

veterans, our veterans have had to struggle to get the basic care they were promised. And now, just this week, in the last few days, we got more evidence that this administration has been covering up the extent of the toll this war has taken on our troops.

Internal e-mails that became public in a court hearing showed that the VA has vastly downplayed the number of suicides and suicide attempts by veterans in the last several years.

Last November, an analysis by CBS News found that over 6,200 veterans had, sadly, committed suicide in 2005. That is an average of 17 a day. When they were confronted then, the VA said: Oh, no, no, no, those numbers are much lower than that. Now we find that according to internal e-mails from the VA's head of mental health, Dr. Ira Katz, 6,570 veterans actually committed suicide in 2005, an average of 18 a day. Those e-mails also revealed that VA officials also knew that another 1,000 veterans who are receiving care at our VA medical facilities attempt suicide each month. Those numbers offer tragic evidence that our Nation is failing thousands of veterans every year, and they reflect an administration that has failed to own up to its responsibilities and failed even to own up to the true impact of the war on our veterans.

What is most appalling to me is that this is not the first time the VA has covered up the problems facing our veterans who have sacrificed for our country. Time and again, this VA told us one thing in public while saying something completely different in private. It is outrageous to me that our VA officials would put public appearance ahead of people's lives. Yet it appears that is what is happening again and again.

When we as Members of Congress sit down to try to determine what resources we need to give to the VA, we have to truly understand what is going on. If there is a problem, we have to act. It is our duty and the duty of this administration to care for our veterans. By covering up the true extent of the problem, the VA has actually hindered our ability to get those resources to the veterans who need them. That is irresponsible, and it is wrong.

I have come to the floor today because we now have an opportunity to extend benefits to our veterans. These benefits that are in the bill that is before the Senate today will help them with job training, insurance, housing, and other matters. The bill that is before us offers veterans peace of mind and will help them to readjust as they come home to civilian life.

The Veterans' Benefits Enhancement Act the Senate is currently considering expands traumatic injury insurance. It increases job training—vital to many of our veterans who are coming home. It extends housing benefits to veterans with severe burns, something we have to do. And critically, it restores limited pension benefits to Filipino veterans who fought for our country in World War II.

This is a bill that we have done in our VA Committee that normally would come to the floor and pass straight through this body by unanimous consent. It is budget neutral, and it works to provide long overdue care for some of our Nation's heroes. But, instead, this bill has languished for 9 months. Why? Because the Republicans chose obstruction over our veterans. The majority leader and our chairman, Senator AKAKA, have worked since last August to try to come to an agreement. They have tried to come to the floor and work out amendments and figure out a way to move this bill forward. But for 9 months the Republicans preferred to play political games and block this critically important bill. It is just part of an overall pattern we have seen on this floor with numerous bills we have been trying to bring forward.

Today, finally we have come to an agreement—late, but finally have come to an agreement—and the Republicans have agreed to move this bill forward.

Later this morning, we are going to have the opportunity to vote for legislation that extends important benefits to help our veterans transition back into civilian life. It expands home-improvement benefits to completely disabled servicemembers before they enter the VA system to help them adapt to their new homes. This will prevent months or even years of delays while they transition from the military into the VA care. The bill we are considering extends monthly educational assistance for veterans who are pursuing an apprenticeship or on-the-job training, and it requires the National Academy of Sciences to study the risk of developing multiple sclerosis as a result of serving in conflicts since the gulf war. This last piece is one I have worked on extensively, as I have worked with gulf war veterans in my State from the early nineties who are now coming in with high rates of multiple sclerosis, to find out if there is a connection. It is a critical piece of legislation.

But I am disappointed that the Republicans object to the provision in the bill before us that extends VA benefits to Filipino World War II veterans. Those now very elderly Filipino veterans were called to service by our country and by President Roosevelt in 1941. They served right alongside our U.S. troops. They fought to protect our interests as they were asked to in the Pacific. They consider themselves to be American troops, and we consider them to be part of our military.

We have a moral duty to repay their sacrifice by providing them with the care they have earned, just as we should do with all of our veterans. But in 1946, when the war was over, our Nation turned its back on them and stripped away their rights to their veterans benefits. That act of Congress denied those men the access to health care and limited compensation to half of what their U.S. counterparts re-

ceived. I believe that act of Congress was wrong, but I believe it is just as wrong that 62 years later we still have not corrected that injustice.

Some on the other side are saying those benefits are too generous. Those veterans have been denied benefits for over 60 years. How can we say giving them a few hundred dollars in the last remaining months of their lives is too much? Sixty-two years later, those veterans are in their twilight years. They need and they deserve the care this country ought to give them. We cannot make up for lost time for these veterans, but certainly we can right this injustice. We have the opportunity today to do what is honorable, what is moral, and treat our Filipino veterans as the heroes they are, and it is long past time that we did.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill later this morning when we vote on it and to oppose the Burr substitute amendment which would remove those provisions for our Filipino veterans.

Our veterans have waited 9 months for this bill to come before the Senate. Our Filipino veterans have waited more than six decades. Our veterans have all earned these benefits by sacrificing for us. They should not be forced to wait any longer.

To our VA which has continually hidden the facts from us, we need them to be honest and forthright. This country wants to be there to support our veterans, and we cannot do that if we are being given misinformation.

So my message to the VA is: We stand beside you as a country to work to make sure our veterans get the care and support they need. We expect you to do the same.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I yield myself whatever leader time I may use.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has that right.

208TH ANNIVERSARY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the Library of Congress celebrates today its 208th anniversary. On this day in 1800, President John Adams approved the appropriation of \$5,000 for the purchase of such books as may be necessary for the use of Congress.

The original collection included just 740 volumes and 3 maps, which are stored right here in the Capitol. In fact, what is now the reception area of the Republican leader's office was the Library's very first home. When British troops burned the Capitol building in 1814, they used the books and maps of the Library to ignite the flames, and all 3,000 volumes in the collection were destroyed.

Several years ago, when British Prime Minister Tony Blair addressed a joint session of Congress, he visited the leader's suite and told then-majority

leader Bill Frist that although it was coming a bit late, he was sorry for the fire incident.

Today, the Library of Congress is the largest library in the world. There are more than 138 million items, including books, recordings, photographs, maps, sheet music, and manuscripts. At the Library of Congress, access to this wonderful resource is no longer limited to Members of Congress. Today, the general public can browse everything from Presidential papers to books in over 470 languages, dating as far back as the 15th century.

Two hundred eight years after its launch, the Library is renowned for its original mission of making resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people and sustaining and preserving a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations. Over 3,500 staff members work for the Library, and we thank them for doing so much to keep our rich history and heritage alive.

LOWER GAS PRICES

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another issue, 2 years ago today, Democrats announced they had a commonsense plan to lower gas prices. When Democrats took over control of Congress last January, the average price of a gallon of gas was \$2.32. Today, it is \$3.53, according to AAA. Apparently, their commonsense plan is not working as intended.

In fact, since taking control of Congress last year, Democrats not only failed to deliver on their promise to lower gas prices, they have repeatedly pushed for policies that in fact would raise, not lower, prices at the pump. Every week, I hear from Kentuckians who are feeling the squeeze each time they fill up their tanks. High gas prices hurt families, hurt commuters, hurt truckers, who are paying record prices for diesel, and drive up the prices of daily necessities, including food. Yet some of our friends, reverting to form, appear to have no plan except to increase taxes on energy companies, which of course will raise prices for consumers, not lower them.

At a time of record-high gas prices, Democrats want to tax them to even higher levels. The reality is high gas prices are the result of misguided policies that have been in place for many years and will take time to bring down. For example, for too long we have kept too much of America's oil and gas resources locked up, literally off limits and unavailable to help America's families meet their energy needs. This has left us 60 percent dependent on foreign sources of oil and vulnerable to price hikes and the whims of foreign governments.

We took a small step last Congress when we opened an area in the Gulf of Mexico to energy production, but there is much more we can and should do if we want to have a meaningful impact on supplies and prices in the long term.

Back in 1995, when President Clinton vetoed a bill opening a very small portion of the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge to exploration, the price of oil was \$19 a barrel. Over a decade later, when a million barrels a day from ANWR would have been flowing to U.S. consumers, oil is \$118 a barrel. While there is not much Government can do to lower gas prices overnight, this was a policy that, had it not been vetoed 13 years ago, could be making a difference today.

Democrats have also blocked proposals to increase refining capacity, which would lead to additional supplies and lower prices. We have had some successes when we have acted in a reasonable, bipartisan way, as we did when we raised the fuel economy standards and increased the use of renewable fuels in last year's Energy bill. But we will not have a balanced, effective, sensible energy policy until we also address the issue of making more of America's energy here at home available to American customers.

So we want to know what is the Democrats' commonsense plan to lower gas prices? It was announced 2 years ago. What is it? We haven't seen it yet. What is taking them so long to unveil it? The American people are waiting and paying more at the pump each day they wait.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

CORPORAL CHRISTOPHER TYLER WARNDORF

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today in honor of a young man from Kentucky who was lost in the performance of his duty. CPL Christopher Tyler Warndorf, of Burlington, KY, was tragically killed on August 29, 2006, in Iraq's Al Anbar Province, after an explosion set by terrorists went off.

A U.S. marine, he was 23 years old. Corporal Warndorf's mother Tina explains the circumstances of her son's death and how he died a hero.

The suicide bomber's plan was to come through the gates of their base. Tyler stopped him before that happened.

For his bravery in uniform, Corporal Warndorf received several medals, awards, and decorations, including the National Defense Service Medal, the Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon, and the Purple Heart.

Looking back, it is clear Tyler's service to his country, and indeed his entire life, was a gift. Tina remembers how she and Tyler's father Christopher Joseph Warndorf were once told they could not expect to have children.

A month before we were to be married, the doctors told us children would not be possible. We were ecstatic when we found out we were going to have a baby. It was a pretty high-risk pregnancy and a tough delivery. Tyler came in fighting and left fighting.

Tina and Christopher went on to have three children in all—Nicholas and Katelyn soon joined eldest son Tyler, who went by his middle name because Tina didn't want to hear her son called Little Chris.

As a child, Tyler had to wear braces to straighten his legs. But that didn't stop him from going on to play sports and becoming a leader of other kids both on and off the playing field.

Tina remembers:

Tyler was often teased for being so small. When he went out for football, he was so small none of the gear would fit him. The coach got gear from the peewee football league and told me he was on the team because of his heart, his soul, and his determination.

In addition to playing football and soccer as a kid, Tyler was active in his church, the First Church of Christ in Burlington. He convinced his family to join as well and made friends through the church's youth group.

Tina remembers how little trouble Tyler gave her growing up.

He always told me where he was going to be. I wish all parents could have that relationship with their kids. Tyler set the bar with Katelyn and Nick because they saw how I trusted him. There was never a reason to worry.

Tyler was interested in bridges and architecture and for a while set his sights on becoming a structural engineer. After a family visit to California, he thought about going to school there. But then came the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and those plans changed.

Tina said:

When 9/11 happened, he came and told me he was going to join. He loved the Marines. He excelled at it.

Tyler enlisted in the Marine Corps in the fall of 2003, a few months after graduating from Conner High School. He spent the whole summer beforehand running and getting in shape. He was assigned to Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, based in Camp Lejeune, NC, and was eventually sent to Iraq under the First Marine Expeditionary Force, Forward.

As a marine, Tyler deployed once to Haiti and twice to Iraq. While serving in Haiti, Tyler was appalled to see children forced to scavenge for food and eat out of garbage cans. He sent to his family a list of food to send, which he passed out to the neediest kids.

Tyler did not let the thousands of miles between Iraq and Kentucky weaken the bonds between him and his family. His little sister Katelyn received a special birthday present when she turned 13. Tyler had 13 white roses delivered to her class at Conner Middle School, while over the intercom a tape of Tyler singing "Happy Birthday" played. It was a touching gift from a big brother who, had he been there, would surely be looking over Katelyn's report card, as he had in the past. "He made sure we got good grades," Katelyn remembers of Tyler. "If not, he would give us a talking-to."

Tyler's family was blessed to receive a phone call from him in Iraq before his tragic death, on the happy occasion of a new niece born into the family. "My daughter and I got to talk to him 45