

have no problem with that, with that accommodation, but we could have worked all day yesterday on the veterans bill and scheduled that vote the same time at the end of the day, as we did. But it was basically a wasted day in the Senate, other than hearings that might have gone on. To waste a whole day and then blame us for it, that is not right.

We all know why the Ledbetter bill was brought up. In many respects, it is just to score political points or it would have gone through the committee. Had it gone through the committee, had we done a good statute of limitations change, had we made some other changes that make sense in the law, I think we would have passed a bill that would have made Lilly Ledbetter at least realize that her actions were not in vain. But the way it was done looks to me as if it was done for political purposes and to score political points. We could have worked it out. At least I think we could have worked it out. But there was not even a chance to do that.

Let me just say this: I believe we have too much of this business that every time the majority files a bill and then files a cloture motion, they then call us filibusterers. That is not right, and it is not true. Frankly, we all know it is not true.

(Ms. STABENOW assumed the chair.)

#### AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, we live in cynical times, and today I want to address that cynicism; namely, a small number of media reports that, some have suggested, call into question the command abilities of the senior leadership of the U.S. Air Force.

In addition, I was dismayed to learn that a Member of the Senate has compounded these misrepresentations by recently authoring a letter that makes inaccurate assertions about matters that have already been dealt with by the proper military authorities and investigated by the inspector general of the Department of Defense.

Let me address the underlying matter directly. It has been my privilege and honor to represent the people of Utah in this august body for now more than 31 years. During that time, I have had the pleasure to meet many of our Nation's military leaders, their families, and, of course, military period. However, I can say without reservation the current generation of Air Force leaders is among the finest I have ever known in all my years in the Senate.

Under the steadfast and capable leadership of Secretary Michael Wynne and GEN Michael Moseley, the leaders of our Air Force are resolute in the defense of this country, tenacious in their support and care for the young men and women who serve under them, and dedicated to modernizing the ancient—or should I say aging—equipment of their force.

These are leaders to be proud of, not criticized the way they have been.

They are leaders to have confidence in. They exemplify the Air Force's unofficial motto: "Nothing Comes Close." They are the rightful heirs to the title: "The Right Stuff."

This does not mean errors do not occur. In any organization, especially one with more than 350,000 service-members, some will make mistakes, a few will veer from the straight and narrow; and, sadly, a tiny minority might even betray the public trust. That said, I believe the true measure of military leadership is not to wipe away every possible temptation and sin of mankind; it is to create a culture where malfeasance, once identified, is dealt with firmly, swiftly, and justly.

For example, the current Air Force leadership met this standard when it was recently tested by the wrongdoing of a civilian official during an initial attempt to replace our Nation's aerial tankers that are, on average, 47 years old. Once Senator McCAIN brought this malfeasance to the attention of the Air Force, the service responded by holding accountable those responsible. These individuals were prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Yet from that troubled time, the current Air Force leadership rallied and conducted one of the most transparent, open, and fair procurement competitions in recent memory. That is stuff of which real leaders are made.

I was also disappointed to read the characterizations of some press reports regarding the speech given by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates during his trip on Monday to the Air War College. When one reads some of these reports, one could only conclude that Secretary Gates was issuing a rebuke to the Air Force's leadership. This is most perplexing. Although I have not spoken to Secretary Gates about his speech, I have read the official transcript. My impression of his address was that Secretary Gates was not issuing an admonishment—not at all. In fact, I believe the Secretary was seeking to do what all good Secretaries of Defense strive to obtain: a more effective and efficient force through new and creative thinking.

Now, this conclusion is ironically bolstered by later reports from the same news service that published the initial reports I find so puzzling. These later reports quote the Pentagon press secretary as saying one of the major alleged reproaches was not directed at the Air Force as a service, but to "the military as a whole."

As I said earlier, we live in cynical times. Unfortunately, it has become customary for many in political circles to hurl unfair and even untrue criticisms at one another. One could argue this is the price of a vibrant democracy. However, this sort of behavior is unbecoming when it wrongly distracts our military leaders, especially during a time of war.

The Air Force leadership, under Secretary Wynne and General Moseley, has done an extraordinary job of pro-

tecting our Nation and supporting our other armed services in this war on terror. I, for one, am thankful we have such leaders in positions with such heavy responsibility. So today I rise to thank them. I thank Secretary Wynne. I thank General Moseley. They are thanks I believe they deserve from the entire Senate.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If the Senator would withhold.

Mr. HATCH. I withdraw that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana is recognized.

#### VETERANS' BENEFITS ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I wish to commend Chairman AKAKA on the legislation that was passed in the Senate earlier today, S. 1315.

This bill makes a number of commonsense improvements to the benefits packages we offer America's veterans. I am pleased to have voted for this bill as it came out of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I am also pleased to have supported it on the floor today. It is long past due to give our disabled veterans the ability to purchase affordable life insurance. That is what this bill does. It provides up to \$50,000 in life insurance for any veteran younger than the age of 65 who has a service-connected disability.

The bill also adds a host of new benefits to help critically injured service men and women get their households refurbished if they become disabled. That can mean putting in wheelchair ramps, remodeling a kitchen or a bathroom, and countless other chores. Again, it is a small measure, but for a soldier who has lost an arm or a leg or a marine who has suffered severe burns, it means the world.

It is long past time to increase burial benefits to help families deal with the growing costs of providing a final resting place for their veteran loved ones. This bill does that by authorizing double the current allowance for the burial of a veteran who dies from a service-connected disability to \$4,000. It also triples the \$300 benefit for nonservice connected disabilities. With the average funeral cost now around \$6,000, this is a small gesture to the loved ones of our veterans, but it matters a great deal.

At a time of record national debt and chronic annual budget deficits, I am particularly pleased this bill is deficit-neutral. It does not increase taxes.

With all the good in the bill, it is little wonder the Veterans' Benefit Enhancement Act is supported by every major veterans service organization. This bill passed out of the VA Committee unanimously last summer, and I am pleased by the bipartisan support it got today. We now need to turn our attention to the veterans health care legislation that I am told will follow this bill. Our Nation's veterans deserve nothing less.