the support they need to do the job we are asking them to do. So I thank the Senator from Maine for going on that very important trip and for making that statement and that commitment.

I ask unanimous consent that the time I have used not be counted against the time of the Senator from Maine.

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

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Texas for her comments. I was, indeed, so impressed with the pride and professionalism of the soldiers that I met. They were so committed to their jobs and to serving our country. We simply need to do better by them.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine is recognized.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 351 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I yield the floor. Seeing no one seeking rec-

ognition, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent I be allowed to speak as in morning business for up to 8 minutes and that that time not count against the majority's allotted time.

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

Mr. BINGAMAN. I thank the Chair. (The remarks of Mr. BINGAMAN pertaining to the introduction of S. 352 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there are now 90 minutes under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREE- MENT—NOMINATION OF JOSEPH ALLBAUGH

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, as in executive session, I ask unanimous consent that at 1:45 p.m. today the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the nomination of Joseph Allbaugh to be Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate then immediately proceed to a vote on the confirmation of the nomination. Further, I ask that following the vote, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and, finally, the Senate then resume legislative session.

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

The Senator from Texas is recognized.

(The remarks of Mrs. HUTCHISON pertaining to the introduction of S. 353 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the vote on the nomination of Joseph Allbaugh be changed to occur at 1:40 p.m.

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

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Thank you, Mr. President.

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.

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

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

Ms. LANDRIEU. I ask unanimous consent to speak for 10 minutes as in morning business.

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

(The remarks of Ms. LANDRIEU pertaining to the introduction of S. 355 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana is recognized.

(The remarks of Ms. LANDRIEU pertaining to the introduction of S. 356 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. LANDRIEU. 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.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

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

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, for the information of our colleagues, there will be a rollcall vote in the next few minutes on Joe Allbaugh to be Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Just to put everybody on alert, I think at 1:40 there will be a rollcall vote.

I rise today in support of Joe Allbaugh to be Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I have had the pleasure of knowing Joe Allbaugh for a long time. He is a native Oklahoman. He is actually a native of Kay County, my home county in northern Oklahoma. I had the pleasure of knowing him at Oklahoma State where he was a member, actually, of the fraternity of which I was a member. He is a very good friend of my wife's brother Steve. I think the world of Joe Allbaugh and his wife Dianne, and I think he will do an outstanding job as Director of FEMA. He will replace James Lee Witt, a native of Arkansas, who served our country and Arkansas well in that capacity, and I am confident Joe Allbaugh will as well.

Joe Allbaugh was politically active going all the way back to Goldwater. He helped our former colleague Henry Bellmon, not only in Bellmon's campaign but also in his administration. He also worked with Governor Bush in his administration, was chief of staff, and became quite familiar with State emergencies and disasters.

When we were growing up in Oklahoma, our neighborhood was known as Tornado Alley. Actually, in Joe's hometown of Blackwell, OK, in 1955 we had a severe tornado that killed 20 people and destroyed a very significant portion of the town. I remember that tornado well. All of us do. Joe Allbaugh learned then the value of coordination of emergency responses to natural disasters.

During his tenure as chief of staff to Governor Bush, he was well aware of the natural disasters that happened throughout the State of Texas. In 1998, there was a flood in San Antonio that

killed 30 people. He was involved in coordinating State responses as well as requesting Federal resources and working with Federal officials. So he has a good appreciation of the combination of what should be done on the State level and what can and should be done on the Federal level as well.

He is well prepared for this task. I think he will do an outstanding job. I think all of us will be proud to have Joe Allbaugh serve as Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I urge all my colleagues to support his nomination.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF JOE M. ALLBAUGH TO BE DIRECTOR OF THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the nomination of Joe M. Allbaugh to be Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which the clerk will report nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Joe M. Allbaugh, of Texas, to be Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the nomination of Joseph Allbaugh to be the next director of the Federal Emergency Management Administration, FEMA. I was pleased to hear that Mr. Allbaugh has experience in dealing with natural disasters in Texas and in his home state of Oklahoma.

I'm sure he learned during his tenure as chief of staff to former Governor George Bush that recovering from a disaster requires great collaboration and compassion. We learned that last year in New Mexico when we were faced with numerous forest fires, including the Cerro Grande fire that started near Los Alamos.

Because of the U.S. government's role in starting a controlled burn that soon burned out of control, eventually burning hundreds of homes and thousands of acres of forest land, the New Mexico delegation drafted the Cerro Grande Fire Assistance Act, CGFAA, and got the bill signed into law on July 13 of last year.

I emphasize that this was a delegation effort because I want Mr. Allbaugh to know that the New Mexico delegation worked side-by-side on every aspect of this fire compensation legislation. When it was introduced, all five members of the delegation were present. I hope that FEMA, under Mr. Allbaugh's guidance, will recognize the importance of collaborating with all members of the New Mexico delegation when it comes to the Cerro Grande fire, or any other disasters we are faced with in the future.

Because of FEMA's strong track record under James Lee Witt of re-

sponding quickly and effectively to disasters, the CGFAA designated FEMA as the lead agency to compensate the victims of the Cerro Grande fire. FEMA responded quickly and set up an Office of Cerro Grande Fire Claims in New Mexico in August 2000.

We are now almost six months into the claims process and we are beginning to face a few problems. I would like to point out to Mr. Allbaugh that the policy section in the Interim Final Regulations—regulations that have governed the claims process thus far—says, "It is FEMA's policy to provide for the expeditious resolution of meritorious claims through a process that is administered with sensitivity to the burdens placed upon Claimants by the Cerro Grande Fire." Based on the numerous complaints I have received recently about the claims process, it does not appear that the stated policy is being carried out as anticipated.

Mr. Allbaugh has been nominated for a position that carries with it enormous responsibility. I trust that he will carry out his responsibilities with respect to the Cerro Grande fire claims process with the sensitivity urged in the regulations.

Few of the fire victims have been able to begin rebuilding their lives and their homes because the final regulations are not complete. Many are hesitant to settle their claims against the federal government until the final regulations are published. Unfortunately, FEMA's 180-day deadline for settling claims is approaching for some claimants. We never anticipated that this deadline would come before the final regulations were in place. Nearly four months have passed since the comment period ended for the interim final regulations, yet we are still waiting for final regulations. I strongly urge Mr. Allbaugh to make it a top priority to ensure that the final regulations are published in the very near future.

Moreover, I urge Mr. Allbaugh to keep in mind that the Cerro Grande fire is different from most, if not all, other disasters FEMA has responded to in the past. This fire was not a natural disaster. It did not start as an act of God. Because of the federal government's involvement, the government had a responsibility to respond expeditiously and thoroughly.

The New Mexico delegation initiated that response by introducing compensation legislation. President Clinton responded by signing the legislation. It is now in Mr. Allbaugh's hands to make sure fire claims are responded to expeditiously and with compassion.

I look forward to sitting down with Mr. Allbaugh in the near future to discuss his plans for carrying out the intent of the CGFAA.

In the meantime, I will cast my vote in favor of Mr. Allbaugh.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise to voice my sincere congratulations to Joe Allbaugh on his confirmation today as the new director of the