

stay in the Guard, risking another deployment, to collect his or her benefits.

I believe that as a matter of basic fairness, soldiers that share the same foxhole for the same length of time should get the same benefit. Some people say "That's too logical for government." But fortunately, Senators WEBB and WARNER recognizing this basic inequity have written a bill to correct this problem, and generally modernize the GI bill.

I firmly believe education should be both available and affordable to all service men and women, and it for this reason that I am proud to stand today in support of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act.

Many servicemembers who volunteered to join the armed forces after September 11, 2001, did so with the full knowledge that they would very likely be called to serve in harm's way. Over 600,000 members of the Nation's Guard and Reserve have been called to active duty. Since our nation came under attack, more than half of the Oregon National Guard has deployed overseas. Oregon's deployment rate has ranked among the highest per capita in the Nation. The National Guard has done much more than they have historically been called upon to do, and at great sacrifice. This bill honors all who have served on active duty on or after September 11, 2001, by expanding the educational benefits provided under current law.

The cost of higher education has increased dramatically in recent years. Over the past 5 years, the average cost of tuition has increased 35 percent. Room and board costs have also risen on average over 35 percent. Many of our servicemembers have put their educational plans on hold while at war, and the rising cost of education has outpaced their ability to pay. This has put them at a competitive disadvantage in a nation that has called them to service. This bill would put them back on equal footing. Servicemembers, including activated Guard and Reserve members, who have served on active duty for at least 3 months would be entitled to benefits under this bill.

As with previous GI bills, this bill would secure tuition payments, a monthly stipend to assist with living expenses, and a stipend for books and required educational expenses. This bill would go a step further, however. Instead of recognizing an activated reservist's longest consecutive active service, this bill would recognize cumulative active service. This is a crucial distinction that recognizes the way we employ our forces today. Payments and stipends would be scaled up to 100 percent. The benefits would be protected if a servicemember is deployed or transferred. It would contribute to licensure and certification testing and to some college-level correspondence courses. Finally, this bill would establish a new program in which colleges or universities may voluntarily agree to make up or reduce the difference between

tuition costs and what the new benefits would provide. Under this program, the benefit would match a school's additional contribution dollar for dollar, up to 50 percent of the tuition difference.

This bill would not just recognize and reward our service men and women for their sacrifices. It would create a meaningful retention and recruiting tool for our active, Guard and Reserve forces, and it would provide an investment in the future of our Nation by encouraging and contributing to the kinds of education and training that lead to good jobs, good pay, and economic stability. I am proud to cosponsor the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act and encourage its immediate passage so we can begin to repay the debt we owe to those who stand guard and defend our liberty.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING W. LAIRD STABLER, JR.

• Mr. BIDEN. Madam President, today I wish to remember the Honorable W. Laird Stabler, Jr., a devoted public servant and a gentleman in the truest sense of the word. It is clear from the ways in which Delawareans from all political persuasions and all walks of life have mourned his death this week that all that knew him understand this part. He was a decent man, a man who viewed public service as a duty and a trust.

I first met Laird in 1969, when he was the house majority Leader in Dover and I was a young public defender. Despite only having served for 3 years, he had already gained a reputation as a fair and thoughtful man. In 1970, when I first sought public office as a county councilman, the people of Delaware recognized Laird's sterling character and integrity by entrusting him with the office of attorney general. He later served as U.S. attorney for the State of Delaware and, for 20 years, as Delaware's Republican National Committeeman. It seems incredible today that a man who in Delaware was literally synonymous with the Republican Party endeared himself to a generation of Democrats.

No matter where he was in his career, or whom he was representing, every decision Laird made was guided by his two most redeeming qualities: honor and integrity. As the British songwriter, Charles Dibdin, wrote: "If honour gives greatness, [he] was great as a king."

Laird's exceptional sense for others earned him the respect of nearly everyone he knew, from U.S. Presidents to his neighbors. His fierce devotion to his Scottish ancestry and his unending sense of humor were legendary.

Laird was that rare breed of politician who could lead with very few words. For all his commitment and knowledge, Laird led with a calm and steady hand. The universal outpouring

of mourning expressed by Delawareans from every corner of the State is a testimony to his quiet dignity and nobility.

As Shakespeare wrote in "Hamlet:" "He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again."

Knowing Laird Stabler, I am certain he did not judge his life based upon how others viewed him or even his great contributions to the state and country. I believe Laird would prefer to be judged based on those he loved most and those who loved him—his family. For me, it was hard to tell where Laird ended and where Peggy, his beautiful wife, began. At least from my perspective, they seemed to be a matched pair in terms of effortless grace, genuine empathy and devotion to one another. They produced a family that is a genuine reflection of their collective virtues. I know Laird III the best, and he is every bit his family. Their daughter Margaretta and son Ramsay are a genuine reflection of their parents' decency.

As a Delawarean and a Democrat, I feel privileged today to pay tribute to a Delawarean and a Republican whose life reflected what all of us strive to achieve.●

OIL PRICES

• Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, in April 2004, when American consumers were paying \$1.78 per gallon at the pump, I warned that energy experts were "predicting that the price of gas may rise to \$2.50 or \$3.00 per gallon." The administration did nothing. Last October, when American consumers were paying \$2.87 per gallon at the pump, I warned that "oil may be on its way to over \$100 a barrel." The administration did nothing.

This week, oil reached a record \$102 a barrel, and gas prices averaged \$3.13 a gallon. How much will families in Vermont and across America have to pay to heat their homes in this long winter and drive to work before the President takes action? At a news conference yesterday, the President was not even aware that some are predicting that gas prices will hit \$3.50 or even \$4 a gallon by the spring.

Two facts are painfully clear: Gasoline prices have more than doubled since the President took office, and the President has no plan to protect consumers and our economy.

I have said this before, and I say it again today: The principal cause of the relentless increase in oil prices is not a natural supply issue, but market manipulation by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC, an international cartel that limits the supply of oil to keep fuel prices high. In January, the President's best attempt to increase the supply of oil was to tell Saudi King Abdullah that "paying more for gasoline hurts some American families." Indeed it does, and I am pleased the administration acknowledges the effects of rising gas