had one request of them. Of course, I thanked them over and over. I had one request, and that was that these veterans, both men and women, tell their stories to their children and grandchildren. My father, a World War II veteran who enlisted about a year after Pearl Harbor, sometime during 1942, and went overseas, he didn't talk about it much. He passed away 6 years ago at the age of 89. He didn't talk about it much. I encouraged these men and women who served our country valiantly in World War II—or any veteran since then—to share the stories with their children and grandchildren because it will enrich their lives. They don't need to brag, but they ought to tell friends and families about their accomplishments and feats. These are stories that their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren will treasure for the rest of their lives.

I thought of that visit yesterday before I made the visit, as I was planning it. I thought yesterday, when the Senate passed the Defense reauthorization bill, of an amendment that Congressman BART STUPAK of Michigan and I have been working on. Currently, the Department of Defense—prior to this amendment—is allowed to use any combination of air, rail or road transportation to bring the body of a fallen soldier home. But what has been done, because the rule is so broad, the law is so broad, the Department of Defense in many cases has brought the body of a soldier killed in action to the nearest big city airport, which could be 50, 100, 200 or 300 miles away. Congressman STUPAK represents an area in northern Michigan, the Upper Peninsula, and often bodies are brought back to Green Bay, which is too far from many of these families who have to go to an airport that is 2 or 3 hours away with the funeral home, paying the expenses and accompanying the body back to the hometown. That has happened in southern Ohio, where there is no airport. Maybe they would go to Charleston, Columbus or Pittsburgh. It is outrageous that the Department of Defense doesn't bring the bodies to the communities where the families live, when they are already so distraught from losing a loved one.

We were able to get the fallen servicemember respectful return amendment included in the Department of Defense bill. This means that when our soldiers make the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country, the least the Government and the DOD can do—and for reasons I don't even understand they had failed to do. We talk so much about honoring our soldiers, but they failed to do this. All of the money we are spending—hundreds of billions of dollars—and they didn't get these bodies back to the funeral home in the local communities. It is incumbent upon us to do that.

Congressman STUPAK in the House and my amendment in the Senate finally has done that. The least we can do is ease the path for these families as they confront their loss.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, the Children's Health Insurance Plan legislation was delivered to the White House this afternoon for, I hope, the President's signature, but unfortunately, I fear the President's veto. It is unbelievable that the President would veto legislation that means so much to many working families in Ohio, in the great State of Colorado, and any of the other 48 States in our great Nation.

The Children's Health Insurance Program was conceived in 1996 and took effect in 1997, with a Democratic President and a Republican House and Senate. It now insures some 6 million children in our country. These are the sons and daughters of working families, parents who are working hard, playing by the rules, paying their taxes, but they make too much to be on Medicaid but make too little to be able to afford insurance, especially if one of their children has a preexisting condition of any serious nature. They are making $20,000, $30,000, and $40,000 a year.

The President—as Senator GRASSLEY has pointed out in criticism—has said we don't want to give help to these rich children. These are families making $20,000, $30,000, $40,000, and as much as $50,000 or $60,000 a year but mostly families making less. They are struggling, and it is not easy to pay the bills when you make $30,000 or $40,000 a year, let alone pay for health care bills and health insurance.

The President also said he doesn't want this big Government program. He talked about socialism, or something I don't understand. The President of the United States and most Members of Congress go out to Bethesda. That is a Government health care system. They get great health care at Bethesda Naval Hospital. The VA has terrific facilities, not just the CBOCs, community-based outreach clinics, such as in Mansfield, Youngstown, Lorraine, Springfield, Marion, Lima, and all over the State and all over this country; but the big VA hospitals in places such as Brecksville, Columbus, and Chillicothe, and what all that means.

The President says these are kids who should be covered by private insurance. Sure, they should. I wish these children did have private insurance. But the fact is that millions of children in our country don't have private insurance. At relatively little cost—because most children don't cost much to insure—we can put them in the Children's Health Insurance Program.

If the President vetoes this bill, it will immediately mean that some number of children—several hundred thousand—will lose their health insurance immediately, and it will mean a lost opportunity for 4 million other children in Colorado, Ohio, and all over this country, to get health insurance. Again, these are children of working parents—parents who are struggling and doing the best they can to make a go of it. All they want is health insurance for their children.

The President is critical of the cost of the bill. This bill will cost about $7 billion a year, the Children's Health Insurance Plan. The Presiding Officer voted for it and I voted for it and it passed this Senate with 68 votes, with almost 20 Republicans—almost 40 percent of the Republicans voted for this bill in the Senate and all of the Democrats. This is a bipartisan bill. The House is the same way, where dozens of Republicans in the House voted for it.

So it is clearly a bipartisan bill, and the President says it costs too much. It costs $7 billion a year in the next 5 years. What does that mean? In contrast, we spend in 1 week in Iraq close to $3 billion. So we are spending $3 billion a week in Iraq, and we want to spend $7 billion a year to cover 4 million children—some 60 or 70 or 80 in Ohio would take advantage of this—and the President says no to that. He wants more than $3 billion additional per week in Iraq. Something is wrong with those priorities.

The President has had the legislation delivered to him at the White House. I hope the President will reconsider some of his public comments and listen to middle-class families. This is one of those times when Government can directly help the middle class and make a difference in the lives of so many middle-class families who are struggling, such as the Demko family in Columbus.

I just wish the President would open his mind and his ears and his eyes for the next few days and let's send some children, some families we have met, whom you have met, Mr. President, in Boulder or Denver, whom you met in Colorado Springs, whom I have met in Columbus, Cincinnati, or Dayton, or Zanesville, or Steubenville—let's invite some of those families to the White House, sit down with the President and say: Mr. President, here is what the Children's Health Insurance Program means to me and my family and to a lot of my neighbors. Please, Mr. President, sign this bill.

I believe, because I think he is a decent person, if the President would open his ears, eyes, and mind to that conversation of those families, it would be a very different outcome. I am hopeful in the next couple of days that the President will sign the Children's Health Insurance Program. If he does not, I am confident we will override his veto in the Senate, and I am hopeful that enough Republicans will get on this bipartisan bandwagon and join the Democrats in overriding that veto because it will mean a stronger, more vibrant, more humane policy and a stronger middle class for our country.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and 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.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period for the transaction of morning business.

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

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION

Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, from day one, the Bush administration has pursued an aggressive agenda of privatizing essential Government services, even when there has existed overwhelming evidence that doing so would waste money, impair accountability, harm citizens who rely on those services, or jeopardize our Nation's safety and security. The Kennedy-McCaskill amendment on civilian contracting will slow this agenda and bring some much needed common sense to the administration's campaign to outsource essential functions to the private sector.

Among other reforms, the amendment will nullify an edict imposed from outside the Department of Defense that the agency contract out a certain number of jobs regardless of the merits; give Federal employees the same rights to challenge a contracting decision that are now enjoyed by private contractors; and eliminate a wasteful rule that civilian jobs automatically be recompeted at the end of each performance period. I am a strong supporter of the Kennedy-McCaskill amendment, which will serve as an important check on the administration's privatization agenda.

UNSOLVED CIVIL RIGHTS CRIMES

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I objected to a unanimous consent request to pass S. 535/H.R. 923, the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act. I objected, not because I disagree with the well intended motives of the legislation, but because the authors of the bill refused to work with me to make some commonsense changes.

Let me be clear, I absolutely support the goals of this legislation and believe that those who committed civil rights crimes must be brought to justice, but I believe that we can and must do so in a fiscally responsible manner.

Just last week, the Senate voted to increase the Federal Government's debt limit to $9.815 trillion. It is beyond irresponsible to pass any bill that will add to this debt that will be inherited by our children and grandchildren. Even our best intentions need to be paid for with offsets from lower priorities or wasteful spending.

On February 5, 2007, I sent a letter to my colleagues outlining my intent to object to any legislation authorizing new spending that is not offset by reductions in real spending elsewhere. I strongly believe that Congress should stop borrowing and spending beyond our means. Instead, Congress, like all families, ought to prioritize spending and reduce less important spending when greater priorities arise.

S. 535/H.R. 923 violates two of the principles that I outlined in my February letter. These are: If a bill authorizes new spending, it must be offset by reductions in real spending elsewhere; and if a bill creates or authorizes a new Federal program or activity, it must not duplicate an existing program or activity.

This bill authorizes unpaid for new spending and creates a new government program that duplicates existing government efforts. Both of these concerns could be easily addressed if the sponsors of the bill were interested in securing its passage.

In June of this year, my office contacted the bill's sponsors to suggest possible offsets so that I could give my consent—but there was no desire, at the time, to amend the bill. This was unfortunate because last Congress, when Senator Jim Talent was the lead sponsor, he agreed to include offsets in exchange for my consent, but the compromise language was opposed by an unidentified Senator.

It is also unfortunate because there is no shortage of potential offsets for this bill within the Department of Justice, which would administer the proposed program. The bill authorizes $12 million each year for 10 years. The Department has $1.6 billion in unobligated balances, which are funds that have been appropriated but which there are no plans to spend. In fiscal year 2006, the Department spent $45.9 million on conferences, a 34-percent increase since fiscal year 2000. The inspector general examined just 10 conferences and found that the Department spent an estimated $1.5 million on food and beverages. This included paying $4 per meatball at one lavish dinner and spreading an average of $25 worth of snacks around to each participant at a movie-themed party. It is estimated that the current fiscal year 2008 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations bill contains congressional earmarks totaling $587 million and the bill exceeds the President's request by more than $2 billion. Clearly, there is wasteful spending that can be reduced to pay for this program.

Just like American taxpayers, Congress needs to learn to pay for what it spends. This is a reasonable expectation but one that has been ignored by Washington politicians who tend to put off difficult decisions and, as a result, have charged up a $9 trillion debt.

This bill also creates a new Federal program that duplicates an existing Federal Government initiative that seeks to address unsolved civil rights crimes. The Department of Justice and the Civil Rights Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation are currently working with States and nonprofit groups to pursue unsolved civil rights era crimes that resulted in death.

In February 2006, the FBI began an initiative to identify hate crimes that occurred prior to December 1969, and resulted in death. Since then, the Bureau's 56 field offices began to reexamine their unsolved civil rights cases