

marijuana throughout the country. This is a decision for the States. I hope many of my colleagues, especially those who express support for States' rights and our Federalist system of government, those who often decry the power of the big bad Federal Government in undermining local initiatives, would support my very simple and straightforward legislation that will be introduced next week.

All my legislation says is that if a State chooses to legalize marijuana, that State should be able to go forward without legal impediments from the Federal Government.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Mr. President, I want to talk about an issue of great importance in this country. I believe the time is now for the United States to end capital punishment. I know this is not necessarily a popular point of view, but in my view it is the right point of view. Virtually every Western industrialized country has chosen to end capital punishment. I would rather have our country stand side-by-side with European democracies than with countries like China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and others that maintain the death penalty.

We are all shocked and disgusted by the horrific murders we see in this country, including massacres in schools and on college campuses that seem to take place every week. All of us are tired and disgusted with what we are seeing, but it seems to me that at a time of rampant violence and murder all over the world, where people are being blown up and their heads are being cut off, it is important that the state itself, the Federal Government in America, say loudly and clearly that we will not be part of that process.

When people commit horrendous crimes—and we see too many of them—we should lock them up and throw away the key. I have no problem in saying that people who commit terrible murders should spend the rest of their lives in jail, but the state itself, in a democratic civilized society, should itself not be involved in the murder of other Americans.

I know there are strong differences of opinion on this issue. In fact, I think I am in a minority position, but I think those of us who want to set an example, who want to say that we have to end the murders and the violence we are seeing in our country and all over the world, should in fact be on the side of those of us who believe we must end capital punishment in this country.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). The Senator from Washington.

HOMELESS VETERANS SERVICES PROTECTION ACT OF 2015

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want to take a few minutes to talk about an issue that is very important to me, and that is the care of our Nation's veterans. As the daughter of a World War

II veteran, I realize what it means for a family member to be willing to sacrifice their life for their country. We promise our men and women in uniform that the country will be there for them after they leave service, and sometimes that means long after the war is over. But I am concerned our country is about to turn its back on thousands of veterans, and I am here today to say we have to fix it.

Last year, the VA told homeless service providers they needed to cut off services to certain veterans who had other than honorable discharges or had not served a certain length of time. If that policy had been enacted, it would have been a major setback for veterans across the country. It would have set us back on our goal of ending veteran homelessness, a goal that the administration has set for itself and hundreds of mayors across the country have committed to. It would have been simply unacceptable. These are veterans who need our support. Many of them struggle with mental illness and substance abuse or simply finding employment.

According to some of our leading veterans and homeless groups—including the American Legion, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans—if the policy had been enacted, the VA would have had to stop serving about 15 percent of the homeless veteran population. In some urban areas, up to 30 percent of homeless veterans would be turned away.

Thankfully, after hearing concern from around the country, including from my home State of Washington, the VA was able to put off that terrible policy change. But, unfortunately, the VA is now expected to announce their final decision any day that the reprieve is over, and they are going to have to go ahead with this change and force homeless providers to turn away veterans who have nowhere else to go—veterans whose providers have been serving them for decades. That is wrong. This policy change would be heartless. It is a bureaucratic move that would put thousands of veterans on the streets practically overnight, and it has to be stopped.

The VA is going to enact this policy when the final decision is made. So Congress needs to act now to stop this from happening. Earlier this year, I introduced the Homeless Veterans Services Protection Act. That is a bill that would ensure our most vulnerable veterans would be assured continued access to critical homeless service programs, regardless of their discharge status or length of service. In other words, it fixes the problem the VA says it has and makes sure they do not have to cut off homeless veterans from care.

My bill will make it clear that our country takes care of those who served and that we do not allow bureaucracy to dictate who gets a roof over their head and who does not. But it is crit-

ical that we act now. The VA has said it would issue this legal position in November, which could put thousands of veterans on the street. We are running out of time. But the solution to this crisis is now before us, and we can do it by passing the Homeless Veterans Services Protection Act.

I don't believe there is any Member of this body who would deny our obligation to ensure that veterans are taken care of and have a roof over their head. While our country has made great strides in recent years providing homeless services to the men and women who so bravely served our country, I believe that even one veteran sleeping on our streets in the United States is one too many. We know we have a lot of work ahead of us.

Veterans are at a greater risk of becoming homeless than nonveterans. On any given night, as many as 50,000 veterans are homeless here in this country. With an influx of veterans now returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the numbers of veterans seeking care will continue to go up.

In short, this problem is not going away. Our veterans have made great sacrifices serving our country. We cannot turn our backs on them when they come home. That commitment includes providing benefits, medical care, support, and assistance to prevent homelessness. It is a commitment that shouldn't stop simply because we have run into a policy roadblock.

I am very pleased to call this up now with the Heller amendment which is the text of S. 1105. It is a bill that I strongly support. The provision will increase the availability of care for homeless veterans with children by reimbursing facilities funded by the VA Grant and Per Diem Program.

I want to thank Senator HELLER for his leadership on this issue. I want to thank Senator ISAKSON and Senator BLUMENTHAL for their leadership, as the heads of the Veterans Affairs' Committee, and for their support in being here today.

I am hoping Democrats and Republicans join us today to right this wrong and prevent this problem from happening. It shouldn't be a partisan issue. It is not a political issue. This is a veterans issue. It is one that should bring us all together.

With that, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of S. 1731 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

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

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1731) to amend title 38, United States Code, to waive the minimum period of continuous active duty in the Armed Forces for receipt of certain benefits for homeless veterans, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish such benefits to homeless veterans with discharges or releases from service in the Armed Forces with other than dishonorable conditions, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Heller amendment be agreed to; the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The amendment (No. 2760) was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: To authorize per diem payments under comprehensive service programs for homeless veterans to furnish care to dependents of homeless veterans)

On page 4, between lines 15 and 16, insert the following:

SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION OF PER DIEM PAYMENTS FOR FURNISHING CARE TO DEPENDENTS OF CERTAIN HOMELESS VETERANS.

Section 2012(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(4) Services for which a recipient of a grant under section 2011 of this title (or an entity described in paragraph (1)) may receive per diem payments under this subsection may include furnishing care for a dependent of a homeless veteran who is under the care of such homeless veteran while such homeless veteran receives services from the grant recipient (or entity).”

The bill (S. 1731), as amended, was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed, as follows:

S. 1731

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Homeless Veterans Services Protection Act of 2015”.

SEC. 2. WAIVER OF MINIMUM PERIOD OF CONTINUOUS ACTIVE DUTY IN ARMED FORCES FOR CERTAIN BENEFITS FOR HOMELESS VETERANS.

Section 5303A(b)(3) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subparagraphs (F) and (G) as subparagraphs (G) and (H), respectively; and

(2) by inserting after subparagraph (E) the following new subparagraph (F):

“(F) to benefits under section 2011, 2012, 2013, 2044, or 2061 of this title;”.

SEC. 3. AUTHORIZATION TO FURNISH CERTAIN BENEFITS TO HOMELESS VETERANS WITH DISCHARGES OR RELEASES UNDER OTHER THAN HONORABLE CONDITIONS.

Section 5303(d) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking “not apply to any war-risk insurance” and inserting the following: “not apply to the following:

“(1) Any war-risk insurance”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(2) Benefits under section 2011, 2012, 2013, 2044, or 2061 of this title (except for benefits for individuals discharged or dismissed from the Armed Forces by reason of the sentence of a general court-martial).”.

SEC. 4. MODIFICATION OF DEFINITION OF VETERAN FOR PURPOSES OF PROVIDING CERTAIN BENEFITS TO HOMELESS VETERANS.

Section 2002 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking “In this chapter” and inserting “(a) IN GENERAL.—In this chapter”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following:

“(b) VETERAN DEFINED.—(1) Notwithstanding section 101(2) of this title and except as provided in paragraph (2), for purposes of sections 2011, 2012, 2013, 2044, and 2061 of this title, the term ‘veteran’ means a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, regardless of length of service, and who was discharged or released therefrom.

“(2) For purposes of paragraph (1), the term ‘veteran’ excludes a person who—

“(A) received a dishonorable discharge from the Armed Forces; or

“(B) was discharged or dismissed from the Armed Forces by reason of the sentence of a general court-martial.”.

SEC. 5. TRAINING OF PERSONNEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND GRANT RECIPIENTS.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a program of training and education to ensure that the following persons are aware of and implement this Act and the amendments made by this Act:

(1) Personnel of the Department of Veterans Affairs who are supporting or administering a program under chapter 20 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) Recipients of grants or other amounts for purposes of carrying out such a program.

SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION OF PER DIEM PAYMENTS FOR FURNISHING CARE TO DEPENDENTS OF CERTAIN HOMELESS VETERANS.

Section 2012(a) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

“(4) Services for which a recipient of a grant under section 2011 of this title (or an entity described in paragraph (1)) may receive per diem payments under this subsection may include furnishing care for a dependent of a homeless veteran who is under the care of such homeless veteran while such homeless veteran receives services from the grant recipient (or entity).”.

SEC. 7. REGULATIONS.

Not later than 270 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall prescribe regulations, including such modifications to section 3.12 of title 38, Code of Federal Regulations (or any successor regulation), as the Secretary considers appropriate, to ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs is in full compliance with this Act and the amendments made by this Act.

SEC. 8. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This Act and the amendments made by this Act shall apply to individuals seeking benefits under chapter 20 of title 38, United States Code, before, on, and after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator HELLER, Senator ISAKSON, and the other Members who worked so hard for this. I would like to yield some time to the Senator from Nevada.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator MURRAY for her efforts here today and for her willingness to work with me on including a provision that we worked on together for several years now as members of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Senator MURRAY's legislation ensures that homeless veterans continue to be eligible for the VA's Grant and Per Diem Program.

With my provision that Senator MURRAY agreed to include, this legisla-

tion will also extend this eligibility to the dependents of homeless veterans. Given the work that I have done with Senator MURRAY on eligibility for homeless veterans' dependents, I believe it was important we addressed both the needs of the veteran as well as their dependents.

In cities such as Las Vegas, where veteran homelessness remains a serious problem, the support of housing and service centers that receive VA funding is absolutely critical in getting these veterans back on their feet. Not only do the programs provide housing but they also offer services, such as case management, education, crisis intervention, and other services to special populations and important populations such as homeless women veterans.

This Congress has a responsibility to ensure that existing veterans under this program remain eligible, but also that dependents of veterans, especially their children, are taken care of when their veteran parents have fallen on hard times.

That is why I introduced the CARE for Veterans' Dependents Act with Senator MURRAY, to make dependents eligible for care at VA-funded facilities. These children and their parents deserve the certainty that they will be able to access supportive housing during their serious time of need. I am proud that we were able to move forward on this measure, which was just accepted a few moments ago by unanimous consent.

Senator MURRAY and I have a proud history of working together to advocate on behalf of our Nation's veterans, and today's passage of this legislation is another testament to our strong partnership on behalf of veterans. I am also grateful to the chairman of the committee, Senator ISAKSON, and to Ranking Member BLUMENTHAL of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, for working so diligently with us to make this happen.

Mr. President, I yield back to the Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I yield back.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TRADE ACT OF 2015—Continued

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. RES. 222

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, as the proud parent of a wonderful daughter and the proud grandparent of three wonderful granddaughters, like so many others, I was proud of the U.S. Women's National Team and their historic World Cup victory. I was even more proud on Tuesday when I saw