

To his credit, Secretary Shinseki has ordered an inspector general review of the Phoenix VA health care system. It would not surprise me in the least if additional inspector general reviews end up being required at other VA hospitals.

One thing I will be listening for today is whether Secretary Shinseki states a belief that the VA is, in fact, facing a systemic crisis because just this morning the Wall Street Journal reported that his Department has made "minimal progress at best" on a host of problems identified in 2012 by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office—"minimal progress at best." That is how a nonpartisan GAO official described it.

Many letters have come into my office on this issue. Kentuckians are really concerned. Let me read what one Kentuckian had to say:

As a veteran, I have read the recent revelations of events in Phoenix with horror. These [Americans] . . . sacrificed for their country . . . In return, we owed them competent care and treatment as a person, and not an obstacle to a "good evaluation." In order to regain the trust of our veterans, it is vital that we hold those responsible accountable.

This Kentucky veteran could not be more right.

Last year I called the Obama administration's veterans backlog a "national disgrace." I have also made several appeals to the Secretary. I know, of course, I was not the only one. Yet the initial reports of the shocking situation in Phoenix indicate that things have only gotten worse. With similar stories now filtering in from other parts of the country, it is getting harder to believe this is not more of a sort of systemic, administration-wide crisis. The Veterans' Administration needs to get to the bottom of how widespread the problem has become.

My concern is that the Obama administration will treat this scandal the way it does all the others—like a political crisis to get past rather than a serious problem to be solved. We know the President appointed a member of his staff yesterday to look into it. That is a start, but if the President is truly serious, he needs to treat these stories at least as seriously as he did the ObamaCare Web site fiasco when he pledged his complete attention and the full force of his administration to do whatever needed to be done. That was on the Web site fiasco when he let it be known that his people would not rest until a solution was worked out. Incredibly, so far the President has made no such pledge when it comes to the treatment of our veterans. The President needs to understand that our veterans deserve at least as much attention as a Web site—at least as much attention as a Web site. In fact, they deserve a heck of a lot more.

This is a really big deal. It is our job as Senators to get to the bottom of it. We need to ask the tough questions. We need to uncover the truth. Any misconduct found at VA hospitals should be met with swift punishment.

Administration officials need to be held accountable because America's ill and wounded veterans have already paid a price. They have already paid a price. They have a right to expect that our country will be there when they need help. If we break faith with them, we are breaking faith with the recruiters who made commitments to the next generation of American military leaders. All of those people have made commitments. The recruiters, the military leaders have all made commitments. As one of my colleagues put it, American veterans ought to be first in line—first in line—for the best care, not pushed to the back of the line for what they are getting.

So our joint mission, whether we are Democrats or Republicans, should be to get to the bottom of the Obama administration's veteran crisis swiftly and fix it. It means holding officials accountable. It means getting serious about solutions, such as Senator RUBIO's bill that would make it easier to remove high-level VA employees for performance failures. I am proud to co-sponsor that legislation. I know some of my colleagues will have other good ideas in the coming days and weeks too. The point is, that is where our focus needs to be. We owe it to every veteran who has served.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BOURBON  
RESOLUTION

Mr. President, I wish to pay tribute to the spirit of Kentucky literally. This month marks the 50th anniversary since the U.S. Congress passed S. Con. Res. 19, which recognized bourbon whiskey as a distinctive product of the United States and unlike any other type of distilled spirit, whether foreign or domestic.

On May 4, 1964, Congress declared that bourbon whiskey had achieved recognition and acceptance throughout the world as a distinctive product of the United States and expressed a sense of Congress that the United States should prohibit the importation of any other whiskey purporting to call itself bourbon. This resolution helped to promote the thriving bourbon distillery industry that we can be thankful is located in the United States today.

Kentucky is, of course, the birthplace of bourbon. The drink itself is named for Bourbon County, KY. Bourbon County, KY, is in the heart of the Bluegrass State, where the product first emerged. Kentucky produces 95 percent of the world's bourbon supply, and Kentucky's iconic bourbon brands ship more than 30 million gallons of the spirit to 126 countries, making bourbon the largest export category among all U.S. distilled spirits.

Not only is Kentucky the overwhelming producer of the world's bourbon, bourbon gives much back to Kentucky. It is a vital part of our State's tourism and economy. The industry generates close to 9,000 jobs and contributed almost \$2 billion to Kentucky's economy in 2010. Production of

bourbon in Kentucky has increased by more than 120 percent since 1999. Not to go unnoticed, the bourbon industry has taken an active role in promoting the responsible and moderate use of its product by everyone.

S. Con. Res. 19 was originally introduced 50 years ago by Kentucky Senator Thruston Morton, and a companion measure was introduced in the House by Representative John C. Watts. They recognized that just as Scotch whisky is a distinctive product of Scotland, Canadian whiskey a distinctive product of Canada, and cognac a distinctive product of the Cognac region of France, all with official government recognition, bourbon deserved the distinction that comes with official recognition as well. However, the International Federation of Manufacturing Industries and Wholesale Trades in Wines, Spirits, and Liqueurs could only enforce the protection of the bourbon appellation if Congress passed a resolution declaring such. Therefore, on May 4, 1964, Congress adopted the original bourbon resolution.

Fifty years later, I rise to introduce, along with my friend and colleague Senator PAUL, a new Senate resolution to recognize the 50th anniversary of this original declaration of independence for bourbon.

Kentucky is celebrating this 50th anniversary in appropriate fashion through various exhibits, events, and tastings. Perhaps the most exciting of these events is the display of the original bourbon resolution, which has been released from the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington. For the first time since its adoption, it is to be exhibited in Louisville at the Frazier History Museum. I was proud to be able to work with my friend and fellow Kentucky Representative ANDY BARR to assist in bringing the original resolution to Kentucky. I thank the Kentucky Distillers Association and the Frazier History Museum for their efforts to honor the anniversary of the bourbon resolution. I am also proud today to follow in the footsteps of Kentucky leaders from the past in honoring and recognizing the original bourbon resolution with this 50th anniversary resolution.

Bourbon production in Kentucky has grown strong and thrived over the last half century, and I am sure it will continue to do the same for the next 50 years. I thank and congratulate all the hard-working Kentuckians who contributed to building our State's vibrant bourbon industry.

I urge my Senate colleagues to support this resolution and look forward to its swift adoption.

RECOGNIZING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
CONGRESSIONAL DECLARATION OF BOURBON  
WHISKEY

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 446, submitted earlier today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the resolution by title.



and women who had exited the military and then couldn't find a job. Obviously, these are men and women who served valiantly during the longest period of war in the history of this country.

As our Armed Forces continue to draw down in Afghanistan after nearly 15 years of combat operations—and those combat operations are scheduled to cease this year—we have to do everything we can to ensure that these servicemembers can find a way to quickly transition from military to civilian life and find good jobs in the process.

We know—and the Presiding Officer knows very well in his personal capacity—that servicemembers gain incredibly valuable skills while serving in the military. We make a significant investment as a society in training each and every member of our Armed Forces in a military occupation or specialty, many of which of have parallel fields in the civilian workforce.

I have a child in the military now. Watching the degree of training he undergoes—training that will be very valuable for civilian work when he chooses to make that transition—and seeing the kind of training his colleagues undergo as well convinces me of these great skills that adhere in our military. But instead of making it easier for these servicemembers to get credit for their skills that would help them as they transition to civilian life, they are often continuing to face roadblocks.

That inspired me to introduce my first bill as a Senator last year, the Troop Talent Act of 2013. The Troop Talent Act required that information on civilian credentialing opportunities be made available to servicemembers during their Active-Duty training and that information on military training and experience be provided to civilian credentialing agencies to help them understand how the skills for success in military life transfer directly to the skills for success in civilian life. If you are learning to operate heavy equipment in the military, get the commercial driver's license right when you are learning it. If you are learning to be a battlefield medic in the military, get physician assistant or nursing credits right when you are getting that. If you are at the ordnance school at Fort Lee in Virginia learning to be an ordnance officer, get the American Welding Society's certificate after you take your welding class, put it in the personnel file, and when you get ready to move to civilian life, you will have credentials that will be understood by a civilian workforce.

I am proud that key parts of the bill were signed into law as part of the national defense authorization bill we passed in December, and with this information servicemembers will be more prepared to transfer into civilian life. They will have a better sense of what skills servicemembers possess as they enter civilian life. So the passage of

this Troop Talent Act was for me a first step, but there are many more steps we have to take to tackle this problem of veterans' unemployment.

In speaking with military leadership, servicemembers and veterans, I have learned there are some additional barriers to the employment of our veterans that deal with how tuition assistance monies can be used by those in active service. One is the cost of fees associated with getting credentials while on Active Duty. Those costs of credentials are not covered by the current military tuition assistance program.

Some military members transfer out of the service and they decide to pursue a degree at a college or university, but others are ready to immediately enter the workforce with the skills they obtained through military training. Again, to use the example I started with earlier, if you are a logistics ordnance officer training in Fort Lee in Virginia, you take metalworking courses, you take welding courses, and those are the kinds of skills in very significant demand in the American manufacturing sector right now. Those individuals often have an ability—they certainly have the skills—to get good jobs when they leave. But they often lack something important. They lack the credential the civilian workforce understands—in this case an American Welding Society credential, for example.

Currently, the military tuition assistance program provides Active-Duty servicemembers financial assistance up to \$4,500 in aggregate per fiscal year for postsecondary courses or degree programs. While you are in service, you can take degree programs, and up to \$4,500 a year, those degree programs and courses will be supported by the military tuition assistance program. But despite the success of this program, certification and license fees are not allowed to be paid with tuition assistance benefits.

So in other words, if you are in the military and you want to take a college course, you can get paid. If you are in the military and you want to pass a welding certificate exam to be a welder, the tuition assistance program will not pay for that. This is a challenge because these credentialing exams can cost significantly out-of-pocket, often \$300 to \$500, and many of our enlisted men and women don't have that. It is really inequitable we would allow Active-Duty military to draw down up to \$4,500 for college courses but not draw down one penny to get a credential for a technical skill they maintain.

This is part of a larger societal issue. I think we value college and community college in a way we do not or have not traditionally valued career and technical education programs. So many of our programs—Pell grants and Stafford loans, GI bill benefits—often can be used more easily for community college or 4-year colleges than they can be used for even the highest quality career and technical programs.

That is why today I am introducing the Credentialing Improvement for Troop Talent, or CREDIT Act. The legislation will go into that military tuition assistance program and expand the authority of the program so that it can cover credentialing expenses for those military men and women who want to move into career and technical fields. It will give servicemembers the means to pay for credentials while they are still on Active-Duty and before they transition into civilian workforce.

In addition, the legislation will ensure the credentials our servicemembers earn are of the highest quality and that they are recognized by national and international standards, and not offered by shady or sort of fly-by-night organizations that simply want to pocket money that our military men and women are entitled to in order to help them get an education for themselves.

We in Virginia have seen firsthand how the skills and talents of the men and women who serve our country can benefit our workforce and contribute to our economy. We make a huge investment in our servicemembers, and it is a disservice not only to them but also to our Nation not to take advantage of the skills we bestow on these men and women once they transition to civilian life. We have to, all of us, Mr. President, stay focused on this. It is unacceptable for us as a Nation to look in the mirror and say: Our servicemen and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have an unemployment rate higher than the national average, but I guess there is nothing we can do about that. No, we can do a lot about it. We can make sure they get skills while in the military that a civilian workforce will understand, and that those skills can also carry with them credentials that will enable them to get a quicker traction when they move into the civilian workforce.

It is unacceptable we are paying \$800 million a year in the Federal budget to pay for unemployment benefits for people who exit the military and then can't find jobs when they do. We need steps such as the CREDIT Act and others to bring down that veterans' unemployment rate, to enable people to get the kinds of jobs that will help them have a happy and successful life postservice, and that will enable society to take advantage of the great skills and talents they have.

#### SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 446—RECOGNIZING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONGRESSIONAL DECLARATION OF BOURBON WHISKEY AS A DISTINCTIVE PRODUCT OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. MCCONNELL (for himself and Mr. PAUL) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:



S. RES. 446

Whereas on May 4, 1964, Congress declared bourbon whiskey a distinctive product of the United States that is unlike other types of alcoholic beverages, whether foreign or domestic;

Whereas to be designated as "bourbon," a product must conform to high standards and be manufactured in accordance with the laws and regulations of the United States, which prescribe Federal Standards of Identity for "bourbon whiskey";

Whereas bourbon whiskey has achieved recognition and acceptance throughout the world as a distinctive product of the United States;

Whereas Kentucky, the birthplace of bourbon, produces 95 percent of the world's supply;

Whereas Kentucky's iconic bourbon brands are reaching farther than ever, with more than 30,000,000 gallons shipped to 126 countries, making bourbon the largest export category among all United States distilled spirits and a source of national pride;

Whereas bourbon production has increased by more than 120 percent since 1999, contributing to the development of a vibrant bourbon tourism industry in Kentucky;

Whereas bourbon is a vital part of American culture and the economy, generating close to 9,000 jobs in Kentucky and almost \$2,000,000,000 in gross Kentucky product in 2010; and

Whereas the bourbon industry continues its efforts to promote the responsible and moderate use of its product, and to curb drunken driving and underage drinking: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the Senate recognizes the 50th anniversary of the Congressional declaration of bourbon whiskey as a distinctive product of the United States.

**SENATE RESOLUTION 447—RECOGNIZING THE THREATS TO FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND EXPRESSION AROUND THE WORLD AND REAFFIRMING FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AS A PRIORITY IN THE EFFORTS OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TO PROMOTE DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE**

Mr. CASEY (for himself and Mr. RUBIO) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 447

Whereas Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted at Paris December 10, 1948, states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers";

Whereas, in 1993, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed May 3 of each year as "World Press Freedom Day" to celebrate the fundamental principles of freedom of the press, to evaluate freedom of the press around the world, to defend the media from attacks on its independence, and to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession;

Whereas, on December 18, 2013, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/RES/68/163) on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, which unequivocally condemns all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers, including torture, extrajudicial killings, en-

forced disappearances, arbitrary detention, and intimidation and harassment in both conflict and non-conflict situations;

Whereas 2014 is the 21st anniversary of World Press Freedom Day, which focuses on the theme "Media Freedom for a Better Future: Shaping the Post-2015 Development Agenda";

Whereas the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-16822; U.S.C. 2151 note), which was passed by unanimous consent in the Senate and signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010, expanded the examination of freedom of the press around the world in the annual human rights report of the Department of State;

Whereas, according to Reporters Without Borders, 71 journalists and 39 citizen journalists were killed in 2013 in connection with their collection and dissemination of news and information;

Whereas, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the 3 deadliest countries for journalists on assignment in 2013 were Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, and in Syria, the deadliest country for such journalists, an unprecedented number of journalists were abducted;

Whereas, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 617 journalists have been murdered since 1992 without the perpetrators of such crimes facing punishment;

Whereas, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the 5 countries with the highest number of unsolved journalist murders are Iraq, the Philippines, Algeria, Colombia, and Somalia;

Whereas, according to Reporters Without Borders, 826 journalists and 127 citizen journalists were arrested in 2013;

Whereas, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 211 journalists worldwide were in prison on December 1, 2013;

Whereas, according to Reporters Without Borders, the 5 countries with the highest number of journalists in prison are Syria, China, Eritrea, Turkey, and Iran;

Whereas, according to Reporters Without Borders, the Government of Syria and extremist rebel militias have intentionally targeted journalists, causing dramatic repercussions for the freedom of the press throughout the region;

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation has engaged in an unprecedented campaign to silence the independent press and undermine freedom of expression, including its recent efforts to destabilize Ukraine;

Whereas freedom of the press is a key component of democratic governance, the activism of civil society, and socioeconomic development; and

Whereas freedom of the press enhances public accountability, transparency, and participation: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the Senate—

(1) expresses concern about the threats to freedom of the press and expression around the world following World Press Freedom Day, held on May 3, 2014;

(2) commends journalists and media workers around the world for their essential role in promoting government accountability, defending democratic activity, and strengthening civil society, despite threats to their safety;

(3) pays tribute to the journalists who have lost their lives carrying out their work;

(4) calls on governments abroad to implement United Nations General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/68/163), by thoroughly investigating and seeking to resolve outstanding cases of violence against journalists, including murders and kidnappings, while ensuring the protection of witnesses;

(5) condemns all actions around the world that suppress freedom of the press, such as

the recent kidnappings of journalists and media workers in eastern Ukraine by pro-Russian militant groups;

(6) reaffirms the centrality of freedom of the press to efforts by the United States Government to support democracy, mitigate conflict, and promote good governance domestically and around the world; and

(7) calls on the President and the Secretary of State—

(A) to improve the means by which the United States Government rapidly identifies, publicizes, and responds to threats against freedom of the press around the world;

(B) to urge foreign governments to transparently investigate and bring to justice the perpetrators of attacks against journalists; and

(C) to highlight the issue of threats against freedom of the press year-round.

**SENATE RESOLUTION 448—EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE SENATE ON THE POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES REGARDING STABILIZING THE CURRENCY OF UKRAINE**

Mr. RUBIO (for himself and Mr. CRUZ) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 448

Whereas the territorial integrity of Ukraine has been compromised by the unlawful annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation;

Whereas the territorial integrity of Ukraine continues to be under threat because of unlawful provocations by the Russian Federation;

Whereas ongoing economic hardships in Ukraine are being exploited by unlawful separatist elements with allegiances to the Russian Federation;

Whereas strengthening of the economy of Ukraine can help stabilize the unrest in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine and support the territorial integrity of Ukraine;

Whereas the Russian Federation has declared the Russian ruble to be legal tender in Crimea following its unlawful annexation of Crimea, to circulate in parallel with the hryvnia, the national currency of Ukraine, until January 1, 2016;

Whereas the Russian Federation will exploit currency competition between the ruble and the hryvnia during the period both currencies are in circulation in Crimea in an attempt to portray the Russian-controlled managed economy as superior to Western-style democracy and free markets;

Whereas a stable national currency can be important to facilitate economic growth;

Whereas the hryvnia dropped in value by 35 percent relative to the United States dollar between January and May 2014;

Whereas currency boards have a long record of promoting superior performance in countries with emerging growth markets by spurring higher economic growth rates, lower inflation rates, and more fiscal discipline than central banks that employ floating exchange rates;

Whereas the establishment of a national currency board for Ukraine can generate a more stable currency and enhance demand for the hryvnia;

Whereas, under a currency board, the hryvnia could be convertible into the United States dollar or the euro, both of which are dominant global reserve currencies;

Whereas the ability to convert the hryvnia into the United States dollar or the euro would help make the hryvnia stable and its exchange more reliable;