

Itay's father Ruby has been one of the leading advocates for the return of the hostages. He has traveled to every corner of the world and has met with some of the highest ranking leaders in the world to say: Bring them home. Bring them home now.

Itay's father requested me to "please get his body back." I will do everything I can to make it happen. The family is not going to sit Shiva and observe formal Jewish burial practices until they recover Itay's body.

The family also expresses their thanks to the Biden administration and to the FBI for helping them get through these difficult months.

I will continue working with the Chen family, the administration, and others to return Itay's body back to his family so they can have the burial and Shiva in the way they desire and deserve.

When I spoke to Itay's father just a couple of hours ago, he promised me that the family would continue to fight for the release of all the other hostages. That was such an act. In the moment of their darkness, of clouds descending upon them, to still have that fortitude, that strength, that generosity to say they are going to fight for others touched my heart.

I will be working with the administration however possible until we finally bring back every last hostage and the remains of the hostages who are no longer with us are home at last.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2801

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today in hopes of passing a bill in a few minutes that would support our veterans and our servicemembers by making sure that when they want to grow their family, they can get the care and services they need, including IVF.

The recent chaos in Alabama caused by far-right ideology put a national spotlight on just how crucial IVF is to so many women and families who are desperately hoping and trying to have children. The first thing we heard after IVF was thrown into uncertainty in Alabama was the horror of women and their families who had their dreams turned into nightmares as appointments were canceled—tens of thousands of dollars, months of appointments were callously tossed out of the window by the Alabama Supreme Court. Its decision rested on extreme ideology—an ideology Republicans are working right now to enshrine into law nationwide.

Next, we heard Republicans tripping over themselves to proclaim that they stand for IVF even while still standing by the same extreme fetal personhood laws that caused all of this chaos in the first place.

I have said this before, but given how Republicans refuse to publicly disavow fetal personhood, it clearly bears repeating: When Republicans support legislation that says a fertilized egg has

the same rights and protections as a living, breathing, human person, that is fundamentally incompatible with supporting IVF. That is the very ideology that caused the disaster in Alabama, and right now, the majority of House Republicans are cosponsors of a national abortion ban that would enshrine fetal personhood in Federal law, endangering IVF treatments everywhere.

But if Republicans really do now want to support IVF, if they really do want to help people who are trying to grow their families, why not start with our veterans and our servicemembers? These are the men and women who fought to protect our families. Why don't we make sure they all have the support they need to grow theirs?

I reintroduced a bill with Senator DUCKWORTH last year—the Veteran Families Health Services Act—and it would do just that. I have been working to pass this bill for well over a decade now. It has gone through countless rounds of technical edits and reviews and is more than ready for prime time.

This is exactly the kind of straightforward legislation that we should pass through unanimous consent. It hasn't just passed committee before; it actually passed the Senate before.

The goal of this bill is very simple. It expands the fertility treatments and family-building services that are covered under servicemembers' and veterans' healthcare. That means finally having the coverage that gives servicemembers and veterans the option to freeze eggs or sperm before deployment, it means expanding adoption assistance at the VA, and it means expanding access to IVF for all of our veterans and servicemembers. Current coverage policies for VA and DOD still leave out many committed, loving people who want to start a family. We are talking about a bill that would help our wounded warriors get the care and coverage they need to start a family.

I am really glad DOD and VA have been taking some steps under President Biden to offer this care to more people, including the expansion that the VA announced just yesterday, but we still have a long way to go.

I hope that every one of my colleagues would agree that our country should keep that basic promise we make to our servicemembers to take care of them when they come home; that when a soldier comes home with injuries and subsequently needs IVF because of that to start a family or really when any soldier needs IVF to start a family, they should be able to get it. So how about we take action right now, today, to make that a reality. It should not be controversial, especially if Republicans are serious even in the slightest about supporting IVF.

This bill is just saying: Yes, we want to make sure that all of our veterans, all of our servicemembers have access to the family-building services and fertility treatments they need. Given all

that we have heard in recent weeks, this should be hugely bipartisan.

We stand by our veterans. If you stand by IVF, if you want to see our military families growing and thriving, we need to send that message now and send this legislation that I will be asking unanimous consent on shortly to the President's desk as soon as possible.

Mr. President, I know I have a number of Members who are coming to the floor to speak to this, so I will suggest the absence of a quorum until that time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am very proud to be here today to join my great colleague from the State of Washington to support the Veteran Families Health Services Act.

At a time when there are many, many complex and difficult issues—some of them nowhere near black-and-white; a lot of gray areas of policy abroad and at home—there is one issue that ought to be absolutely clear, unequivocally, in terms of what we should do—the right thing to do—really, the obligatory thing to do. And that is to make sure that our men and women who serve in uniform and our veterans have access to the healthcare they deserve and, in particular, reproductive healthcare and, most especially, IVF treatment.

The Alabama Supreme Court in the LePage decision is another step in the assault on women's rights and women's healthcare and, in fact, on women. The kinds of restrictions placed on IVF treatment have been, essentially, disowned and disavowed by many Republicans who want to run away as far as they can as quickly as they can from that decision and are saying: Well, we are in favor of IVF but not against laws that restrict IVF.

They can't have it both ways. Here is a chance for them to show, in supremely important terms, that they are in favor of this kind of treatment for our men and women who, in some sense, have earned it and deserve it more than or as much as any other American because they are the ones who put on uniforms and defend our rights and our freedoms. And they are the ones who, afterwards, come back to their community as veterans and continue to serve us.

This measure, essentially, provides guarantees for Active-Duty servicemembers and veterans access to IVF. It expands adoption assistance at the VA and counseling services for couples navigating that process. There is very little to be said that wouldn't repeat the basic common sense of this proposal, and it shouldn't even be needed

to be said that military families don't choose where they live. They are assigned to one State or another, one country or another. When they answer the Nation's call, they don't sign up for service in Connecticut at the subbase. They sign up, and they raise their right hand. And their access to IVF shouldn't be dependent on the State where they are assigned or the country. It ought to be available to every servicemember regardless of their posting. They defend our rights every day, and we must protect theirs with this bill.

And veterans who have completed their service honorably deserve the same protection and access to family planning services. Our veterans who receive care at the VA deserve the highest standard—the gold standard—not some diluted standard because of a State law that restricts access to IVF. Their lives are already complex and challenging enough. We shouldn't complicate them further with administrative barriers.

I will just repeat what I said on the floor the other day in favor of IVF treatment. There is nothing so moving and so profound as a family who wants a child and is having difficulty having it. There is nothing so moving as two parents or people who want to be parents. And in our military, that predicament is especially moving because they have committed to give up a part of their lives—one could say their lives—to serve our country, and we should make sure that they have access to this fundamental right.

Again, I thank my colleague from the State of Washington, and I thank other colleagues who will be here today and all who are supporting this important measure, which we should be proud to support.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we all know it is Women's History Month; and though this work should be done year round, during March especially, we focus on policies that improve the lives of women in America, including the lives of women veterans.

For most of America's history, America's Armed Forces were made up primarily of men in uniform. Not anymore. Today, more than 17 percent of the Active-Duty Force in America are women. As our Armed Forces better reflect the diversity of America, that means our support system and resources for veterans must also meet the needs of that population.

And one of those resources must be supporting our veterans and servicemembers when they want to start a family. Those who serve our Nation are at an elevated risk for injury. That is part of the reason we owe them such a debt of gratitude. They do risk life and limb to protect America.

But when servicemembers are injured in the line of duty, one consequence can be obstacles to conceiving chil-

dren. That is why we should pass the Veteran Families Health Services Act immediately. This comprehensive legislation will expand fertility treatments and family-building services that are covered under servicemembers and veterans' healthcare plans. This includes services across the board to safeguard future fertility, adoption assistance, and, most likely, in vitro fertilization.

Access to IVF recently came into the national spotlight when the Alabama Supreme Court ruled last month that frozen embryos are children and that their destruction can be treated like the wrongful death of a child. That decision by the Alabama Supreme Court had major consequences on reproductive rights in Alabama as major healthcare providers stopped IVF procedures out of fear of civil and criminal liability.

Not surprisingly, Republicans across the country started scrambling, fearing that such an unpopular restriction on reproductive rights could hurt their electoral chances in the next election.

In the weeks since the ruling, Republicans have claimed to support access to IVF, and yet many also support so-called fetal personhood bills that codify that life begins at conception and lack carve-outs to protect access to IVF. The simple reality is you can't have it both ways. Although Alabama Governor Kay Ivey signed a law last week that attempted to ensure that IVF treatments continued in her State, many legal experts and fertility doctors are still concerned that the rush to stopgap that measure will do more harm than good.

And when Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH—my Illinois colleague, a veteran herself who relied on IVF to start her family—came to this floor of the U.S. Senate and asked for unanimous consent to pass a bill that would establish Federal protection for access to IVF and other fertility treatments, a Republican Senator blocked it.

If the Republicans are truly pro-family, pro-military, as they claim to be, there should be no hesitation supporting this bill that supports our servicemembers and veterans who want to start a family.

Let me make one thing clear. No one should have to choose between serving our Nation and having a child. We should be expanding these services, not restricting them. Our servicemembers sacrifice much to keep our families safe. The least we can do is to make sure they have the full range of care options they need to start families of their own.

I want to thank the Senator from Washington, PATTY MURRAY, for calling us together for this important stand, one that I think will benefit families across the board and, certainly, benefit veteran families who want to start a family.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, as in legislative session, notwithstanding the provisions of rule XX, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of S. 2801, the Veteran Families Health Services Act of 2023, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Reserving the right to object, I, like most Americans, have friends who have loved ones who have children who were born through IVF.

I am passionate about the value of every single child and grateful for every single child who we have in our Nation and for their potential future. I have friends who are in the process right now of actually adopting embryos that were still frozen. They could not have children of their own, and so they are adopting those embryos to make sure that they are able to come to life. IVF is not a controversial issue for me in that sense. We are passionate about it, as every State now protects that right and continues to honor that.

I understand it has become vogue in this current season right now to be able to say Republicans are somehow opposed to life because they are opposed to IVF. I just don't find that. But within this bill that is actually coming, this bill—actually, part of it came through the Senate Armed Services Committee. That bill, itself, when it came through—it is substantially similar to that—it tried to come to the NDAA and was not included in the NDAA. It had an objection.

The CBO scored it somewhere around a billion dollars a year. This bill, itself, I understand, doesn't have a CBO score because it includes not only that section that was a billion dollars a year but actually includes another section that has not gone through the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. In fact, it was brought up in a previous Congress in the Senate Committee of Veterans' Affairs. It didn't have a hearing on it nor a markup. And then during a Democrat-led Senate and then a Democrat-led Senate, as well, didn't even recently, this session, even have a markup on it.

So all of these issues, I look at and say: This has not been fully vetted through what this actually is and what it actually does, nor the cost of it, much less to be able to have 24 hours later to try to come for unanimous consent.

This bill itself includes some overly broad definitions that I think need some conversation about. Quite frankly, we are in the Senate. This is what we are supposed to do. It includes things like assisted reproductive technology, fertility treatments. It leaves the door open for future definitions for

gene editing and cloning and leaves those at the discretion of the Secretary, whoever the Secretary may be, in the future.

The bill's definition of infertility includes "the inability to reproduce or safely carry a pregnancy to term." It is a very broad term trying to be able to figure out what that means. Obviously, that means everyone who is not a woman as well would be included in that.

The bill also expands the eligibility to "partners." You do not have to be TRICARE beneficiaries. This would be the first time that DOD would be required to provide medical care to someone who is not otherwise entitled to it by virtue of their relationship to the military in other ways. This breaks new ground in that area.

So there is not only issues of questions of definitions and such, but there is also just definition of cost or working through the committee process through committees that have, so far, either not passed it or have refused to even have a markup or a hearing on it.

So I don't think it is good for us to be able to bring this for unanimous consent to be able to move it at this time. Let's move it through in a broader conversation, but I would also encourage, just as a body, I don't find Republicans who are just broadly opposed to IVF.

And I know this is a broad part of the conversation right now to leave that implication after what happened in Alabama, but I am a Republican who is passionate about the value of every single child who also doesn't have an issue with IVF and am grateful to know people who have gone through the process and know their kids and know the value of every single one of those children.

So for the sake of honoring life and for the sake of honoring, obviously, what we do as a Senate and how we function together, for those reasons, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I am deeply disappointed but not surprised.

Let the record show I have been trying to pass this legislation into law for well over a decade. It wasn't yesterday. It wasn't last year—for well over a decade.

And for the entire time Republicans have been the ones who have blocked efforts to include this bill in any legislative package.

I had really hoped, after the outpouring of public statements in support of IVF from my colleagues across the aisle, they might finally change their tune, but the American people understand that actions speak louder than words.

On the unofficial CBO score that was mentioned, let's just say, I think it is a real overestimate of how many people dealing with fertility would make use of IVF and other fertility services at that cost.

And my understanding is it also adds the cost of children conceived through IVF being covered on VA healthcare for the rest of their childhood, which doesn't make a lot of sense since many of those families will have children one way or the other anyway. So I dispute that, but I will say, it is pretty clear, Republicans do not support IVF, despite their language, not even for wounded servicemembers and for veterans.

But having said that, my door is open. I am determined. If a servicemember goes overseas and is wounded and comes home and cannot conceive a family, we should be there to provide service for them. It is our promise to our veterans that when they serve us, we will take care of them when they get home.

What is not more basic than making sure they can have a family after serving our country? So I am disappointed once again, but I will not stop working on this. It is the right thing to do.

I yield the floor.

#### NOMINATION OF MELISSA R. DUBOSE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, the Senate will vote to confirm Judge Melissa DuBose to the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island.

Born in Providence, RI, Judge DuBose received her B.A. from Providence College and served as a teacher in Rhode Island for 11 years. While teaching high school, she earned her law degree by attending night classes at Roger Williams School of Law. Judge DuBose began her legal career as a special assistant attorney general in the Rhode Island Office of the Attorney General, where she was responsible for prosecuting adults charged with child abuse, felonies committed by juveniles, and violations of probation. She then joined Schneider Electric as a senior legal counsel, assisting and providing legal counsel in litigation involving federal government-related disputes.

In 2019, then-Governor Gina Raimondo appointed Judge DuBose to serve as an associate judge on the Rhode Island District Court, where she has presided over approximately 250 to 300 bench trials that have gone to verdict or judgment. The American Bar Association rated Judge DuBose as "qualified" to serve on the district court, and she has the strong support of her home State Senators, Mr. REED and Mr. WHITEHOUSE.

Judge DuBose's deep ties to the Rhode Island legal community, combined with her significant courtroom experience, will make her an excellent addition to the Federal bench.

I urge my colleagues to support her nomination.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, we are about to vote on final passage to confirm President Biden's nominee to the U.S. District Court of Rhode Island, Melissa DuBose, and I would like to say a few words about her.

My senior Senator, JACK REED, will be following me shortly, and I want to begin by saying what a pleasure and successful effort it has been to work with Senator REED together to make recommendations to several Presidents that have produced excellent district court judges in the District Court for the District of Rhode Island, a really terrific senior judge on the First Circuit, and a sitting judge on the First Circuit Court of Appeals. I think our nominees have proven themselves very well in the field after the nominations came and they were sworn in and joined the bench.

Melissa DuBose, I am confident, will join that roster of very successful Reed-Whitehouse recommendations. She has a few characteristics that I would like to mention.

One, she worked as a prosecutor in the Rhode Island Department of Attorney General, where I used to work and where I used to actually work as attorney general for a bit. She did very busy, active service there on the criminal prosecution side and was very well regarded by her peers. She spent nearly 10 years as a corporate in-house counsel at a Fortune 500 company, Schneider Electric, and learned the law from that side. Then she served on the Rhode Island district court, which is a very fast paced, busy court where your judgment is constantly called on. She has shown herself to be a very patient and well-regarded judge, having presided over maybe 250 or 300 cases that have either gone to trial or verdict.

She is a graduate of Rhode Island's own Providence College. She was a history teacher in Providence schools for 11 years before she embarked on her legal career. She was educated at the Roger Williams University School of Law, which not only graduated her but thought so highly of her that they invited her back to sit on the board of the law school. I don't know how many of my colleagues here who are lawyers have been invited to sit on the board of their law school, but the law school thought highly enough of Judge DuBose that they asked her to do that.

I would add that perhaps the most prestigious board in the State of Rhode Island is the board of the Rhode Island Foundation, a huge charitable organization devoted to the well-being and welfare of the Rhode Island community, and Rhode Island's community leaders invited her to be on the board of that as well.

This is a person, a lifelong Rhode Islander, who is exceedingly well regarded in our community.

I will close before I yield to Senator REED by pointing out that the members of the district court could not be more excited about having her join the Rhode Island U.S. District Court.