

more than 3 months Congress chose to do nothing. Let me be clear, it was Congress that chose to ignore the pleas of the intelligence community. As a matter of fact, in late June, Admiral McConnell had a briefing for the entire Senate. I believe about 42 to 44 of us showed up there. He briefed Members of the Senate, again urging us to modernize FISA. Finally, his pleadings began to gain traction.

In mid-July, Members of Congress agreed to discuss a short-term, scaled-down version of FISA to protect the country for the next few months before we could address comprehensive reform in the fall. Admiral McConnell immediately sent Congress his scaled-down proposal.

Over the next week, Admiral McConnell was given nearly half a dozen versions of unvetted proposals from various congressional staffs across Congress and then pressed for instant support of these proposals. The admiral returned a compromise proposal to the Senate, including some of the provisions requested. Unfortunately, there were numerous bait and switches that took place during that time.

Since the bipartisan committee process was circumvented to craft legislation behind closed doors without input from the relevant committee and the minority, it got messy in the final hours. Even as the vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee, I was excluded from the key meetings. Not only was I excluded, most members of the Intelligence Committee, Republican and Democratic, were left out of the process.

Therefore, in the waning moments before the recess, I got together with a number of Democrats, including several from our Intelligence Committee, to discuss the short-term approach for the Protect America Act that Leader McConnell and I had introduced and which had the support of the DNI and the Department of Justice.

Finally, on August 3 and 4, Congress, on a strong bipartisan basis and a desire to get out of town for the August recess, passed the Protect America Act.

That was why it was jammed up. The administration was not trying to stiff us. The administration felt it was being stiffed. Fortunately, a solid, bipartisan majority of the Senate came together, passed the bill, and gave the House, regrettably, no choice but to pass it—which they did. But after the passage of the act, I think we all learned a good lesson. We sat down together on the Senate Intelligence Committee and began, on a bipartisan basis, to work out a permanent solution to FISA. I am very thankful we could do it. We put in a great deal of work. We spent a lot of time with the DNI, with the lawyers and the operatives for the program, and Senator Rockefeller and I worked, in a bipartisan fashion, to come up with a strong committee bill that we passed out of the Senate later on a 68-to-29 vote.

I thank my colleagues on the committee, their staff, and all the Members of Congress who supported us, particularly the 68 who came and voted aye to pass the FISA amendments in February.

That started the process that led us to where we are today. There is a strong bipartisan product before us. There were changes, cosmetic changes largely, made that the House believed were important and the intelligence community assured us would not interfere with their ability to collect information under the structure we had set forth in the FISA amendments that were passed by the Senate.

That is where we are today. I am ready, willing, and able, whenever it is the will of the leadership, to act on amendments that may be before us and try to pass this bill so we will have some certainty for the intelligence community that they will know what the guidelines are for the next period through 2012.

In any event, I will be back when we get on the bill to go over some of the items which are in question. But I think you see our chairman, Senator Rockefeller, who is on the floor, and I can assure you this is a good, solid, bipartisan bill that we should pass.

I see it is a good time to yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana is recognized, pursuant to the previous order.

#### GI BILL

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I rise in support of the bipartisan Webb GI bill, and I urge the Senate to join me in voting to pass it without further delay. As a member of the veterans committee, this legislation has been a big priority of mine for the past year and a half.

Montana is home to more than 100,000 veterans. I have spoken with many of them over the past year and a half, and I was very pleased to work on their behalf last year for the largest increase in funding in the history of the VA.

Earlier this year, the Senate passed my legislation to raise the reimbursement rate for veterans' travel to and from VA facilities. It was the first increase in 30 years.

As American forces continue to be engaged in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is well past time for Congress to step up to the plate and deliver for our veterans.

This new GI bill will provide first-class educational benefits for those who served since 9/11. It will pay for tuition and books and a monthly stipend roughly equivalent to the benefits given to millions of Americans following World War II.

The first GI bill created a vibrant middle class that drives our economy to this day and makes America the envy of the world. This GI bill can do the same again.

Every major veterans organization in this country supports this bill. I under-

stand even the White House has dropped its longstanding opposition, and the President now says he will sign this bill into law.

Passing the 21st century GI bill will be a landmark achievement for this Congress. It will strengthen our Nation's military readiness through better recruitment by making military service a more practical option, and it will provide an important investment in America's future by enabling veterans to afford college at a time when career options and lifetime earning potential are increasingly linked to higher education.

One in nine Montanans have served our country in the military. We have one of the highest veterans rates in the country, and our Montana values compel us to take care of those who have served. Many of my Montana neighbors have written to me in support of this new GI bill for the new "greatest generation."

One airman from Belt, MT, said to me:

I hope this bill passes for myself and for future generations. I have been deployed three times in my five and a half years of active duty service, and will be leaving active duty service within the year. This bill is finally something that will allow people to do the things that they put off and that so many have died for since the beginning of our war on terrorism. I ask you to support this bill and allow all our Armed Forces members to succeed in life and all their endeavors.

Another veteran from Kalispell, MT, wrote:

I read with a great deal of interest your article in the Flathead Beacon about the need for a GI Bill, much like that of what we had in the past. I was able to attend college under the GI Bill after I was discharged from the Army in 1956 under that bill enacted for World War II vets. The GI Bill was instrumental in the creation of our middle class. It gave this child of the Depression an opportunity to experience the degree of success that I very likely would not have been able to achieve had it not been for that GI Bill.

These are just two examples of the many letters I have received from back home. I know many Senators received similar letters. I call on all of my colleagues to join me in voting for this vital legislation. We must pass this bill to honor the service and sacrifice of our Nation's veterans and to invest in America's future.

I have been pleased to work on this important piece of legislation with a bipartisan group of Senators led by the Senator from Virginia, one of my fellow members of the Senate class of 2006.

Senator WEBB and I hail from different parts of the country and different walks of life, but we joined the Senate at the same time with a simple hope: to provide a new direction for our Nation.

Last year, Senator WEBB and I traveled together to Iraq. We were able to visit with quite a few of the brave young men and women who serve our country day in and day out. When you talk to these folks, it really makes you feel that our Nation is in good hands.

They are serving us well, and now it is time to do right by them. This is commonsense legislation that will demonstrate to our veterans that America honors their service and cares about their future.

Passing this bill is the right thing to do, and it is the smart thing to do. I urge the Senate to vote as soon as possible to pass this new GI bill for America's new "greatest generation."

I thank the Senator from Missouri for giving me this opportunity to speak.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from Hawaii is recognized.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, as the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am very pleased to express my support for the provisions of the war funding supplemental that would establish a new GI bill for the 21st century.

These provisions, drawn from S. 22 as introduced by the junior Senator from Virginia, Mr. WEBB, who serves with me on the committee, will establish a new program of educational assistance for the brave young men and women who have answered the call to duty in service to our country since September 11, 2001.

This past Sunday, June 22, marks the 64th anniversary of the original GI bill. As one of the 8 million World War II veterans who took advantage of the opportunity it made available, I know firsthand the value of what we are prepared to approve today. If it were not for the valuable educational benefits I received, I would not be standing here today in the Senate.

Without the GI bill and the maturity and discipline I learned through my military service, I am certain my life would have turned out much differently. The original GI bill changed America. It made higher education accessible for individuals from all backgrounds.

Veterans flooded colleges and universities. Huge lines of returning servicemembers doubled or tripled enrollments. By the time the original GI bill expired in 1956, the United States was richer by hundreds of thousands of trained engineers, accountants, teachers, scientists, doctors, dentists, and more than 1 million other college-educated individuals.

The original GI bill created major social change. Some have credited it with creating the middle class. And when the sons and daughters of the "greatest generation," the baby boomers, came of age, the legacy of a college education was passed on to them.

Today, we are set to approve a measure that will shape today's military, the future of the military, and the future of our Nation for many years to come. Today's new veterans will know that we honor the contributions they have made in service to this Nation. We understand the sacrifices they made, the hardships they endured, and the toll that has taken on their lives and the lives of their families.

This new GI bill will be a tool that the military can use to attract our best and brightest college-bound high school seniors to voluntary military service. Down the road these new veterans will turn to their children and grandchildren and tell them that the way to advancement is through the successful completion of an honorable period of service to their country.

I am genuinely delighted to have played a role, however small, in the formulation of this legislation. I sought to work with Senator WEBB early in the development of this measure. When the time for action was at hand, he and I came together as a team and crafted the workable measure that is before the Senate today. I express my deep respect and gratitude to Senator WEBB for his untiring efforts and personal commitment to this issue.

As chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am excited to see that this new GI bill will have a smooth transition. I intend to work closely with Senator WEBB and others toward that end. We will begin later this week by ordering reported a group of technical amendments that will help ensure that the implementation of the new GI bill will be as effective as possible.

The committee, in its oversight capacity, will also be working closely with both the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to identify and resolve issues before they become problems.

Today, with the final passage of this new GI bill, we say to our newest generation of citizen soldiers, we appreciate you. We recognize that the ability of our Armed Forces to attract and retain quality personnel in the future, and consequently our national security, depends on how we meet the needs of those serving us today. The new GI bill will do that for our country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa is recognized.

#### TAX POLICY

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I want to address the Senate on the issue of tax policy. Serving as a member of the Senate Finance Committee with jurisdiction over this, I watch tax policy pretty closely. We are almost half through the year 2008. Since January 1 of this year, several tax relief provisions have expired. I am talking about what we call tax extenders that have been on the books in the Tax Code for several years, in some cases decades,

that sunset from time to time that must continue to be extended if you want the benefits of that tax policy.

In most cases, we think this tax policy is good policy because many times these policies have been on the books and expired, and we have extended them. So the term "tax extender" means keeping existing tax policy in place; however, it has sunset so Congress must act to keep it going.

The biggest one is called the AMT. Most people know it by the alternative minimum tax fix. That affects 25 million families. There are a number of other widely applicable tax relief provisions that fit into the term "tax extenders."

One provides millions of families with a deduction for college tuition, another provides deduction for our schoolteachers for out-of-pocket expenses that they might pay for that the school district does not pay for. One that is very important to innovation in American business is called the research and development tax credit, which has been part of the Tax Code since 1981.

All of these tax relief provisions expired not just today but 6 months ago.

This Congress has not passed legislation yet to deal with this problem. We have had two cloture votes in the Senate on taking care of this, but those votes have been on a bill that will not pass the Senate. And even if the House bill were to pass the Senate, the President would not sign it. So the issue is, do we want to get these things extended or not? If you are going to do it, you have to do it in a way that is going to get it through the House and Senate, as well as the President's signature.

What is holding up this bipartisan, time-sensitive tax relief? It is an obsession with the Democratic leadership, a version of pay-go or pay-as-you-go. I have spoken on this before, but the hangup is the Democratic Party's feeling and obsession over raising taxes to offset continuing current law tax relief policies.

I have offered a deficit-neutral path to these tax extenders, that being a restraint on new spending. But I have no takers from the other side. I haven't even received a response on the merits of my offer that I made to the other side. The action or lack of action thus far proves my point. The leadership of the other party—or maybe all Members of that party—is so obsessed with raising taxes that they are willing to hold hostage popular bipartisan tax relief measures.

Democratic spokespersons are threatening to kill these tax extenders unless they get tax increases they want so badly. It reminds me of a nursery story. I am referring to the story of the big bad wolf. I have a chart here so people don't forget who the big bad wolf is. You remember the story. The big bad wolf in that nursery story threatened the three little pigs. He said something like: I am going to huff and puff and blow your house down. The Democratic