

Mr. BINGAMAN. I am not proposing to restart Office of Technology Assessment (or OTA). But, I feel that today we lack the analytical insight of its technology assessment process.

Mr. DURBIN. How is the Senator proposing that these funds be used?

Mr. BINGAMAN. I am proposing a one year pilot program to utilize technology assessment methodology to analyze current science and technology issues affecting our Congress. I am proposing to implement this by contracting with outside non-profit agencies such as the National Academy of Sciences. My intent was for the Congressional Research Service to manage this activity as I feel they are better suited to conduct and oversee this type of long term research activity. In doing so, I was hoping that oversight would be provided by the Senate Rules and House Administration Committees and through these Committees, the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress.

Mr. DURBIN. Who is the Senator now proposing to manage this activity?

Mr. BINGAMAN. It has been suggested that the General Accounting Office can better serve this function. I feel that the General Accounting Office may not be suited for such a long term research activity. The GAO is investigative in nature. However, it is better to start an initial pilot program utilizing the OTA technology assessment method rather than no pilot program at all. So, I offer this amendment to use the General Accounting Office. But, I ask the Chairman that during conference, serious consideration be given to my request of having the Congressional Research Service manage this pilot program.

Mr. DURBIN. How will the initial studies be chosen for the pilot program and how will it be reported?

Mr. BINGAMAN. The General Accounting Office should submit a listing of Congressionally relevant technology assessment studies to its oversight committees, the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs and the House Committee on Government Reform. From this list, two projects should be chosen, one by each Committee no later than October 31st, 2001. The technology assessment studies should then begin with a report given to both Committees, and the House and Senate Appropriations Committee, no later than June 15, 2002. At that time the decision can be made as to whether this technology assessment process was beneficial enough to continue it a second year. If this pilot program is to continue, I recommend that the funding be executed using the Office of Technology Assessment authorization language. Rather than OTA's 200 person, \$20 million budget, the organization would be a small legislative branch staff using outside non-profit groups to perform the in-depth research.

ACCESS TO VA HEALTH CARE IN WEST VIRGINIA

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Madam President, as chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I want to share with my colleagues some of the concerns voiced by veterans at a recent field hearing in my state of West Virginia.

On July 16, the Committee held a hearing in Huntington, West Virginia, to examine the challenges facing veterans from rural areas who receive health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Committee held its last West Virginia field hearing on access to rural VA health care in 1993. Since then, profound changes in VA's health care delivery—a rapid increase in community clinics, eligibility reform that opened the system to more veterans, and the reorganization of VA into 22 service networks—have affected how veterans access basic and specialized medical care.

The challenges that face VA in providing the best health care possible to our Nation's veterans are often magnified in rural areas, where veterans and VA caregivers must stretch already limited resources over long distances. West Virginia contends with a unique situation: each of our four VA medical centers belongs to a different VA service network. While this partitioning creates problems for West Virginians, it also offers the Committee the opportunity to study in microcosm the problems facing veterans throughout the VA health care system.

Regrettably, many of the problems discussed at the 1993 field hearing remain with us: the struggles with an inadequate budget, long waiting times for care, too few VA personnel to provide specialized care, insufficient long-term care services, and transportation problems for veterans traveling to or between VA medical centers. And, with the aging of the veterans population and continued absence of meaningful prescription drug coverage under Medicare, veterans' concerns about access to, and copayments for, prescription drugs grow even more pressing.

It will not be easy to solve these problems; after the President's recent tax cut, there is simply not enough money available—either in the President's budget or the Budget Resolution adopted by the Congress—for veterans' health care. That said, we must do our best to improve access to rural health care with the resources that we have.

On July 16, West Virginia veterans talked to me about the obstacles they face just to get an appointment at a VA health care facility, and then in getting to that appointment for care. Veterans report to the State Veterans Coalition that they regularly wait months for an appointment for basic VA medical care—or even longer for a first visit. After veterans have finally seen a doctor for a first exam, they may wait weeks or months longer for a referral to needed specialty care.

For veterans in rural areas, referrals frequently require a transfer to distant

VA medical centers. After hours of driving, veterans may sit for many more hours in a waiting room, without meals or a safe place to rest. A shocking number of veterans disabled by spinal cord injuries neglect basic medical checkups to avoid travel. One West Virginia veteran described making more than 30 round trips to the VA hospital at Richmond for tests based on a single referral; and his story, unfortunately, is not unique. This is not only inconvenient for the veteran, but a waste of VA resources.

VA must focus on coordination and management of care between facilities—both to provide the best health care and to consider the practical needs of veterans. For veterans who must drive long distances or depend on van services, appointments could be scheduled to accommodate their traveling times. VA could coordinate tests to compress them into the shortest time span possible, with lodging arranged when an overnight stay is required. Veterans who served this country should not be expected to sleep in waiting room chairs and to go hungry when simple attention to details can prevent excessive traveling and long waits. At the very least, VA should have a systemwide plan for communicating how transfers work, and what resources are available, to veterans and their families.

Although it is impossible to expect that every veteran in the Nation's vast rural areas can access every health care service close to home, it is essential that—should they require care at distant VA or private facilities—their transfers happen as simply and efficiently as possible. VA's network and hospital directors must eliminate barriers to coordinating and managing care between medical centers or between networks. I will continue to work with VA to find better ways to communicate with veterans and to make transfers as seamless as possible.

The Millennium Act, which VA has been shamefully slow to implement, will provide veterans with access to noninstitutional long-term care services. As I heard from the son of a World War II ex-prisoner of war, now being cared for at home at his family's expense, aging veterans suffering from PTSD need caregivers who understand the legacies of war-time experiences. The Committee will continue to oversee VA's efforts to bring long-term care services—both nursing beds and non-institutional services—to the veterans who need it.

I have advocated the opening of community-based outpatient clinics, which bring basic primary health care closer to the veteran. These outpatient clinics are enormously important to veterans in rural areas, and I will continue to urge VA to make these clinics the best they can possibly be—without sacrificing the specialized programs at which VA has excelled.

We have to count more than just the number of clinics and hospitals when

we talk about access to health care—we must consider waiting times for an appointment. Many of the delays in appointments, referrals, and transfers that veterans experience stem from inadequate staffing, especially the increasingly critical shortage of skilled nurses. I have recently introduced legislation to improve VA's ability to recruit and retain nurses, whose skills are essential to providing high quality health care in a timely fashion.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of the many volunteers who help bring rural veterans closer to health care. Disabled American Veterans (DAV) operates a nationwide Transportation Network that helps sick and disabled veterans reach VA medical facilities for care. Since its inception, DAV volunteers in West Virginia have dedicated more than 700,000 hours of time to driving veterans to medical appointments, often in vans donated by DAV to the VA. Nationally, DAV Hospital Service Coordinators operate 185 such programs, where 8,000 volunteers donated almost 2 million hours last year alone. Although this program does not replace VA's obligation to bring services close to the veteran where possible and to smooth transfers between medical centers, this service is certainly indispensable to disabled veterans who must reach a VA medical center for necessary medical care.

Mr. President, in closing, I look forward to working with VA and my colleagues in the Senate to find the best ways to extend health care more efficiently—and effectively—to veterans in our Nation's rural areas. We owe our veterans nothing less.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE SIXTH NAVAL BEACH BATTALION

Mr. DOMENICI. Madam President, I rise today to recognize the bravery and fortitude of the Sixth Naval Beach Battalion, many of whom gave their lives for their country on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Recently, a small group of the living members of the Battalion gathered in Normandy, France to unveil a commemorative plaque dedicated to their fellow sailors who paid the ultimate price for the defense of liberty. This memorial will serve as a small reminder of the tremendous sacrifice that these men made in order to secure the freedoms that we, as a nation, now enjoy.

Unfortunately, for many years, the Sixth Naval Beach Battalion was known as the "Forgotten Sailors." While many of its members were individually recognized for their bravery, the Battalion as a whole had never been recognized. However, thanks to the persistent efforts of its living members, the Battalion was finally honored last year with the Presidential Unit Citation. This great honor was presented to the Battalion at its annual reunion last year, and I am proud that the valiance of these men has finally been recognized.

The World War II generation is frequently referred to as America's "Greatest Generation," and this is no more true of the Sixth Naval Beach Battalion. They landed on Omaha Beach early in the morning of June 6 and faced extraordinary peril on that historic day. Yet, the Battalion demonstrated its courage and fought gallantly despite overwhelming odds. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all of the members of the Battalion, both living and deceased, for the hard-fought victory over tyranny that was achieved on that day.

I would like to share my gratitude for the bravery and selflessness of the Sixth Naval Beach Battalion. I would hope that America never forgets the great sacrifice that the Battalion's members made in the defense of our liberty. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the speech given by Lieutenant Commander Joseph Vaghi at the unveiling of the commemorative plaque be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DEDICATION ADDRESS OF THE 6TH NAVAL BEACH BATTALION PLAQUE AT OMAHA BEACH—NORMANDY, FRANCE

(By LCDR Joseph P. Vaghi, USNR (Ret.))

We are here today this 5th day of June 2001, to unveil a plaque dedicated in memory of the men of the 6th Naval Beach Battalion who gave their lives on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

A small remnant of living members of our Battalion is also here today to pay tribute to their comrades, who have fallen and paid the ultimate price by giving their lives.

Each and every person here for this unveiling shares in the victory of freedom over tyranny by the selfless action which took place 57 years ago on this sacred soil of Omaha Beach.

You will remember that for four long years the fate of freedom flickered in the shadow of the world's aggressions.

We watched as the war in Europe spread across the English Channel to Britain. Then came Pearl Harbor. We as a nation were at war.

It was on these beaches of Normandy that the 6th Naval Beach Battalion made its contribution in the fight for liberty and against tyranny. This became the greatest military operation in all of history.

The men of the 6th Naval Beach Battalion had great faith that what was head of us was right and just. We knew what we were doing had to be done.

It made little difference if we were 18 or 38 years of age. We knew that what we were about to do was in some manner exactly what God wanted us to do.

The men of the 6th Naval Beach Battalion prepared for D-Day at Camp Bradford, VA., and Fort Pierce, FL., on the beaches of Slapton Sands, England, and in training with the 5th Engineer Special Brigade in Swansea, Wales.

At each step, we become more aware of the responsibility we would be asked to assume as we landed on the shores of France.

Elements of our battalion who were part of the Underwater Demolition Team landed at H-Hour (6:30 in the morning) with the main body of the battalion coming ashore an hour and five minutes after H-Hour at 7:35 a.m.

Of the thousands of men who came ashore that day, 9386 are at rest in the cemetery above the cliffs behind us.

This plaque we dedicate today is in memory of our comrades, and in extension is in memory of all who were laid to rest in the hallowed ground of the Normandy Cemetery. The plaque will be a perpetual reminder of the sacrifices made here on this beach, not only the 6th Naval Beach Battalion but the Coast Guard and Army too.

Last year at the 12th annual reunion of our battalion we were presented with the Presidential Unit Citation. It had been recommended by the Joint Command of Operation Overlord, which was the code name for the invasion of France, both the Army and Navy issued approval and recommendations that the 6th Naval Beach Battalion be honored with the citation.

When inquiries were made by some of our men, the Defense Department began looking into the situation and in September of last year there followed a full ceremony for the presentation of the award.

For 56 years we of the 6th Naval Beach Battalion were known by writers as the "Forgotten Sailors." Many of the officers and men of the Battalion had been recognized for individual heroism but not the Battalion as a unit.

Our being here today is the cap-stone of our réson d'être, the 6th Naval Beach Battalion stands with all the great body of men who have been immortalized here on these beaches. Permit me to close by quoting President Roosevelt, "The quality of our American fighting men is not all a matter of training, or equipment, or organization. It is essentially a matter of Spirit. That Spirit is expressed in their faith in America!"

That was the faith we had then and the faith we have today. Thank you, may God bless America.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2001

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Madam President, I rise today to speak about hate crimes legislation I introduced with Senator KENNEDY in March of this year. The Local Law Enforcement Act of 2001 would add new categories to current hate crimes legislation sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society.

I would like to describe a terrible crime that occurred July 27, 1990 in Grand Chute, WI. Two policemen, from Marathon County and Blanchardville, were accused of disorderly conduct in the beating of a gay man. Witnesses said the officers, who were in a local nightclub, began taunting the victim on the dance floor with anti-gay slurs. Witnesses said they later saw the officers beat and kick the man in the parking lot. The victim was treated for bruised ribs and internal injuries.

I believe that Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act of 2001 is now a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation, we can change hearts and minds as well.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE NOMINATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I am pleased that the Judiciary Committee