

years for employees that have worked at least 30 years for the railroad. Some of my colleagues have asked why we should lower the railroad retirement age when the Social Security retirement age is increasing from 65 to 67. It is important to make a distinction between Tier I and Tier II benefits in this plan. Tier I benefits are comparable to Social Security benefits, and they do not start paying until the equivalent Social Security benefits are paid. Currently, that is at age 65. Tier II benefits, which are funded by taxes to the railroad employers and employees, pay the early retirement benefits for eligible workers. This is very similar to the "bridge plan" offered by private pension plans. This is important because railroading is a physically rigorous profession that ages a body prematurely and is still considered hazardous.

This legislation includes an automatic tax trigger that initiates an increase or decrease of the employer's taxes if the trust fund's amount moves outside of preset barriers. The barriers would ensure that a cushion of 4 to 6 years' worth of benefits payable remain in the account. A number of my colleagues have been presenting graphs that show benefit levels falling and employer taxes increasing 20 years after the program is initiated. I do not dispute this. In fact, it shows the fund's ability to manage itself and respond to decreases in its cushion.

As a Wyoming Senator and an accountant, I support the Railroad Retirement and Survivor's Improvement Act. I support it as a responsible way to manage the funds entrusted to us by the railroad workers. I support it as a way to fully care for the individuals that have contributed so much to our nation's infrastructure. I ask that my colleagues do the same and pass this bill.

SERVICE MEMBERS OPPORTUNITY COLLEGES

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, it is with great pleasure that I rise to bring to the attention of the Senate a true national asset, the Service Members Opportunity Colleges, (SOC). The SOC is a consortium of over 1500 Colleges and Universities across the Nation that have taken on the privilege of educating our Nation's men and women in uniform.

Founded in 1972 the SOC was created to "provide educational opportunities to service members, who, because they frequently moved from place to place, had trouble completing college degrees."

In fulfilling this primary role the SOC and their member institutions currently serve hundreds of thousands of service members. They work very hard to provide opportunities for our brave young men and women to educate themselves while serving our Nation. Consequently the SOC is helping prepare the future leaders of our mili-

tary and our country. For this I salute them.

However, in addition to their stated mission the SOC, and their director Dr. Steven Kime, have dedicated themselves to ensuring that our men and women in the Guard and Reserve are taken care of when our Nation calls upon them and they are forced to leave school. The SOC does this by using their extensive network to ensure that students called to service are either refunded their tuition or receive credits for later education. Through their hard work SOC has helped create a sense of duty among their member institutions who regularly prove their devotion to this Nation by providing help and assistance to their students called upon to serve.

Consequently SOC has ensured that our brave young men and women called to active duty have one less worry on their already heavy shoulders. In these trying times it is this type of duty and leadership that proves our Nation and the American people are without equal.

Again, I would like to offer my thanks and admiration to the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges and their men and women working so hard to make life better for our men and women in uniform.

ANOTHER REASON TO CLOSE THE GUN SHOW LOOPHOLE

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I would like to enter into the RECORD some important information about guns and terrorists. Currently, shoppers at gun shows may choose to buy firearms from federally licensed firearms dealers—or from unlicensed dealers. Since unlicensed sellers are not required to run Brady background checks, which involves an instant background check for among other things, criminal history, outstanding warrants and illegal immigration status, gun shows are an important source of guns for criminals and terrorists who would not be able to buy weapons in a store. In fact, several cases have linked the purchase of guns at gun shows to terrorists. For example, in Florida, a man accused of having ties to the Irish Republican Army testified that he purchased thousands of dollars worth of machine guns, rifles, and high-powered ammunition at gun shows and proceeded to smuggle them to Ireland. Now more than ever, we must close the gun show loophole. I urge my fellow Senators to support bringing to the floor legislation that will close the gun show loophole.

MAJOR GENERAL PAUL A. WEAVER, JR.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I would like to take a moment to recognize one of the finest officers in our Armed Forces, Major General Paul A. Weaver, Jr., the Director of the Air National Guard. Well known and respected by many Members in this chamber, General Weaver will soon re-

tire after almost 35 years of selfless service to our country. Today, I am honored to acknowledge some of General Weaver's distinguished accomplishments and to commend the superb service he has provided to the Air National Guard, the Air Force, and our great Nation.

After completing his Bachelor of Science degree in Communicative Arts at Ithaca College, New York, Paul Weaver entered the Air Force in 1967 and was commissioned through Officer Training School. After earning his pilot wings, he had flying assignments in the F-4E and O-2A, and completed overseas tours in Germany and Korea. In 1975, he joined the New York Air National Guard with which he served in increasing levels of responsibility. This culminated when he took command of the 105th Airlift Group at Stewart Air National Guard Base, New York, in 1985. Following his nine years as commander, General Weaver served as the Air National Guard's Deputy Director for four years and was appointed the Director of the Air Guard in 1998.

General Weaver is a command pilot with more than 2,800 flying hours in five different aircraft. He is a veteran of Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Just Cause. General Weaver's decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Aerial Achievement Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters, Combat Readiness Medal with Service Star, and Southwest Asia Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters.

While serving as Commander of the 105th Airlift Wing, Paul Weaver was responsible for the largest conversion in the history of the Air National Guard. Under his command, the wing converted from the Air Force's smallest aircraft, the O-2 Skymaster, to its largest, the C-5 Galaxy. During this conversion, he oversaw the largest military construction program in the history of the reserve forces as he literally rebuilt Stewart Air National Guard Base.

As the Air National Guard's Director, General Weaver's accomplishments are also noteworthy. He had dedicated each year of his term to a different theme—transition, the enlisted force, the family, and employers, thereby providing focus and enhancements to these four crucial areas. In addition, Paul Weaver's modernization, readiness, people, and infrastructure initiatives have enabled a fuller partnership role in the Air Force's Expeditionary Aerospace Force. The Air Guard achieved all its domestic and global takings and requirements with a force that is also smaller in size. Under General Weaver's leadership, the Air National Guard is even more relevant, ready, responsive, and accessible than it has ever been.

I would be remiss if I also did not mention that the Air National Guard is also fortunate to have another Weaver contributing to its success. Besides

fully supporting his chosen profession, Paul's wife, Cathylee Weaver has had a major impact on the Air Guard's Family Enrichment programs. With dignity and grace, she dedicated time and attention to Air National Guard families, which led to her recently being voted as Volunteer of the Year of Family Programs. Clearly, the Air National Guard will lose not one, but two, exceptional people.

Let me close by saying that as both its Deputy and Director, General Weaver has made the Air National Guard a stronger and more capable partner for the Air Force. His distinguished and faithful service has provided significant and lasting contributions to our Nation's security. I know the members of the Senate will join me in paying tribute to this outstanding citizen-airman and true patriot upon his retirement from the Air National Guard. We thank General Weaver, and wish him, Cathylee, and the entire Weaver family much health, happiness, and Godspeed.

KIDS TO KIDS: WARM CLOTHING FOR AFGHAN CHILDREN

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I would like to draw my Colleagues' attention to an important initiative that is taking shape in Vermont. On Monday of this week, I attended a very special ceremony at Lawrence Barnes School in Burlington to kick off a program called Kids to Kids. The event was organized by Vermont Boy and Girl Scouts and its goal is simple—a drive to collect and send warm clothing to Afghan children. My wife, Liz, and I wholeheartedly agreed to be honorary co-chairs of this program and we are pleased to be part of a mission that involves the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the Islamic Society of Vermont, the National Guard and the business community.

We in Vermont know the importance of being well-prepared for the frigid winter months, and we are fortunate to be in a position to help. But I am particularly pleased that the impetus for this clothing drive has come from the children. Vermonters have always stood eager and ready to lend a hand to those in need, and it fascinates me to see how this tradition passes from one generation to the next. It is the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and school children of Vermont who will make this campaign a success, and the importance of their role cannot be stressed enough.

This campaign is so much more than simply a gesture of good will. It is a matter of saving lives. Thousands of children have fled Afghanistan with nothing more than the clothing on their backs. The flood of Afghan refugees started many years ago, and now there are many thousands of displaced children living in refugee camps.

Many of these children are suffering under conditions that no child should have to bear. They are hungry and they are cold. With winter setting in, some-

thing like a warm winter sweater, which so many of us take for granted, is a luxury item that is far beyond their reach.

From our small State to Afghan refugee camps, the boys and girls of Vermont are proving that they can make a difference. I am certain their "good turn" will be as rewarding for them as it is for the children of Afghanistan.

NATIVE AMERICAN BREAST AND CERVICAL CANCER TREATMENT TECHNICAL AMENDMENT ACT OF 2001

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, last evening, the Senate passed by unanimous consent S. 1741, the Native American Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Technical Amendment Act of 2001, which I had introduced with Senator MCCAIN and 23 other bipartisan co-sponsors.

S. 1741 is identical to S. 535 and was introduced as a freestanding bill to address a jurisdictional concern raised with the committee referral of the initial bill. Due to the importance of the legislation, I am pleased that the entire Senate saw fit to allow this bill to be reintroduced and passed by unanimous consent yesterday.

The legislation makes a simple, yet important, technical change to the Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment and Prevention Act of 2000 by clarifying that American Indian and Alaska Native women should not be excluded from receiving coverage through Medicaid for breast and cervical cancer treatment.

The Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act of 2000 gives States the option to extend coverage for the treatment of breast and cervical cancer through the Medicaid program to certain women who have been screened through the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, or Title XV of the Public Health Service Act, and who do not have what is called "creditable coverage," as defined by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, or HIPPA.

In referencing the HIPPA definition of "creditable coverage," the bill language inadvertently precludes coverage to Native American women who have access to medical care under the Indian Health Service, or IHS. HIPPA included a reference to IHS or tribal care as "creditable coverage" so that members of Indian Tribes eligible for IHS would not be treated as having a break in coverage, and thus subject to pre-existing exclusions and waiting periods when seeking health insurance, simply because they had received care through Indian health programs, rather than through a conventional health insurance program. Thus, in HIPPA, the inclusion of the IHS or tribal provision was intended to benefit American Indians and Alaska Natives, not penalize them.

However, use of the HIPPA definition in the recent Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment and Prevention Act has the exact opposite effect. In fact, the many Indian women, who rely on IHS or tribal programs for basic health care, are specifically excluded from the law's new eligibility under Medicaid. Clearly it was not the intent of Congress to specifically discriminate against low-income Native American women and to deny them much needed health treatment to combat breast or cervical cancer.

The legislation resolves these problems by clarifying that, for purposes of the Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act, the term "creditable coverage" shall not include IHS-funded care so that American Indian and Alaska Native women can be covered by Medicaid for breast and cervical cancer treatment, as they are for all other Medicaid services. Since a number of States are currently moving forward to provide Medicaid coverage under the State option, the need for this legislation is immediate to ensure that some American Indian and Alaska Native women are not denied received life-saving breast and cervical cancer treatment due to a Congressional drafting error.

In addition, this bill would also reduce the administrative burdens this language places on states. Under administrative guidance, some Native American women can be enrolled on the program depending on a determination of their "access" to IHS services, which depends on certain documentation obtained by Native American women seeking breast and cervical cancer treatment from IHS. In order to determine the Medicaid eligibility of Native American women who are screened as having breast or cervical cancer through the Title XV program each year, states are having to put together a whole set of regulations and rules to make these special "access" determinations.

During this year, almost 50,000 women are expected to die from breast or cervical cancer in the United States despite the fact that early detection and treatment of these diseases could substantially decrease this mortality. While passage of last year's bill makes significant strides to address this problem, it fails to do so for certain Native American women and that must be changed as soon as possible.

In support of Native American women across this country that are being diagnosed through CDC screening activities as having breast or cervical cancer, this legislation will assure that they can also access much needed treatment through the Medicaid program while also reducing the unnecessary paperwork and administrative burdens on states.

I would like to thank all Senators for their support and specifically thank