

bill won't come to a final vote, regardless of what is in it, until there are 60 Members of the Senate who want it to come to a final vote.

I wish to speak for a moment about don't ask, don't tell. Senator LEVIN has done an excellent job in the debate. I voted against the policy as a member of the Armed Services Committee in 1993, when it first came up. I was privileged to be an original cosponsor, with many others, of the legislation to repeal it this year, working with Senator LEVIN and others on the committee, including Senator COLLINS who, to her great credit, had the guts to join us because she believes don't ask, don't tell is un-American—my word—not fair and hurtful to military effectiveness.

More than 14,000 members of the military have been put out of the services since 1993 under don't ask, don't tell, not because they weren't good soldiers, sailors, marines or airmen, not because they violated any military code of conduct but only because of their private sexual orientation. That number is the equivalent of an entire division of warfighters we need in places such as Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world. It is also a waste of money to train those 14,000. Estimates are that taxpayers paid over \$600 million. We waste that by tossing them out, not because they are bad soldiers but because of their private sexual orientation.

I know some have said repealing don't ask, don't tell doesn't belong on this bill. Don't ask, don't tell was originally adopted as part of the Defense authorization bill. It is, frankly, the best and most logical place around which to repeal the policy. I know Senator LEVIN has talked about the process. There is a fundamental judgment that the President, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and those of us who have sponsored the amendment to repeal don't ask, don't tell have made, which is that it ought to go. It is un-American. It is inconsistent with our best values of equal opportunity, who can get the job done, not what one's private life is about. It is hurting our military. That judgment has been made.

The study being done at the Pentagon is to determine how to implement this best without intervening in military effectiveness. Then we put in the amendment which is in the bill. This provision, as Senator LEVIN has pointed out, doesn't go into effect until 60 days after the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff certify in writing that repeal of don't ask, don't tell is consistent with standards of military readiness, military effectiveness, unity, cohesion, recruiting, and retention. We couldn't ask for more in the way of due process. We don't direct the military exactly when and how and over what timeframe they actually go about pulling apart this unjust don't ask, don't tell policy.

It will be a close vote today. It would be a shame if we don't get the 60 votes. If Members are against don't ask, don't tell being repealed, vote against it when the amendment comes up. Submit an amendment to strike it. But don't stop the whole bill which is so important to our military. If for some reason we don't get the 60 votes today, Senator REED has made clear we are coming back, and we will do this in November or December. We have to pass this bill for all the reasons I have stated, for our military effectiveness when our troops are in combat. There will come a day before the end of this year when there will be a motion to strike the repeal of don't ask, don't tell. I don't think opponents of don't ask, don't tell have the votes to accomplish that. When that day comes, we will support our military and America's best values by ending this nonsensical, unfair policy.

In America, we judge people by whether they can get the job done, not by any quality about them personally. I think we will get this job done before the end of this year. I hope we can do it beginning this afternoon. But if we don't, we will come back.

I thank Senator LEVIN for his extraordinary leadership.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired.

Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:34 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and was reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. BEGICH.)

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2011—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time between now and 2:30 p.m. will be equally divided.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I yield 2½ minutes to Senator REED.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, we are at a critical juncture in proceeding to the National Defense Authorization Act. This bill is routinely taken up every year. I want to emphasize again, we are at the first step. This is just a motion to go forward to begin to debate the bill. I would hope we could at least summon sufficient votes to agree to talk about these critical issues.

This legislation contains important programs for our military. We have a military that is at war in Iraq and Afghanistan. They need equipment, and they need support. We have included changes for the quality of life of their families. One change, significantly, is to make the TRICARE system comparable to the new health care system

by allowing children who are up to 26 years old to stay on their parents' policies.

There are some controversial provisions and proposals. One is don't ask, don't tell. The other is the DREAM Act. First, the minority or anyone has the right to move an amendment to take out or change provisions with respect to don't ask, don't tell. I would disagree with that and oppose that, but that is something that can and will happen and will engender a very strong, positive debate. The other issue is the DREAM Act. I think that has a significant connection to this bill because that is one of the ways in which a youngster who came to the United States—not by his or her choice but because of a family choice—under 16 years of age who later joins the military, and who serves honorably, can be put on a path to eventually become a citizen. That has a strong nexus to this bill. But that issue has to be proposed on this legislation and voted for by a majority of Members.

So we are here simply to begin an important debate and discussion to support our men and women in uniform across the globe, and their families. To deny at least the initiation of such a debate seems to be exactly contrary to why we should be here, which is to support our military, to debate difficult issues, and then to take votes up and down to decide the policy of the United States.

With that, I urge all my colleagues to support this motion to proceed to the bill.

Mr. President, I yield any remaining time I have back to the chairman of the committee.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

Time will be charged equally.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I will yield myself just a minute and a half. I would ask that the Republicans have their speaker—if they are going to be using their time—to come immediately after me; otherwise, it would not be fair for us to be using up all of our time in advance.

Mr. President, this morning a number of Republican Senators stated they would support the current filibuster of this bill because they were afraid that if we take up the bill, we are going to have a closed process that would limit their ability to offer amendments. The majority leader has addressed this issue. He specifically said last Thursday that he is "willing to work with Republicans on a process that will permit the Senate to consider these matters and complete the bill as soon as possible." He is very clear on this. He is not trying to prevent other amendments from being offered. However, there are not going to be any amendments, there is not going to be any opportunity to vote on any amendments unless we get 60 votes to overcome the current filibuster and proceed to the bill. It makes no sense for Senators to