

REMARKS OF SENATOR TED STEVENS

Thank you for the recognition and honor you confer on me today.

The Harry S. Truman Award, unlike any other, reflects the input of leaders from the 54 association chapters from every corner of America.

There is no organization with whom I have worked more closely than the National Guard Association during my 17 years as chairman or ranking member of the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee.

This award reflects the tutelage I received from a previous recipient of this honor, my close friend and mentor, John Stennis.

The insight and wisdom of my great friend, compounded by my own experience working with the Alaska National Guard, founded my belief that the Guard serves as an essential pillar of our national security.

Over the years, we have worked to modernize during the buildup led by President Reagan in the 1980's, and now realign force structure during the 1990's.

Our efforts reflect a determination to fulfill the vision of our Nation's Founding Fathers—that our national defense be maintained and preserved by citizen soldiers—by all Americans.

The National Guard, and the National Guard Association of the United States, are the embodiment of that guiding principle in our Constitution.

Your conference here in Albuquerque serves to refresh, and reforge, our mutual commitment to ensure the National Guard grows in capability and stature within our national security establishment.

While the Guard faces some tough trials in the weeks and months ahead, there is genuine reason for optimism that our efforts will succeed.

A major factor contributing to this optimism is the bipartisan budget agreement, negotiated by my good friend, Senator PETE DOMENICI, who is with us here today.

This compact should give us 5 years of stability in defense funding—we've not enjoyed these circumstances since the early 1980's.

With predictable spending levels, Secretary Bill Cohen and the Joint Chiefs may plan and implement force realignment and modernization plans.

Our job now is to assure Guard participation in the allocation of resources and to modernize the force as we enter the 21st century.

You have many real friends to turn to in this effort.

We've just heard from one of our most important friends, Joe Ralston.

You don't need to hear from me how Joe feels about the National Guard. Just ask Ed Baca, Jake Lestenkof, or Hugh Cox.

Secretary Cohen knows first hand what the Guard means to all our States, and is a genuine ally in the Senate on Guard issues—he listens with a sympathetic ear. You'll hear from General Reimer tomorrow. You'll find him a true friend also.

Your job, and mine, is to help these friends effectively advocate the Guard's interests and priorities.

Now, more than ever before, the National Guard must function as a total partner in the total force. We cannot permit the National Guard to struggle for resources—it needs the total support of the Army and Air Force.

The Army and Air Force can only achieve their missions—our National Security missions—with the total participation and support of the National Guard. It's a two-way street, and our system simply won't work any other way.

Recent missions in Bosnia, Southwest Asia, Haiti, and Korea make apparent this axiom.

Each of you knows the extraordinary service performed by Air and Army National Guard units overseas. On my own visits to these forces, every CINC has extolled the performance, readiness, and dedication of the National Guard Forces assigned to their commands. That is the success story of our total force.

While undertaking these military missions, the National Guard continues to serve its State role. Everyone of us here understands the unique status the Guard holds as an arm of our State governments. Whether responding to natural disasters, or managing the youth challenge program performing so successfully, the National Guard serves our communities every day.

To ensure the representation of the National Guard at the highest levels of DOD, I authored an amendment sponsored by 48 other Senators. This legislation would change the rank, and role, of the Chief of the National Guard Bureau.

That amendment passed the Senate without any objection, and awaits final resolution on the Defense authorization bill.

We succeeded in passing this legislation in large part because of the work of the Guard, the association, and the adjutants general.

The expanded role of the Guard, and its relative size within the military, should be reflected in an appropriate rank for the chief.

Resolution of this issue must include a voice—and a seat at the table—for the National Guard, when the Secretary and the Joint Chiefs make force structure and resource decisions that impact the Guard.

The details of my suggestion are yet to be resolved. Our goal is to assure that the National Guard leader is equal in rank and capability to the members of the Joint Chiefs.

Achieving this priority is only meaningful if we improve and build on relations between the Army, the National Guard, and the Army Reserve.

This initiative is meant to build bridges, and expand the dialog and understanding by Pentagon leaders of the Guard's needs and capabilities.

If by doing so, we burn bridges behind us, we will achieve little in the end. We must achieve change—change that all parties can live with, and will commit to work together to achieve.

We continue to need your support and active involvement—you will make the difference in the end. You and your force meet more Americans every day than all other military forces put together. You need to support adequate funding levels for all defense activities, including the Coast Guard.

You need to tell the chamber of commerce, the Rotary, the Lions, the Kiwanis Clubs, and the PTA's what America needs is a ready defense force. You are part of that force.

Again, let me thank you for honoring me today with the Truman Award. I am humbled by your recognition of my efforts.

I will continue to be your partner, and advocate, in the years to come.●

COMMEMORATION OF LAWSUIT ABUSE AWARENESS WEEK

● Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, today I recognize a growing group of concerned citizens in West Virginia working to educate the public about their concerns over the costs of what they refer to as "lawsuit abuse."

In many areas of West Virginia, local supporters of Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse have given their time on a volunteer basis to speak out about an issue that has statewide and national implications. The costs of lawsuits can include higher costs for consumer products, higher medical expenses, higher taxes, and fewer jobs, due to lost business expansion and forgone product development. At the same time, the legal system must provide avenues for recourse and justice. Together, leaders and citizens must try to achieve consensus in ensuring that our system is balanced and fair to all.

Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse has a straightforward goal. They want to help the public prevent unnecessary lawsuits.

When West Virginians see a problem, we work to make people aware of it, and we try to make it right. CALA members are citizens who believe they see harm to our society brought on by certain unnecessary lawsuits and excessive awards that can cripple a small business or strip an individual of his or her life savings. CALA supporters emphasize that they want to make sure that persons with a real need for the civil justice system have access to the courts. Public opinion surveys in our state have shown that a majority of responsible citizens want their legal system to be more fair, more effective, and more sensible, to serve everyone's interests.

These nonprofit CALA groups have raised local funds to run educational media announcements and are speaking to local organizations and citizen groups across the State to raise public awareness of the issue that they call "lawsuit abuse."

Supporters of CALA also encourage that citizens do their part by serving on juries when they are called. To help encourage the youth of West Virginia to become responsible citizens when they reach adulthood, CALA groups have offered scholarship grants to students through an essay contest on the subject of importance of jury service.

While the local groups have thousands of supporters, there are few individuals who should be recognized for their ongoing leadership and for dedicating countless volunteer hours in the past year. These individuals are Cuz Blake of Bridgeport, chairman and founding member of CALA of Northern

West Virginia, and Robert Mauk of Huntington, chairman and founding member of CALA of Southern West Virginia. Many others have given their time and energy to these public watchdog groups as well, persons such as Sid Davis of Charleston who, despite having to take time off recently for health reasons, has returned to his volunteer position as an officer of CALA of Southern West Virginia.

Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse groups have declared September 21 through September 27, 1997, to be Lawsuit Abuse Awareness Week in West Virginia. I commend all of the individuals who are involved in Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse for their involvement in civic affairs and their efforts to promote constructive action in a policy area they care about.

As someone who has been a leader for a balanced, responsible form of product liability reform, I continue to hope for the kind of education, dialogue, and consensus-building clearly needed to address problems in our legal system that hurt consumers, victims, and the private sector. I encourage CALA to continue raising these issues and promoting solutions that ensure justice and improve the legal system. West Virginia and the country as a whole need informed, educated, and dedicated citizens to help elected officials address serious issues and achieve proper reforms when necessary.●

RIGHT TO LIFE OF MICHIGAN

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today to honor those of Right to Life of Livingston County, Inc. and Right to Life of Michigan for their enduring commitment and dedication to one of today's most important social issues.

Mr. President, to those of us who are pro-life, being pro-life means protecting our families and respecting the sanctity of life. It also means maintaining the central role of the family in all our lives. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those of Right to Life of Michigan for their perseverance in support of those goals. Unfortunately, we still must spend much of our time in the political sphere, arguing against laws that promote the taking of unborn human lives, and I am grateful for all their efforts in that area as well.

Ending the tragedy of abortion will not be easy. But groups like Right to Life of Livingston County, National Right to Life of Michigan, and the National Right to Life Committee, are fighting a winning battle. By their example, as well as their arguments, they are showing the power and the beauty of human life.●

● Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, retinal degenerative diseases affect more than six million Americans. This number is expected to climb beyond 10 million as the baby boomers age. This is a vision timebomb and I have witnessed its devastating impact on many of our senior citizens. September 27, 1997 marks World Retina Day, a day in which organizations around the world dedicated

to finding the cures for retinal degenerative diseases join together to call attention to the collaborative research that is being done internationally.

The most common retinal disease is age-related macular degeneration (AMD) which is the leading cause of vision loss in adults over the age of 60. Individuals with AMD not only lose their central vision, but also their ability to read, drive and in many cases they lose their sense of independence. Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) is a genetic disease that steals the sight of the young, robbing them in the prime of their life, their night vision and then their peripheral vision. RP is a progressive disease, leading in most cases to blindness. There is no treatment to stop the progression of this disease. Usher's Syndrome is also a genetic disease and it is the leading cause of deaf-blindness in the United States. This again shows up in our young, robbing them of vision and hearing. The suffering to the patients and their families is incalculable.

Due to the work funded by the National Eye Institute at the National Institute of Health, and organizations such as the Foundation Fighting Blindness and similar organizations worldwide, significant progress in research has been made. Just this past week a stunning research breakthrough was announced. Scientists have discovered gene mutations that cause AMD. This landmark finding offers the first concrete evidence that AMD is genetically linked. There is now hope that by the time the generation of the baby boomers reaches age 60, in about 10 years, that there will be a genetic treatment for AMD. If a treatment is found, we will see a return on our investments in eye research, and the savings to the budget in terms of health care costs will be significant.

With the international collaboration among researchers who represent a broad spectrum of highly specialized scientific disciplines, great strides have been made in understanding AMD, RP, Usher's syndrome and related retinal degenerative diseases. International breakthroughs and collaboration in research warrant the recognition of World Retina Day. I am hopeful that there is a cure in sight. I believe that as we continue to fund medical research, diseases such as these will become eradicated and remembered only in the archives of medical history.●

TRIBUTE TO SOUTHWEST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

● Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I stand before you today to pay tribute to a truly outstanding University in my home State of Missouri, Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU). SMSU was one of 135 schools in 42 states selected to the John Templeton Foundation Honor Roll, "a designation recognizing colleges and universities that emphasize character building as an integral part of the college experience."

Being the only public institution in Missouri to earn the 1997-98 Honor Roll

distinction, SMSU is also one of the eight state-funded schools to receive the award nationwide. Schools competing for the Honor Roll were judged on five criteria and out of 2,208 four-year accredited undergraduate institutions only the top few were chosen. One of the categories where SMSU stood out was in community service. During the 1996-97 school year the SMSU campus, including the faculty and students, volunteered more than 69,500 hours.

It is an honor for the entire State of Missouri to have a University like SMSU, whose service and character-building programs have earned it this distinguished award. I commend SMSU's President, Dr. John Kaiser, for his commitment to excellence and hope for continued success in the future.●

JUDGE ROBERT AND HELENE BRANG GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate Judge Robert and Helene Brang on the occasion of their Golden Wedding Anniversary. A long and successful marriage is truly a cause for celebration, well worthy of recognition by the United States Senate. Their commitment to each other and their family is commendable and a great contribution to the tradition of strong American families.

Robert Francis Brang and Helene Marie Foley met at the University of Detroit while both were students. Helene was a reporter for the Varsity News and Bob was the President of the Student Union. They met on the steps of the Commerce and Finance Building when Helene approached him for an interview.

They were married at St. Scholastica's Catholic Church in Detroit on October 4, 1947. In 1956, Robert and Helene moved their growing family from their home in Detroit to Redford Township where they reside to this day. Bob practiced law and Helene reared 8 wonderful children. In 1968, Bob was elected a Judge for the 17th District Court and retained that position until his retirement.

Mr. President, on October 4, Robert and Helene will have celebrated fifty years together. Their children—Kathleen, Robert, Mary, William, Barry, Stephen, Daniel, and Patrick—along with their twelve grandchildren—Diana, Laura, Rob, Patrick, Amy, Beth, Adam, Kellie, Sarah, Kaitlyn, Dakota, and Austin—will join with them in celebration.

Martin Luther once wrote: "There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage." Robert and Helene are blessed to enjoy such a strong and enduring bond. On behalf of the United States Senate, I wish them a happy anniversary and many more years of joy.●