

administrative staff—to improve the timeliness of care to the 8 million veterans enrolled in the Veterans Health Administration. We can help meet that demand if we make those jobs more competitive by adjusting the pay scale.

In the bill we passed this summer—which is now law—Congress gave Secretary McDonald the authority to fire underperformers. The other side of that coin is competitive pay for those who are performing. These doctors and nurses are caring for the men and women who put their lives at risk through military service. Let's lift the pay freeze on their salaries. The VA should have the best and the brightest medical staff out there. That means hiring the best and firing those who do not pass muster.

The shortage of health care providers is not a new issue—particularly in rural areas of the country. We have struggled with this in Illinois. The Danville and Marion VA medical centers—both in small towns far from an urban center—struggle to fill health care positions. In 2009 I offered an amendment to the fiscal year 2010 funding bill that set aside \$3 million for incentive pay to help with recruitment and retention for medical personnel to serve in rural VA facilities. Raising salaries would help facilities such as these attract and keep topflight doctors and nurses.

The Veterans Health Administration is an important training ground for many medical students. At Hines VA medical center in Chicago, medical students from Loyola get much of their training in a clinical setting. The veterans benefit from the addition of these young doctors. And hopefully that experience leads to more doctors looking to the VA as a career choice. But no matter how appealing the VA is, medical school debt is a factor. The VA offers a loan repayment program that can help offset those worries, but offering pay that is more comparable to the private sector would make working for the VA health care system even more attractive to new graduates and would help retain current staff.

The VA cares for America's heroes, the men and women who have worked to keep our country safe and defend American ideals abroad. As recent investigations have brought to light, VA must improve recruitment and retention of medical personnel to keep pace with growing demand. I am happy Secretary McDonald is lifting the salary freeze on medical personnel and plans to increase compensation for the health care providers who work with our veterans. They deserve the best.

HUNGER ACTION MONTH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in honor of Hunger Action Month, I want to say a few words about the real and lingering problem of hunger and food insecurity. Hunger has no boundaries. In a Nation that prides itself as the land of plenty, more than 47 million people—

including more than 1 in 5 children—do not know how they will put food on their table.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, is one of our most important antihunger programs. More than 80 percent of SNAP households have incomes below the poverty line, which is less than \$500 a week for a family of four. Seventy percent of SNAP participants are in families with children, and more than 25 percent are in households with seniors or people with disabilities. Basic sustenance ought to be a guarantee in a civilized society, not a gamble. If children or adults are hungry in America, that is a problem for all of us, and it is a problem we can do something about.

I have traveled across my State and met families and parents that rely on food assistance and heard their stories. They are our neighbors, they are hard-working people who lost their job or got sick. They are seniors living on a limited income.

They are people like Maureen, who works cleaning houses. Her husband fell ill and had to stop working due to a disability. Maureen struggles to put food on the table for her two daughters in high school. Her husband's doctor says he needs to eat more vegetables, but Maureen says they are just too expensive. The \$126 a month in SNAP benefits Maureen receives help, but she still struggles and relies on a food pantry to feed her family. Unfortunately, Maureen is just one of the more than 1.8 million Illinoisans who do not know where their next meal will come from.

The millions of Americans, like Maureen, who rely on safety net antihunger programs, may not have the loudest voice in the debate or big public relations firms, but we must protect these programs and work to improve the lives of vulnerable families, children, and seniors at their time of need.

Hunger in America is not something we can ignore. No family should have to wonder where their next meal will come from. As a co-chair of the Senate Hunger Caucus, I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues and those in the antihunger community to shine a light on this important issue and eliminate domestic hunger.

TRIBUTE TO JOSUE ROBLES

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, today I would like to pay tribute to a great American veteran, businessman, and leader, MG Josue Robles, Retired, or, as he prefers to be called, Joe. Joe is stepping down at the end of this year as the CEO and president of USAA, a great American institution based in San Antonio. His retirement marks a milestone in an inspirational and remarkable American story and the conclusion of an impressive career. He will be sorely missed not only by the employees at USAA but by the greater San Antonio community and beyond.

The eldest of nine children, Joe was born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, in 1946. His father was working as a waiter when he was approached by a group of Americans who were recruiting for steel mills in the United States. His dad went to work for U.S. Steel in Lorain, OH. Eighteen months later, when Joe was 3, his dad had saved enough money to send for the family. Their house in Ohio was six blocks from the steel mill, where his father worked for the next 35 years, in addition to part-time work as a carpenter and plumber to supplement his income.

Starting at age 11 and throughout high school, Joe worked a variety of jobs at a local grocery store and in the neighborhood doing yard work. He worked in the steel mill one summer and learned very quickly what a hot, dirty, dangerous place it was. One summer there was enough, and it motivated Joe to go to school and get a good education so he would never have to shovel slag again.

While in high school, Joe was awarded a medical school scholarship sponsored by the local medical society. They would pay for his education if he agreed to come back and practice medicine in his hometown. But first he had to earn an undergraduate degree. Joe graduated from high school in 1964 and worked that summer painting a house. The job paid enough to cover his first year of tuition at Lorain County Community College. Joe married that year and went to work full time at a nuclear plant, where he monitored radiation levels. Within 2 years, his long hours forced him to drop a few classes and switch his student status to part time. Then, in 1966, his country came calling, and Joe was drafted into the U.S. Army.

By any measure, Joe's military career was stellar. His awards and mission-critical positions and assignments are too numerous to fully recount, but let me share a few highlights. Joe completed his basic training at Fort Jackson, SC. While there, he earned a recommendation for the Artillery Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill, OK. Once commissioned as a second lieutenant, he was sent to Korea in 1967 and 1968, followed by assignment as an executive officer at Fort Knox, KY, and then 12 months as a battery commander in Vietnam.

In the latter part of his career, Joe served as the chief of the Program and Budget Office at the U.S. Army Headquarters, the division artillery commander of the 1st Infantry Division, Mechanized, at Fort Riley, KS; and the Army planner and director for operations and support at Department of the Army Headquarters. As assistant division commander of the 1st Cavalry Division in Fort Hood, TX, he prepared and deployed the division for Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. He then served as the director of the Army budget and as commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division, Mechanized, out of Fort Riley, KS—the legendary “Big Red One.”