

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, thank you. I appreciate that.

COLONEL EDWARD CYR

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, one of the great privileges that I have as a Member of this body is to travel around my home State of Rhode Island and hear directly from the people I was elected to serve. We are a small State, and we all know one another pretty well. So it is a pleasure to get out and listen to people, to hear what is on their minds, their good news and their bad news, and the challenges and the opportunities they and their families face each and every day.

One of the things we do is to regularly hold community dinners around the State. My wife Sandra and I get together with folks over pasta and meatballs or hamburgers and hot dogs and we talk about the issues that are interesting to them.

Mr. President, having the opportunity to hear people of my State share their stories this way has made such a difference in my work here in Washington. I say to the Presiding Officer, I know that as you represent the people in Florida, you feel very much the same way and I've heard you both in committee and on this floor give speeches and remarks that have focused on individual constituents of yours who had troubles and problems that they needed to attend to and you needed to attend to. So I know that you feel very much the same way.

You know, we stand in this Chamber and we debate back and forth on the war in Iraq or the price of a gallon of gas or the crisis in the housing industry. But when we go back home, we see people who are living in the middle of these issues every day. In Rhode Island right now, there are parents worrying about their sons and daughters serving overseas in Iraq. There are families watching the numbers on the gas pump roll, roll, roll, flying higher and higher, and they are wondering how they are going to make ends meet. And there are working people who see their mortgage payments climb out of reach, and they face the gnawing, terrible fear that they might lose the home their children grew up in. So, as glorious as is this grand Chamber we have the opportunity to serve in, the reason we are really here is that it is all about them.

And last Sunday evening, we had one of those moments. We hosted a community dinner in Bristol, RI, which is a beautiful, historic town on Rhode Island's East Bay. Bristol is known for many wonderful things, but one is the oldest—and I think the best—Fourth of July parade in the United States of America. So it was great to be in Bristol, and it was a beautiful evening. The day had been rainy, and toward the end of the day, the clouds had begun to open up and the evening Sun was shining through on the clouds above. The earth and the trees were still wet around, but they were lit up by the lit

sky, and we were in this handsome stone VFW hall that is just a little bit back from Bristol Harbor. It was beautiful not only outside but inside because we had a wonderful group of people. And as the questions and answers were winding down toward the end of the evening, a man stood up and he took the microphone, and he began to speak.

The man was COL Edward Cyr. Colonel Cyr is a 29-year veteran of the Army Reserves, 399th Combat Support Hospital. He has served two tours in Iraq, first in 2003 and then again from June 2006 to October 2007, and was also deployed to Kosovo in 2001. When he is not serving our country in the Army Reserves, Colonel Cyr is a nurse anesthetist at Saint Anne's Hospital in Massachusetts. He is a loving husband to his wife Patricia, and he is the father to five daughters.

Colonel Cyr wanted to tell me about a provision in the 2008 Defense authorization bill which grants early retirement eligibility to reservists and National Guard members who have served on Active Duty since September 11, to allow these individuals to gain 3 months of retirement eligibility for every 90 days of Active service.

He was concerned that the effective date of the legislation was set for the date of its passage, and that it did not reach back to September 11 to pick up all the veterans who had served since that date. I agreed to help him with that legislation, to make the date of the early retirement provision retroactive to September 11, 2001, so that it would reach every veteran in this conflict who served our country and carried the burden of a disastrous war policy with such great honor and dignity.

And often people come with a specific request like that, but that was not what was significant about this. What was significant about this was that Colonel Cyr took the chance to tell his story.

He spoke of the strains of his multiple deployments which have weighed so heavily upon him and his family. He spoke of the blood of the wounded soldiers he worked on, on his hands, on his clothes, in his very pores. He spoke of their service and their loss and his pride in the men and women who served beside him. When he was done, the big room was quiet.

I asked him—I was a little embarrassed to ask because I did not want to ask a personal question that might not be welcome, but I asked him anyway: I said, Colonel, if I may ask a personal question, what was your family situation through all of this? He paused a minute, and he said: Well, Senator, I am glad you asked that question because my wife is sitting right beside me. And he proudly pointed her out, and he said this: For all those months, over three tours, she had to go it alone, raising my five daughters, and I want to take this chance to thank her because if it weren't for her, I wouldn't have had a home to come home to.

Mr. President, you could have heard a pin drop. There was not a dry eye in the House, including my own. And the room then burst into applause.

Mr. President, this was just one of those moments—just one of those moments. I do not think I can explain it, and frankly, I do not even want to try because if I tried to explain it, I would just make it smaller. So all I want to say, as we all leave this glorious Chamber to go home to our States to celebrate this Memorial Day weekend, for all the Edward Cyrs and for all the Patricia Cyrs across this country, thank you and God bless you.

Mr. President, I believe there is no quorum present.

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

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

HEROES EARNINGS ASSISTANCE
AND RELIEF TAX ACT OF 2008

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 6081, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6081) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide benefits for military personnel, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read three times and passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate, and any statements related to the bill be printed in the Record.

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

The bill (H.R. 6081) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, on Memorial Day in 1884, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said:

It is now the moment when by common consent we pause to become conscious of our national life and to rejoice in it, to recall what our country has done for each of us, and to ask ourselves what we can do for our country in return.

I am pleased that today, on the eve of the Memorial Day weekend, the Senate has been able to recall what our service men and women have done for each of us. I am pleased that we can do something for them in return. And I am pleased that we have been able to pass the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax Act of 2008.

Nearly 1.5 million American service men and women have served in Iraq, Afghanistan, or both. Nearly 30,000