

to allow for caucus luncheons. There will be no rollcall votes during today's session. We will continue to work on an agreement to finish the appropriations bill during the day. Senators should expect the next rollcall vote to occur on Monday.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader, the Senator from Kentucky, is recognized.

VETERANS DAY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, tomorrow is Veterans Day, the day we set aside to honor the service and sacrifice of the heroic men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. America remains a beacon of freedom throughout the world today because of commitments and sacrifices they have made. Over the years, many brave Americans donned their country's uniform to ensure we would remain safe and free at home. That effort continues today as our fighting forces courageously defend freedom from threats in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere around the world.

My own State of Kentucky has a proud military history, and today is home both to Fort Knox and Fort Campbell, which together house thousands of soldiers. Many have gone from vital training at these two posts to protecting our Nation in the heart of the fight in Afghanistan and Iraq.

So tomorrow, as America takes a moment to thank these brave men and women who fought to preserve our way of life and to remember the heroes who did not return home, we will also give thanks for the men and women in uniform who are currently in harm's way.

I might say, every Veterans Day I remember my own father, who served in World War II. He arrived in Europe after the Battle of the Bulge and was there until his unit met the Russians in Pilsen. One of my treasured possessions is a letter he wrote to my mother on V-E Day. They called it V-E Day at the time. He wrote "V-E Day" at the top of the letter. That began a series of correspondence in that period right after the cease-fire and the Germans' surrender in which he had at one point prophetically—and this was just a foot soldier—prophetically mentioned to my mother after his experience interacting with the Russians in Pilsen that they were going to be a big problem down the road. I thought it was quite noteworthy that a regular foot soldier sort of instinctively understood at the moment that the Russians were an ally of convenience in World War II and not a long-term ally.

Regretfully, both my mother and father are no longer living, but I do remember them fondly and reread their correspondence from time to time of that period when he was overseas.

Later today, the Fort Hood community will honor the victims of the trag-

ic shootings there last week. We were all shocked by the assault on American soldiers right in the heart of a post they call home. We mourn their loss, and we pray for the victims and their families.

In the midst of this terrible tragedy, we also saw the courage of many troops and civilian law enforcement, and we thank these brave men and women for their dedication that they showed in putting themselves in harm's way.

So we honor every American who has fought for this country, and we recognize this country was built on what they have sacrificed.

I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the second half.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum and request that the time of the quorum call be charged evenly to both sides under morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business.

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

FORT HOOD SHOOTING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, of course, the Nation will observe Veterans Day this week, as we have each year, in commemoration of the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month with the end of World War I. This commemoration is one of special importance this year. We are in the midst of two wars where literally tens of thousands of Americans risk their lives each day in service of our country. It gives us a heightened awareness of our military and the men and women who show such extraordinary courage in serving.

Many of us have taken on the task of reaching out to the families in our States who have lost soldiers in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. When I took on this responsibility a few years ago, I had no idea that by 2009, I would still be writing notes of condolence to families in Illinois. But it continues

and, of course, other tragedies intervene.

Just last week, there was the tragedy at Fort Hood, claiming two lives of Illinois soldiers, as well as those of 11 others, and another 28 seriously wounded. It is a reminder of the danger of this commitment that each soldier makes. It is a reminder too that each of us needs to have gratitude for their service, not only on this day when we commemorate veterans and their service but around the calendar year.

We seem to be more focused on veterans issues in the midst of war, and that is no surprise. In my office last week, the major veterans organizations came in and talked about the fact that there seems to be more interest in veterans hospitals and veterans benefits and the GI bill than ever before, and it has a lot to do with the fact that we are in the midst of a war.

We also understand this tragedy at Fort Hood has brought a sharpened awareness of the vulnerability and the commitment of our soldiers. All Americans were saddened by this horrific outburst of violence. That the brave men and women who are trained to defend our Nation at war should be cut down on a U.S. Army post on American soil apparently at the hands of an Army doctor is deeply shocking and painful. We grieve for these men and women who died in this despicable act. We pray for their families and the recovery of all those who were injured.

We pray for the soldiers and families stationed at Fort Hood, for the safety of all of our brave men and women in uniform wherever they are stationed. This horrendous attack touches us all deeply. But we know the horror of this tragedy, like the burdens of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, falls hardest on our servicemembers and their families. We want them to know our entire Nation stands with them.

Among the fallen at Fort Hood were two young soldiers from Chicago: PFC Michael Pearson of Bolingbrook, IL, and PVT Francheska Velez from the West Humboldt Park neighborhood in Chicago. Both of these fallen veterans were 21 years of age.

PFC Michael Pearson was an honor roll student in high school and a talented musician who taught himself to play the piano and was passionate about playing guitar. He joined the Army a little over a year ago. He has been training to defuse explosives and roadside bombs and was scheduled to be deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan this January.

He was a devoted son. When his father was laid off from his job, Michael sent money home to buy new tires for the family car.

He leaves behind his mom and dad, Sheryll and Jeff, a sister and two brothers, including one who serves in the Illinois National Guard.

PVT Francheska Velez joined the Army right out of high school. She had already served a year in South Korea and 10 months in Iraq where she drove fuel tankers and disarmed bombs.