

people have voted and which they clearly want to see working for the common benefit. We appeal to all parties to work together to remove the remaining obstacles standing in the way of the full achievement of this goal.

The Good Friday Agreement was endorsed by the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland with majorities from both communities. It provided a mandate to those working on behalf of peace, justice, and the creating of a new beginning in Northern Ireland. Its provisions are interdependent, and to ensure the successful implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, those provisions must be addressed concurrently.

In the past, dangerous political vacuums have been avoided when all parties to the Good Friday Agreement have been willing to make difficult political decisions and implement confidence-building measures. We urge them to do so again.

We believe the Patten recommendations on police reform must be fully implemented. We acknowledge that progress has been made, but further steps must be taken to ensure that the police service will be representative of all people in Northern Ireland and have the support of the community it serves. An inclusive and credible police service, which is supported by nationalists and unionists, is in the interest of everyone in Northern Ireland. Likewise, the criminal justice system must be fair and impartial. It must be responsive to the community's concerns, encourage community involvement wherever possible, and have the confidence of all parts of the community.

We also believe the British Government should scale back its military presence in Northern Ireland, particularly in South Armagh. The dismantlement of watchtowers and military installations in Northern Ireland would represent a significant confidence-building measure that would advance the pursuit of peace.

We welcome the May 5, 2000 statement by the IRA that it "will initiate a process that will completely and verifiably put IRA arms beyond use . . . in such a way as to avoid risk to the public and misappropriation by others and ensure maximum public confidence," and we welcome the IRA's recent decision to reengage with the de Chastelain Commission on decommissioning. The IRA's decision is a welcome first step, and we hope it will pave the way for further action by all parties. We urge the IRA to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Commission and take tangible steps to put weapons beyond use.

We also emphasize the importance of advancing human rights and equality issues under the Good Friday Agreement, including the creation of a Bill of Rights. Similarly, we call for the establishment of independent inquiries into the Finucane, Nelson, and Hamill cases, to demonstrate commitment to human rights and accountability.

We commend the Irish and British Governments for their ongoing efforts to work with the political leaders in Northern Ireland and to advance the peace process in Northern Ireland. On St. Patrick's Day, we urge all the leaders to recognize the danger of delay and redouble efforts to fully implement the Good Friday Agreement.

Friends of Ireland Executive Committee.

House: Dennis J. Hastert, Richard A. Gephardt, James T. Walsh.

Senate: Edward M. Kennedy, Christopher J. Dodd, Susan M. Collins.

HOUSE THE SENATE BUILT

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I will be participating in the Habitat for Humanity "House the Senate Built." We will be breaking ground March 17th at

1:00 p.m. This home will be built for the Portillo family at 1209 Raven Place in Loveland, Colorado. I am especially proud to be working with the Loveland Habitat for Humanity chapter because Loveland is my hometown. In addition, the Loveland chapter has existed for 14 years and, in that time, they have built 41 houses. Forty-one families that may have never been in a position to own a home, are now homeowners thanks to the Loveland chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

This is not my first involvement with Habitat for Humanity. During the Republican Convention last year my wife Joan and I had the opportunity to work on a project with the Philadelphia chapter of Habitat. I have also participated in builds with Colorado affiliates in Fort Morgan and in Loveland. This September Habitat International will be celebrating their Silver Anniversary. Since its inception, Habitat has built a total of 100,000 houses.

When I reflect on my vision of housing assistance, an old saying comes to mind: "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." I am especially supportive of Habitat for Humanity because the way that they operate as an organization, fits this old saying perfectly. While Habitat homes are purchased by the individual homeowner families, corporations, faith groups and others all provide financial support and assistance in building the home, and the work is organized at the local level. Instead of relying solely on perennial handouts from the government, Habitat seeks out both private and community resources to form a partnership that results in homes for people who, otherwise, may not have them. This approach works because people at the local level are best equipped to know who needs assistance and are most familiar with the way that local systems operate. Homeowner families are chosen by the local Habitat affiliate according to their need; their ability to repay the no-profit, no-interest mortgage; and their willingness to work in partnership with Habitat. Each family is responsible for paying back their loan and participating in the building of their own home. All of this indicates that Habitat is far more interested in helping people to create a new life for themselves than they are in simply putting a roof over their heads. Put quite simply, Habitat is a very effective way to promote the American dream of home ownership.

On this same note, I would also like to talk for a moment about two people that I hold in high esteem. The first person I would like to recognize is someone whom I can say, with very little bias, is one of the most wonderful women in the world: my wife Joan. She is someone who often seems tireless in her willingness to pitch in. This willingness was exemplified again at the House the Senate Built. Now, as I said before, Joan has worked on several of the Habitat projects with me, and this

project was no exception. Just before the Senate members departed the building site to return to the Capitol, many of us passed our hammers on to our spouses so that they could continue building into the afternoon. I was proud to be able to hand my hammer over to Joan. She came home exhausted, but pleased with the progress that was made on the home, which I understand was considerable. In fact, I am told that when a crew member was walking back to the building site with several of the ladies Joan warned him that "now that the men are gone it's time for the real work to begin." She then put in several hours in her hardhat pounding nails, stuffing insulation and lending a hand wherever it was needed.

The second is Colorado's first lady Frances Owens. She has made Habitat for Humanity projects a top priority since her husband was elected several years ago. She has participated in three builds within the last few years and will now be host to a program called Women Building a Legacy. This program will take place May 5-11 in Montbello, a suburb of Denver. Women Building a Legacy will be a blitz build that will result in five houses in seven days. These homes will be a much needed addition to the Montbello neighborhood where they are to be built and I commend Mrs. Owens for her efforts.

Again, I say thank you to Habitat for Humanity for the services that they provide to so many communities throughout America and the world, thank you to Frances Owens for the work that she does on behalf of Habitat and thank you to my wife Joan for always being willing to do what needs to be done for no bigger reason than because it needs to be done.

FOIA TURNS 35

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, James Madison said that if men were angels, no government would be necessary. But because people and governments are fallible, he added, "experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions." The Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA), a modern improvement in American government, has proved itself as a vital precaution that has served the people well in defending their right to know what their government is doing—or not doing. Friday is the 250th birthday of James Madison and, appropriately, this is also the day that we commemorate FOIA's 35th anniversary.

I am not sure that we could pass FOIA if it were offered in Congress today, but thank heaven it is firmly etched by now in our national culture. Just this month a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court affirmed FOIA's mandate of broad disclosure, noting that full agency disclosure would "help ensure an informed citizenry, vital to the functioning of a democratic society."

FOIA may be an imperfect tool, but as one foreign journalist observed, "in

its klutzy way, it has become one of the slender pillars that make America the most open of modern societies.”

In recent years records released under FOIA have revealed the government's radiation experiments on human guinea pigs during the Cold War, the evidence that the Food and Drug Administration had about heart-valve disease at the time it approved the Fen-Phen diet drug, the Federal Aviation Administration's concerns about ValuJet before the 1996 crash in the Everglades, radiation contamination by a government-run uranium processing plant on nearby recreation and wildlife areas in Kentucky, the government's maltreatment of South Vietnamese commandos who fought in a CIA-sponsored army in the early 1960's, the high salaries paid to independent counsels, and the unsafe lead content of tap water in the nation's capital.

Five years ago we updated FOIA's charter with the Electronic Freedom of Information Act that I proposed as a way to bring the law into the information age, recognizing that technology is dramatically changing the way government handles and stores information. The “E-FOIA” law directs federal agencies to make the information in their computer files available to citizens on the same basis as that in conventional paper files. We also took this as an opportunity to encourage agencies to use technology and the Internet to make government more accessible and accountable to its customers, the citizens. For instance, we now have the technology to translate government records into Braille or large print or synthetic speech for people with sight or hearing impairments, and the new law promotes that. Electronic records also make it possible to offer dial-up access to citizens over the Internet so they can have instant direct access to unclassified information stored in government computer banks. This is far easier for Vermonters than having to travel to Washington to visit an agency's public reading room. Information is a valuable commodity, and the federal government is the largest single producer and repository of data on topics ranging from agriculture to geography to labor statistics and the weather. Better and timelier access to this information helps lubricate our economy.

FOIA today is healthy, but only constant vigilance will keep Congress from needlessly whittling away its promise to the American people. We fought back one such effort last year, and new carve-out proposals are already in the air.

FOIA gives each American the power to ask—and the government the obligation to answer—questions about official actions or inaction. We can count on a government agency to tell us when it does something right, but we need FOIA to help tell us when it does something wrong. Of all the laws that fill our law libraries, none better than

FOIA breathes life into the first words in our Constitution, “We the people of the United States” and into our First Amendment rights to petition our government. This is a law to celebrate, to use, and to defend.

VETERANS EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, as I travel my state of South Dakota and meet with veterans, I am reminded of the very core of what the Founding Fathers meant when they talked about America's citizen soldiers who serve as the bulwark of defending our democracy and freedom. The sacrifices of the men and women who served this nation in time of war are a dramatic story that we need to tell to future generations.

We need to remind younger generations of the sacrifice of the quiet heroes who have served our nation in the military service. We need to remind them that freedom isn't really free. Throughout our nation's proud history, people have made profound sacrifices to preserve liberty and democracy.

I have had the privilege this past year of honoring the South Dakotans who so bravely defended the seeds of democracy in the foreign soil of Korea and remember those who fought and died for democracy. In ceremonies across my state, I have had the honor of presenting the Korean War Service Medals as a long-overdue expression of gratitude from the American public and the South Korean government. It may have taken 50 years for us to properly recognize these veterans for their sacrifices in Korea. But there is no time limit on their patriotism or our country's gratitude.

Unfortunately, it has also taken too long for our government to fully honor the commitment made to our veterans for educational benefits and lifetime health care.

I am pleased to report that Congress has finally begun to honor additional commitments made to veterans nationwide. We all know the history: for decades, men and women who joined the military were promised educational benefits and lifetime health care coverage for themselves and their families. Many of the veterans we honor today were told, in effect, “If you disrupt your family, if you work for low pay, if you endanger your life and limb, our nation will in turn guarantee an opportunity for an education and lifetime health benefits.”

Those promises have too often not been kept, not only to our veterans but also our military retirees, and that is threatening our national security. Veterans are our nation's most effective recruiters. However, inadequate education benefits and poor health care options make it difficult for these men and women to encourage the younger generation to serve in today's voluntary service. We are blessed to have unprecedented federal budget sur-

pluses, and the only question is whether veterans health care and educational benefits should be a priority instead of an afterthought.

Veterans from around the nation have been calling on Congress to provide the VA with adequate funding to meet the health care needs for all veterans. Without additional funding, VA facilities will be unable to deliver the necessary health care services to our veterans population.

For a number of years, I have worked with veterans to increase flat-line appropriations for veterans' health care. Thanks to the grass roots efforts of veterans, we were successful two years ago in getting a historic \$1.7 billion increase for VA medical care. We fought last year for another \$1.4 billion increase. While these increases will help relieve some of the VA's budgetary constraints, I believe that more needs to be done to make up for those years of budgetary neglect, as well as to keep pace with rising costs of health care.

Another priority for me this year will be to continue to improve educational benefits for veterans. The Montgomery GI Bill has been one of the most effective tools in recruiting and retaining the best and the brightest in the military. It has also been a critical component in the transition of veterans to civilian life. Unfortunately, the current GI Bill fails to keep pace with the rising costs of higher education. On the first day of this legislative year, I joined Senator SUSAN COLLINS in introducing legislation to bring the GI Bill in the 21st Century by creating a benchmark level of education benefits that automatically covers inflation to meet the increasing costs of higher education. Our concept is a very simple one: at the very least, GI Bill benefits should be equal to the average cost of a commuter student attending a four-year university. Currently, less than one-half of the men and women who contribute \$1200 of their pay to qualify for the GI Bill actually use these benefits.

The Veterans' Higher Education Opportunities Act—S. 131—has broad bipartisan support and the support of an unprecedented partnership of veterans groups and higher education organizations.

My bipartisan “Keep Our Promises to America's Military Retirees Act” called for the government to fulfill its obligation of lifetime health care for military retirees and their dependents. While I am pleased that last year's enactment of the TRICARE-for-Life program begins to address problems with military retiree health care, there is more work that needs to be done.

In fact, a recent federal court of appeals ruling finally supported what we have been saying all along: that the government has not lived up to its contract with millions of military retirees who were told they would receive lifetime health care in return for 20 years of service in the military. That is why I am once again working with Senator