

and I believe Senator REED and I are moving forward with some amendments we can have debated and also voted on today.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1735, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1735) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2016 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McCain amendment No. 1463, in the nature of a substitute.

McCain amendment No. 1456 (to amendment No. 1463), to require additional information supporting long-range plans for construction of naval vessels.

Cornyn amendment No. 1486 (to amendment No. 1463), to require reporting on energy security issues involving Europe and the Russian Federation, and to express the sense of Congress regarding ways the United States could help vulnerable allies and partners with energy security.

Vitter amendment No. 1473 (to amendment No. 1463), to limit the retirement of Army combat units.

Markey amendment No. 1645 (to amendment No. 1463), to express the sense of Congress that exports of crude oil to United States allies and partners should not be determined to be consistent with the national interest if those exports would increase energy prices in the United States for American consumers or businesses or increase the reliance of the United States on imported oil.

Reed (for Blumenthal) amendment No. 1564 (to amendment No. 1463), to increase civil penalties for violations of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act.

McCain (for Paul) modified amendment No. 1543 (to amendment No. 1463), to strengthen employee cost savings suggestions programs within the Federal Government.

Reed (for Durbin) modified amendment No. 1559 (to amendment No. 1463), to prohibit the award of Department of Defense contracts to inverted domestic corporations.

McCain (for Burr) amendment No. 1569 (to amendment No. 1463), to ensure criminal background checks of employees of the military child care system and providers of child care services and youth program services for military dependents.

Feinstein (for McCain) amendment No. 1889 (to amendment No. 1463), to reaffirm the prohibition on torture.

Fischer/Booker amendment No. 1825 (to amendment No. 1463), to authorize appropriations for national security aspects of the Merchant Marine for fiscal years 2016 and 2017.

Burr/McCain amendment No. 1921 (to amendment No. 1569), to improve cybersecurity in the United States through enhanced sharing of information about cybersecurity threats.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I was first going to offer an amendment, but both the chairman and ranking member of the committee suggested that I wait until after they have had a chance to review some of the technical details. So I will speak on an amendment that I will in all probability offer at a later time.

My amendment really goes to how we make sure we help our troops with the many stresses that are in their lives. My goal is to add money to funding our commissaries. This amendment, which I will offer at a later time, restores \$322 million in cuts to commissaries proposed by the Department of Defense. It would authorize \$1.4 billion in funding—the same level that is in the House National Defense Authorization Act and in the House Defense appropriations bill. It offsets the \$322 million for commissaries by reducing the Pentagon's budget in failed policies to buy spare parts. They have a lot of waste there, and we think we can find the \$322 million we need there, and that is the technical issue we need to work, also known as the offset. But what is not technical is the fact that we have to make sure our commissaries function at their current level.

Commissaries represent one of the most significant and lasting benefits for military members and their families. Commissaries have been around since 1826, giving military families the ability to shop at a network of stores. The commissary system is simple. If you are Active Duty, Reserve, National Guard, or a retired member of the family, you have access to 246 commissaries worldwide. They are particularly important to many of our troops overseas, and they give military families affordable access to healthy foods.

The benefits of commissaries are significant. They feed those people who are actually members of our military. They help military families stretch their budgets, and they also help provide jobs to family members in the military who work in those commissaries.

Our distinguished colleagues on the authorizing committee, Senator MCCAIN and Senator JACK REED, are themselves military men. Senator MCCAIN is a graduate of the Naval Academy and Senator JACK REED graduated from West Point. They know that one of the big expenditures right now for our military is rising health costs. The military itself is looking at how to make sure they keep our troops healthy not only while they are doing their job but also how to keep them

healthy so that when they move on, they will be in excellent shape. The commissaries do those kinds of things. They provide what grocery stores provide—fresh fruits and vegetables. They provide healthy foods.

Also, for example, my own commissary at Fort Meade, which is part of the Healthy Base Initiative, has shown people how to stretch their dollar more so they can get more for their family budget and also has actual recommendations on how to add nutrition—save money and add nutrition. If we want to bend the health care cost curve, while we are looking at important medical research, research shows that good food leads to good health.

The other thing is this: Military members get a significant savings from commissaries. The average savings is about 30 percent on a grocery bill. For a family of four, that comes to over \$4,000 a year. Everyone knows how much military families are stretched, and for our men and women who are enlisted, this is a really big deal. We need to make this available for them.

What many people don't realize is that the commissaries not only create jobs, but 60 percent of commissary workers are spouses of men who serve in the military. About 100,000 jobs are supported through commissaries. The other thing the DOD wants to do is cut their hours. Well, if they cut their hours, that does cut jobs, but it also cuts opportunity.

When you are in the military, you work around the clock. You are not on the clock; you work around the clock. So if you are a military police officer, you could be getting off of duty late at night. If you are someone who repairs our helicopters or airplanes, you could be getting off at night.

The commissary at Fort Meade serves agencies such as the National Security Agency. They essentially work a 36-hour day. They work around the clock, 24 hours a day. Our commissary isn't open 24 hours a day, but I can tell you it can't be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and still meet the needs of our military workforce.

The Department of Defense wants to make the commissaries more self-sustaining, and we don't argue with that. We can always find efficiencies and look at new ways to do things. But don't cut \$322 million and further cut it close to \$1 billion over the next 4 years.

What we want to do is make sure our military families have what they need. First of all, we want them to have good food. We want them to be able to go to these commissaries at hours that work for military families. We also want to look at the long-range effects of bending the health care curve.

I am going to come back to the commissary at Fort Meade. I am very proud of the fact that Fort Meade is what we call a compassionate post. That means if you are in the U.S. Army and you have a special needs child, one of the highly desirable places to be based is at Fort Meade. Why? Because Anne Arundel County has one of