

RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session; further, that there be 2 minutes for debate equally divided in the usual manner prior to each vote and all votes after the first be 10 minutes in length.

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

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for 5 minutes.

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

#### VOTER SUPPRESSION

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, with what we went through in the State of Florida in the attempts to suppress voters, you would think that with the experience of people having stood in line in order to vote for 5 to 7 hours, it would have put this issue to rest. But they are back at it again, this time in a very subtle way.

The Governor's office, through his appointed secretary of state, who is the chief elections officer, has now interpreted a statute that in a municipal election students at the University of Florida cannot early vote on campus at their student center prior to the election. The interpretation was made that it is an educational facility and does not qualify, according to the statute, on a technical reason: that it is not a government-owned conference facility, when, indeed, it is owned by the State of Florida through the university, and it is a conference facility for many conferences for outside groups as well as student groups.

No, what it is is an attempt, in the runup to the November election, to try to make it more difficult and less convenient for students to vote.

As it turns out, in this particular municipal election coming up shortly, students would have to go across town to some other location some 3 miles away, and, of course, as busy as students are, that is going to discourage them.

If they end up doing this for this special election in March, a municipal election, they are, of course, going to try to do it for the November election when we have a statewide election for the Governor and the cabinet. Why? Well, an attempt to suppress student voters who may not be voting for the people in power who are trying to suppress their votes.

It is all the more of interest because on the ballot there will be a proposed constitutional amendment to change the State constitution to allow, by doctors, the prescription of medical marijuana, which is something that has generated interest in all sectors of society but particularly among students—another reason they want to come out to vote.

The whole idea of early voting is to try to make it more convenient for people to be able to vote, that they

might not be able to vote because of a babysitter problem or a work problem on election day. But early voting, as we saw in the experience of the 2012 election—the days were shortened from 14 to 8. They cut out the Sunday before the Tuesday election. Professor Dan Smith, in doing a study at the University of Florida, found that those who availed themselves of Sunday voting were primarily Hispanics and African Americans. Indeed, attempts were made to limit the number of early voting locations within a county, and then, of those early vote locations, having a facility that was small so that you could not get in a lot of voting machines. This was another way—very subtle—of trying to suppress the vote.

So the people of Florida, naturally, were outraged, particularly when they heard stories of the 101-year-old lady who had to stay 3½ hours in order to cast her vote and the others who stayed 5 and 7 hours. They were not going to have their vote taken away from them. They stood in line. So the people were outraged.

There was an attempt to pass a new law. I will close with this. With this new law now as being interpreted, the very same suppression efforts are occurring again. We are simply not going to let this happen even if we have to call in the Justice Department.

#### MILITARY RETIREMENT COLA

Mr. WARNER. Madam President, while I will cast my vote this afternoon for the legislation which would replace the cost of living adjustment, COLA, reduction for military retirees, I disagree strongly with the provision to extend the arbitrary sequester cuts included with this legislation.

It is frustrating to me that Congress will fix one provision which unfairly singled out one group by singling out another.

I am pleased that we can fix the COLA adjustment that would have affected the men and women who serve in the military prior to it taking effect. However, I would have preferred that we find a responsible way to offset the cost by identifying savings elsewhere.

I joined Senator SHAHEEN and Senator KAINE in December in introducing legislation that identified a way to pay for this fix: our proposal would close a loophole that some companies use to avoid paying U.S. taxes. Our approach would generate \$6.6 billion over 10 years to pay for the cost of un-doing the proposed cut in military pensions.

The extension of the sequester on mandatory spending for another year, which primarily hits Medicare providers such as hospitals with a two-percent across-the-board cut in payments, is a blunt and arbitrary way to find savings in Federal health care programs. It does not reward health care value, or support health care quality, nor differentiate among different geographic areas.

The across-the-board cut does nothing to reform the real long-term fiscal

challenges facing our entitlement programs. Instead, it just compounds on the multitude of other cuts that hospitals and other providers are facing, creating a situation where access to care potentially will be threatened.

The vote before the Senate this afternoon shows yet again how we need to have a broader conversation on how to get a better handle on our long-term fiscal challenges. By ignoring that larger conversation, we instead are reduced to playing a game of Whac-A-Mole.

The provision which singled out military servicemembers and veterans was included in a bipartisan package which was the least we could do to ensure that we didn't repeat the stupidity of last fall's government shutdown. The overall package, the Bipartisan Budget Act, which I supported, did not touch the major levers available to fix our balance sheet. By common agreement, revenue and entitlement reforms were not part of the discussion.

This package fixed the arbitrary sequester cuts—though only on the discretionary side, and only for 2 years.

For the last 3 years, Congress—and both chambers, and both parties, bear some responsibility for this—have repeatedly taken the path of least resistance. All of us recognize that we have an enormous fiscal challenge, but there's not the collective will to make the hard decisions which will put us on a path of solvency.

Instead, we punt and we play on the margins. We continually make deep cuts in the type of programs that power economic growth—programs that train our workforce, educate our children, and support those who serve and protect our nation. We choose to put off the broader discussion about reforms which would be easier now—easier because they create a glide path toward enactment—allowing individuals, families, businesses and our state and local government partners to make responsible plans for future changes. We have avoided a conversation about our complex, bloated tax code, which promotes inefficiency and too often inhibits economic growth. By putting off the hard choices, we allow these fiscal challenges to get worse. The choices do not get any easier.

Decisions like the vote before us today are incredibly frustrating. These decisions ask us to support the repeal of a provision, which hurt one specific group, by replacing it with another provision which just places the burden on a separate group. I believe that we can do better for our military personnel, for our Medicare providers, the patients who rely on them, and for our country overall. While I will cast my vote for this bill, I remain committed to finding a way to reverse the sequester cuts we have just extended through 2024.

• Mr. COBURN. Madam President, regardless of which side one falls on the Ryan-Murray budget deal reduction in the annual COLA increase for working