Mr. LOTT. I understand that.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now be in a period for morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

COMMENDING SENATOR COCHRAN

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I commend my colleague, the Presiding Officer, Senator COCHRAN, for the remarks he made a few moments ago on the floor of the Senate with regard to the defense budget, particularly missile defense. He has been very thoughtful in this area. He has been involved for a number of years.

He serves as head of a bipartisan group of Senators who have been to Russia on behalf of the Senate, who have met with representatives from the government, the Duma of Russia, when they have been in the United States.

To put this in a positive way and note that President Bush intends to go forward with it when it is ready to be deployed and that we be prepared to have a serious discussion about it is fine, but I thank him for the way he has been involved in this issue and express my confidence that as we move forward on this very important defense item for our future, I know he will be involved in that.

I feel very good that President Bush and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld will approach this matter in an appropriate way, with our defense budget funding but also in the way it is handled with our allies. I look forward to working together in the future on this important issue.

I yield the floor.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. President, I am very pleased to join in commemorating African-American History Month and particularly this year's theme, ''Creating and Defining the African-American Community: Family, Church, Politics and Culture.''

Since 1926, the month of February has served as a time for our citizens to recognize and applaud the vast contributions made by African-Americans to the founding and building of this great Nation. The vision of the noted author and scholar, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, led to this important annual celebration. As we note the theme of this year's Black History Month celebration, it is important to recognize the challenges ahead for African-Americans in a new age.

From early days, the family has been the backbone of the African-American culture in our country. Through a strong and stable family structure, African-Americans found companionship, love, and an understanding of the suffering endured during oppressive periods in history. The African-American family has served to strengthen and encourage young African-Americans to forge ahead to break barriers and rise to new heights within American culture.

The unemployment rate for African-Americans has fallen from 14.2 percent in 1992 to 8.3 percent in 1999, the lowest annual level on record. The median household income of African-Americans is up 15.1 percent since 1993, from $22,034 in 1993 to $25,351 in 1998. Real wages of African-Americans have risen rapidly in the past two years, up about 5.8 percent for men and 6.2 percent for women since 1996.

The African-American poverty rate has dropped from 33.1 percent in 1993 to 26.1 percent in 1998, the lowest level ever recorded and the largest five-year drop in more than twenty-five years. Since 1993, the child poverty rate among African-Americans has dropped from 46.1 percent to 36.7 percent in 1998. While still too large, this represents the largest five-year drop on record. It is critical that we in Congress continue to work to enact legislation that will further strengthen African-American families and enable these rates to continue to decrease at record levels.

Religion, like family, has played a vital role in African-American life in this country, with the Black Church a substantial and enduring presence. Throughout the early period of our Nation's development, African-Americans established their own religious institutions. Although these institutions were not always formally recognized, it should be noted that the African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1787, followed closely by the African Baptist Church in 1788. Throughout our Nation's history, the Black Church has served as both a stabilizing influence and as a catalyst for needed change.

During slavery, the African-American Church was a place of spiritual sanctuary and community. After Blacks were freed, the Church remained a line of defense and comfort against racism. The Black Church served as an agency of social reorientation and reconstruction, providing reinforcement for the values of marriage, family, morality, and spirituality in the face of the corrosive effects of discrimination.

The Black Church became the center for economic cooperation, pooling resources to buy churches, building mutual aid societies which provided social services, purchasing and helping resettle enslaved Africans, and establishing businesses. From its earliest days as an invisible spiritural community, the Black Church supported social change and struggle, providing leaders and leadership at various points in the struggle against racism and discrimination.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s provided the catalyst for African-Americans to move into the political arena. Three major factors encouraged the beginning of this new movement for civil rights. First, many African-Americans served with honor in World War II, as they had in many wars since the American revolution. However, in this instance, African-American leaders pointed to the records of these veterans to show the injustice of racial discrimination against patriots. Second, more and more African-Americans in the North had made economic gains, increased their education, and registered to vote. Third, the NAACP had attracted many new members and received increased financial support from all citizens.

In addition, a young group of energetic lawyers, including Thurgood Marshall, of Baltimore, Maryland, used the legal system to bring about important changes in the lives of African-Americans, while Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. appealed to the conscience of all citizens. When Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Clarence Mitchell, Jr., of Maryland, played a critical part in steering this legislation through Congress.

African-Americans began to assume more influential roles in the Federal Government as a result of the civil rights movement, a development which benefitted the entire Nation. In 1966, Dr. Robert C. Weaver became the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the first Black Cabinet Member and Edward Brooke became the first African-American elected to the Senate since reconstruction. In 1967, Thurgood Marshall became the first Black Justice on the Supreme Court. In 1969, Shirley Chisholm of New York became the first Black woman to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Progress continued in the next three decades. In 1976, Patricia Harris became the first Black woman Cabinet Member and in 1977 when Clifford Alexander was confirmed as the first Black Secretary of the Army. In 1989, Douglas Wilder of Virginia became the first elected African-American Governor in the Nation. In 1992, Carol Moseley-Braun became the first African-American female U.S. Senator. In 1993, Ron Brown became the first African-American Secretary of Commerce, Jesse Brown became the first African-American Secretary of the Veterans Administration, and Hazel O'Leary became the first black Secretary of Energy. In 1997, Rodney Slater became the first African-American Secretary of Transportation and Alexis Herman became the first African-American Secretary of Labor. In 2001, Roderick Paige became the first African-American Secretary of Education and General Colin Powell, in addition to being the first African-American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, became the first U.S. Secretary of State.

African-Americans have played significant roles in influencing and changing American life and culture. Through such fields as arts and entertainment,

the military, politics and civil rights, African-Americans have been key to the progress and prosperity of our Nation. Blacks have contributed to the artistic and literary heritage of America from the early years to the present. They have influenced the field of music as composers, vocalists, and instrumentalists and played a seminal role in the emergence of blues, jazz, gospel, and rhythm and blues.

Although African-Americans owned and published newspapers in the 19th century, their achievements in the communications industry have been most noted in the 20th century, when they produced and contributed to magazines, newspapers, and television and radio news and talk shows in unprecedented numbers. There are now hundreds of Black-owned radio stations throughout the country. While integrated into professional sports relatively recently, African-American athletes have reached the highest levels of accomplishment. They also comprise some of the finest athletes representing the United States in the Olympic Games.

As we move into the new Millenium, we look forward to the continued growth and prosperity of African-American citizens. Our Nation's history is replete with the contributions of African-Americans. Black History Month affords all Americans an opportunity to celebrate the great achievements of African-Americans, to celebrate how far this Nation has come, and to remind us of how far we have to go.

DR. BENJAMIN ELIJAH MAYS

Mr. HOLLINGS. Mr. President, I rise today to bring the country's attention to one of its most gifted educators, civil rights leaders and theologians, the late Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays, and to again encourage the President to award Dr. Mays a Presidential Medal of Freedom. Dr. Mays lived an extraordinary life that began in a very unextraordinary setting. The son of slaves, Dr. Mays grew up in the rural community of Epworth, South Carolina where poverty and racism were everyday realities and the church was sometimes the only solace to be found. Yet, as the title of Dr. Mays' autobiography, ''Born to Rebel'' reveals, he was never satisfied with the status quo and looked to education as the key to his own success, and later the key to sweeping social change.

After working his way through South Carolina College, Bates College and a doctoral program at the University of Chicago, Dr. Mays worked as a teacher, an urban league representative and later dean of the School of Religion at Howard University here in Washington. Then, in 1940, he took the reins at Morehouse College and—to borrow a phrase—the rest was history. As President of Morehouse, Dr. Mays took an ailing institution and transformed it into one of America's most vital academic centers and an epicenter for the growing civil rights movement. He was instrumental in the elimination of segregated public facilities in Atlanta and promoted the cause of nonviolence through peaceful student protests in a time often marred by racial violence. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other influential 20th century leaders considered Dr. Mays a mentor and scores of colleges and universities—from Harvard University to Lander University in South Carolina—have acknowledged his impressive achievements by awarding him an honorary degree.

After retiring from Morehouse after 27 years, Dr. Mays did not fade from the spotlight—far from it. He served as president of the Atlanta Board of Education for 12 years, ensuring that new generations of children received the same quality education he had fought so hard to obtain back in turn-of-the-century South Carolina. Dr. Mays said it best in his autobiography: ''Foremost in my life has been my honest endeavors to find the truth and proclaim it.'' Now is the time for us to proclaim Dr. Benjamin Mays one of our nation's most distinguished citizens by awarding him a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom.

ASYLUM AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, before leaving office, Attorney General Reno ordered the Board of Immigration Appeals to reconsider its decision to reject the asylum claim of a Guatemalan domestic violence victim. I applaud the former Attorney General for her actions in this case, entitled Matter of R.A., and I encourage the Bush Administration to continue with her efforts to provide a safe harbor for victims of severe domestic abuse.

The facts of the R.A. case are chilling. Ms. Rodi Alvarado Pena sought asylum after suffering from unthinkable abuse at the hands of her husband in her native Guatemala, abuse that ended only when she escaped to the United States in 1995. She said that her husband raped and pistol-whipped her, and beat her unconscious in front of her children. She said that law enforcement authorities in Guatemala told her that they would not protect her from violent crimes committed against her by her husband. And she believed that her husband would kill her if she returned to Guatemala.

The INS did not dispute what Ms. Pena said, and in 1996, an immigration judge determined that she was entitled to asylum. But in 1999, the Board of Immigration Appeals (''BIA'') reversed that decision on the grounds that even if everything Ms. Pena said were true, she did not qualify for asylum because victims of domestic abuse do not constitute a ''social group'' under existing law. This decision seemed to me and a number of other Senators and Representatives to be inconsistent with previous decisions extending asylum to victims of sexual abuse. I wrote Doris Meissner, then the Commissioner of the INS, in August 1999 to express my concerns about the case. I joined a group of Senators writing Attorney General Reno about this matter in November 1999, and raised those concerns again in letters to the Attorney General in February and September 2000. Finally, I reiterated my concerns to Ms. Meissner in August 2000.

The Justice Department released a proposed rule in December that would make it easier for women to base asylum petitions on gender-based persecution. Then-Attorney General Reno's January 19 order stays the R.A. case until a final version of that rule is approved, at which time the BIA will reconsider the case in light of that rule. I urge the Bush Administration to approve a final rule that provides strong protections for victims of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based oppression. And I urge the BIA to apply that rule in a way that provides the maximum protection for such women.

The United States should have—and I believe does have—a bipartisan commitment to refugees. I have been joined by Republicans such as Senators BROWNBACK and JEFFORDS in my attempts to draw attention to this case. And I am optimistic that the Bush Administration will share our concerns. No one wants to see a victim of domestic violence returned to face further abuse, especially where her government does not have the will or ability to protect her. Working together, and building on the foundation laid by Attorney General Reno, we can prevent that from happening.

TRIBUTE TO FORMER SENATOR ALAN CRANSTON

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I join many of my colleagues in paying tribute to former Senator Alan Cranston, who died on New Year's Eve, 2000. Since I came to the Senate in 1985, I have had the honor of serving on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and my first 8 years on the committee were under the superb chairmanship of Senator Cranston. During our years, I came to know and appreciate his unbounded dedication to the veterans of this country, and his extraordinary record of leadership and commitment to our Nation throughout his 24 years of public service in the U.S. Senate.

Senator Cranston played an integral role in veterans affairs from his first days in the Senate, serving initially as Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee of the then-Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. When that subcommittee became the full Committee on Veterans' Affairs in 1971, he was a charter member of it. He became Chairman of the full Committee in 1977, was ranking member from 1978–1986, and then Chairman again in 1987, until he left the Senate in 1993.