

Thank you.

COMMEMORATING 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA

Mr. INOUE. Mr. President, I wish to express my sincere congratulations to the Girl Scouts of the USA as it celebrates its 90th anniversary. Founded on March 12, 1912, in Savannah, GA, the organization has grown to 3.7 million girls and women in the United States and a total of 8.5 million people in 140 countries.

The longevity and strength of Girl Scouts is a testament to the commitment of its members and volunteers to uphold the highest standards of leadership, social conscience, and civic duty. I thank the thousands of adult volunteers who devote their time and resources to this worthy cause.

I also wish to extend my commendation to Ms. Gladys A. Brandt, a Hawaii resident who is being honored as one of the first-ever National Women of Distinction by the Girl Scouts of the USA. This award was created in conjunction with the Girl Scouts' 90th anniversary celebration, and it pays tribute to women who have demonstrated outstanding service to girl scouting. Hawaii is truly proud of Ms. Brandt and grateful for her diligence in educating and serving young people.

Once again, I express my best wishes to Girl Scouts of the USA for continued success, and I encourage the members of this organization to always live up to the Girl Scout Promise and Girl Scout Law in every facet of their lives.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the Girl Scouts of the USA, this month celebrating 90 years of building character and enhancing the life skills of our Nation's young women. The contributions and achievements of this outstanding organization have endured for nine decades, helping girls to grow up courageous and strong. I would like to praise the work of the Girl Scouts, and in particular recognize the Girl Scouts of Alabama, who number almost 45,000 girls and women.

Established on March 12, 1912, the Girl Scouts are based on the noble belief that all young women should be given the opportunity to develop physically, mentally and spiritually. Their founder, Juliette Gordon Low, convened that first meeting with just 18 girls from Savannah, GA. Today her vision continues with a national membership of 3.8 million, making the Girl Scouts the largest organization for girls in the world. Over the years the Girl Scouts have remained true to their founding principles, and still abide by the Girl Scout Promise and Law, just as they did in 1912. These principles emphasize honor, accountability, courage, respect, God and country and are valuable lessons for our young women to incorporate into their lives.

Girl Scouting has had a tremendous impact on the evolving role that

women have played in our country over the past ninety years. The leadership qualities, self confidence and creative thinking that the Girl Scouts teach are all qualities essential in good citizens and great leaders. Indeed, two-thirds of female doctors, lawyers, educators, community leaders and even women members of Congress were once Girl Scouts. It is a true testament to the Girl Scouts that many of these women believe that Girl Scouting has had a positive impact on their lives.

The Alabama Girl Scouts are celebrating their 90th anniversary by helping to promote literacy with their "Books for Alabama Kids" project. The seven Girl Scout councils in Alabama have been collecting children's books over the past 6 months to be donated to schools in the counties in which they were collected. Tomorrow the books will be presented on the Capitol steps in Montgomery. I would like to commend the Alabama Girl Scouts for their community service and dedication to promoting literacy in the state.

I would like to acknowledge the nine decades of excellence of the Girl Scouts. We have seen tremendous changes in our country over the years, and they should be proud to have adapted and flourished. It demonstrates that building character and preparing for the future are qualities that never go out of style.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to recognize the Girl Scouts for their service to our country over the last 90 years. This anniversary marks the day Juliette Gordon Low assembled 18 girls from Savannah, GA, for the Girl Scouts' first meeting, and celebrates the many wonderful moments this organization has enjoyed while growing to its current size of 3.8 million members.

Their mission to help all girls grow strong provides not just inspiration and guidance to those within their ranks, but serves as an example for all the nation's young women. Through service to society and the development of values, self-confidence and integrity, the Girl Scouts of the USA are an inspiration to our Nation's youth, and are instrumental in creating the next generation of good citizens and great leaders.

I am proud that Congress last week honored the Girl Scouts accomplishments with the passage of a resolution marking March 10 through March 16, 2002 as "National Girl Scout Week," and I look forward to future opportunities to celebrate this organization's commitment and contribution to our Nation's young women.

TRIBUTE TO SECOND LIEUTENANT MAURICE W. HARPER AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL EARLE ABER

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the sacrifice of two American patriots who will be interred tomorrow at Arlington National Ceme-

tery. Second Lieutenant Maurice W. Harper, United States Army Air Corps, a native of Birmingham in the great State of Alabama, and Lieutenant Colonel Earle Aber, United States Army Air Corps, of Wisconsin, gave their lives in defense of this Nation and freedom on March 4, 1945 when the B-17G bomber they were flying was shot down while returning from a mission over Holland.

Over half a century later, the crash site was located and 2nd Lt. Harper's remains, along with the remains of his pilot, Lieutenant Colonel Earle Aber, were recovered in September, 1999 and identified by the Army Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii. Their aircraft was severely damaged after it was mistakenly hit by British anti-aircraft guns which were firing at retreating German bombers over the English coastline. Lt. Col. Aber ordered the crew to bail-out while he and 2nd Lt. Harper struggled at the controls of their damaged aircraft. Their selfless actions allowed the other nine members of their crew to bail-out from the aircraft and survive the mission. There was not enough time, however, for these two brave airmen to escape and they perished when the aircraft crashed into the River Stour near Ramsey, England. The remains of both of these fine young men, that could be identified, were returned to their families. Unfortunately, not all of the remains could be positively identified. The co-mingled remains of these two fine Americans, still together after 57 years, will be laid to rest together at Arlington National Cemetery on March 22, 2002.

I would also like to take this time to thank the professionals at the Army's Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii who continue their labors to identify the remains of our fallen sons and daughters and return them to their loved ones.

These two fine gentlemen, members of the "greatest generation," deserve the gratitude of this great Nation. I know the Members of the Senate will join me in honoring the sacrifices of these two brave men and expressing our deepest condolences and heartfelt thanks to their families as they lay their loved ones to rest tomorrow in the hallowed ground at Arlington.

STAYING THE COURSE IN AFGHANISTAN: THE NEED FOR SECURITY

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, about 2 months ago I spent half a week in the Afghan capital city of Kabul, and virtually every conversation I had during my time there revolved around a single question: Would America stay the course?

After all our successful military actions, after all our promises on reconstruction, after all our commitments to prevent Afghanistan from relapsing into chaos and warlordism, would we really have the stomach to get the job done?

Whether I was talking to refugees living in bestial squalor, or to Chairman Karzai in a palace where the electricity barely functioned;

Whether I was talking to NATO soldiers in the international security force, to representatives of the U.N. and international humanitarian groups, or to our own American servicemen and servicewomen so valiantly risking their lives for a just cause; whoever I was talking to, the questions remained basically the same: Would we have the steadiness, determination, and commitment to remain engaged? Would we demonstrate the leadership necessary to keep the international coalition together? Would we maintain our resolve for the long haul, once the immediate battles had been won and our nation's attention had started to turn away from this remote and forbidding part of the world?

I will tell you now what I told them then: We can, we must, and we will.

Let me take a few minutes to explain what I mean, and how I see our role in Afghanistan over months and, yes, the years to come. But first, I suggest that we all remember just why we sent troops to Afghanistan in the first place. I can sum it up in three syllables: 9-1-1.

Our rationale for entering the fray was very simple: Our Nation had come under attack, the most horrific single attack we had ever experienced in all our history, and the de facto rulers of Afghanistan were actively sheltering the terrorists who orchestrated this deed. We gave the Taliban every opportunity to surrender Usama bin Laden and his band of thugs, but the Taliban chose instead to link themselves ever more closely to al Qaeda.

The decision to go to war is never easy, but in this case it was inevitable. The decision was made for us, as I and the rest of the Members here were assembling for morning business on a Tuesday in September.

Our troops have done a truly outstanding job fighting this war, as the recent battle in Shahi-kot demonstrates, the Taliban and al Qaeda are scattered and on the run.

But we always knew that this would be the easy part. As President Bush, Secretary Powell, and Secretary Rumsfeld have correctly noted, our war on terror will be a long one, and we can't expect our early victories to be the final word.

Let's remember that in 1979, it took the Soviet forces no more than 10 days to establish control over every major population center in Afghanistan. The really tough part, we knew from the beginning, wouldn't be ousting the Taliban and al Qaeda—the tough part would be making sure that they stayed ousted.

That is why we have no choice but to stay the course. If Afghanistan returns to a state of lawlessness and disorder, two things are pretty much certain to happen.

First, the Taliban, or some new and equally brutal group, will establish

control over all or part of the country, and they will provide safe haven to any terrorists, drug-traffickers and violent insurgents willing to pay their price;

Second, these terrorists will once again use Afghanistan as a base to launch attacks on the United States to destabilize regimes all around the world.

If we don't do the job right, mark my words: U.S. troops will be right back in Afghanistan a year or two down the line, only this time, we will be doing the fighting all by ourselves.

Let us think about that for a moment. The victories we've seen over the past 5 months have been American victories—but they are not only American victories. At every step along the way, we have relied on our Afghan allies for the bulk of the troops on the ground.

Whether we're talking about battles for Kabul or Kandahar, for Mazar-e Sharif or Tora Bora, the pattern has generally been hundreds of American troops spearheading thousands of Afghan fighters.

This pattern is far from perfect—as the porousness of our cordon at Tora Bora and, most recently, Shahi-kot demonstrate, sometimes Afghan troops are no substitute for U.S. infantrymen.

But without our Afghan allies, imperfect as they have sometimes been, we would not have been able to achieve our impressive victories in anything like the time-frame we have achieved them.

And that point is vital to our future strategy: As many people in Kabul told me, from Chairman Karzai right on down to mud-on-the-boots G.I.s patrolling the airbase at Bagram, we have only got one chance to do it right.

As I was constantly reminded, the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan abruptly in 1989, just as soon as our short-term objectives had been met. If we do so again, I was told time after time, then we had better not expect any Afghans to fight on our side when a new nest of terrorists requires military action in the future.

The stakes, in short, could not be higher. Some people are of the opinion that we can pull out relatively soon, that any future military action would be as "easy" as the present one.

"We've got the most powerful military out there," they say, "we don't need the help of unreliable Afghan and incompetent Europeans—we can go it alone." To anyone who labors under this delusion, I say, take a trip to Afghanistan.

Go there, talk to the people, have a look at the terrain. Anybody who does, I suggest, will return firmly convinced that we must stay the course. We have got to do the job right this time—because it may be the last chance we get.

So what does "doing the job right" entail? There are several parts to the equation—economic reconstruction, building political institutions, clearing minefields, creating the educational, medical, and other infrastructure necessary for long-term self-sufficiency.

But none of these elements are possible without security on the ground. That's the central piece of the puzzle. If we establish security, all else can follow—and without it, nothing else can grow.

For the long term, according to the plans of the U.S. administration and the U.N. organizers, Afghanistan's internal and external security will be provided by a national army and police force.

This is the right way to go, and I fully support all the efforts currently under way to create these institutions. But you can't create them overnight. It takes time to recruit, train, equip, and solidify a truly capable, professionalized force.

In Kabul I received an extensive briefing from Maj. Gen. McColl, the British commander of the International Security force authorized by the U.N. to maintain order in the capital.

Gen. McColl's planners has worked up a detailed strategy for creating an Afghan army and taking at least the heavy weaponry away from local warlords. Even to create a bare-bones force of a few brigades, he found, would take up to 2 years.

So what happens in the meantime? What is happening right now? I am afraid the answer isn't very encouraging. In the meantime—right now—Afghanistan is not-so-slowly falling back into chaos.

The interim government of Hamid Karzai exerts very little control over most of the country: In Herat, Gen. Ismail Khan rules as a semi-independent baron—and entertains emissaries from Iran, who are anxious to expand their sphere of influence.

In Mazar-e Sharif, the brutal warlord Gen. Abdurrashid Dostum has picked up where he left off when he was ousted by the Taliban—and his record suggests that he will take his current duties as Deputy Defense Minister no more seriously than his past promises to virtually every party in the conflict.

In Kabul itself, Defense Minister Fahim maintains the fiction that his own militia, basically the Northern Alliance troops, is serving as a non-partisan national army.

It is clear to all observers, however, that these soldiers owe their allegiance to Fahim and various sub-commanders—and not to the legally-constituted civil authority.

In the Pashtun areas, a wide array of local warlords play all sides against every other—accepting money and arms from the U.S. and the Taliban alike, even attempting to use American air power to settle their own petty feuds.

There have even been credible reports of various warlords falsely identifying their local rivals as al Qaeda in order to call in American airstrikes—putting U.S. servicemen in harm's way to advance their own sordid objectives.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's predatory neighbors sit on the sidelines—but not

for long. Afghanistan's bloody civil war has long been fueled by arms, money, and recruits drawn from the surrounding nations.

The neighboring meddlers include Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia, but a variety of other nations slightly further afield have got into the game at one time or another. Each has attempted to reshape Afghan politics for its own narrow interests—to the detriment of the people, and the instability of the region.

All have basically kept their hands off while U.S. troops have ruled the roost. But the moment the last troop transport takes off, expect the jockeying to begin all over.

Ever had a neighbor who pops in to borrow a cup of sugar and invites himself to dinner? Maybe a distant relative who stops by to say "hello," and never seems to leave? Well, the Afghans know how it feels.

They have had to suffer with unwelcome houseguests for thirty years. And they know that as soon as the door is open—as soon as the American troops leave—all of these unsavory interlopers will come flocking back.

So what's the solution? How do we—*together with the rest of the world community*—provide Afghanistan with a year or two of breathing room to let it build up a national army and police force of its own? There are basically two possible paths.

Have American troops continue to serve as the *de facto* security force, or get the international community to share our burden.

Fortunately, a mechanism exists to make this second option a reality—it's the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF for short, and it can save us from the necessity of being Afghanistan's only policeman.

Right now, ISAF is strictly limited by its U.N. mandate. Its 5,000 troops are confined to Kabul, and even there they have to tread gingerly. The unit is currently under the command of the British, but the Brits plan to transfer command as soon as April.

The entire mandate ends in June—precisely when its continuing presence is most needed to safeguard the Loya Jirga, or Great Council to be convened as the next step in the process of political rebuilding.

So here, in a nutshell, is what we have to do.

First, this international security force must be extended from Kabul to several key sites throughout the country.

It should be expanded to Mazar, Kandahar, and perhaps other cities such as Jalalabad or Gardez. Such an expansion would entail an increase in troop strength from the current 5,000. Some sources say 25,000 troops would be needed, others say the mission could be accomplished with a more modest increase.

I will not presume to venture an opinion on the precise number, I will just say that we should make sure the

military planners have as many troops as they deem necessary to do the job right.

This expansion should not and will not interfere with ongoing U.S. operations against Taliban and al-Qaida remnants.

Currently, the ISAF commander is subordinate in theater to the U.S. commander, and there has been no question of ISAF troops encroaching on American operations. Quite the opposite—ISAF troops are a force multiplier, and free up American assets that would otherwise have to be used to guard and protect bases at transport hubs such as Bagram.

Second, the mandate of the international security force must be extended for 2 years. This would provide sufficient time for the creation of an indigenous Afghan army and police force, and insure a smooth transition to the new Afghan government.

Third, the international security force must be given robust rules of engagement, and all the equipment, airlift, and intelligence necessary to accomplish its mission.

Let's make no mistake here—the troops on the ground are not and must not be blue-helmeted peacekeepers. These are, and must be, peacemakers. We need rough, tough, combat-ready forces, with the ability to take names and impose order.

Fourth, the U.S. must be fully engaged as the mission's guarantor of last resort. That does not necessarily mean we have send U.S. troops, although we shouldn't rule it out off the bat.

What it does mean, however, is that we commit ourselves to insuring the mission's success.

Maybe we can achieve this goal by providing airlift, intelligence, funding, and diplomatic support.

Maybe we also have to provide the promise of troops extraction, air combat assets, and the ultimate ace-in-the-hole of sending the cavalry to the rescue if things get too hot.

But, one way or another, this is a goal we must achieve—not merely for the sake of Afghanistan, but for the national security interest of the United States.

When I go around the country talking about the need for a robust security force, with the U.S. providing the ultimate guarantee of success, I'm often asked whether that's an implicit call for the participation of American ground troops. It is a fair question, but it's putting the cart before the horse.

I would prefer it if we could accomplish our mission without deploying a single U.S. soldier.

I would prefer it if other nations could do the job without our troops on the ground. And maybe they can.

But my past experience, both in the Balkans and elsewhere, leads me to doubt that this will be possible.

First, there aren't a whole lot of countries out there with the military assets—both human and techno-

logical—necessary to get the job done right.

Other countries may be able to provide the bulk of the force, but the presence of even relatively small numbers of American troops can mean the difference between success and failure.

Look at our battlefield results in Afghanistan—the military effectiveness of our Afghan allies has been increased exponentially by the presence very small numbers of U.S. Special Operations Forces.

These troops not only brought in the heavy artillery, by calling in and targeting airstrikes, they stiffened the spine of the brave, but often young, inexperienced, and poorly trained, Afghan fighters.

Second, and just as important, is the political side of the equation. Without U.S. boots on the ground, the commitment of other nations often starts to falter.

As Maj. Gen. McColl, the British commander of ISAF, said to me in Kabul, "Once you Americans pull your troops out of Afghanistan, how long do you think my Parliament will authorize the deployment of British soldiers?"

Let me be clear: I'm not advocating any specific deployment of American troops. The specifics of any troop deployment is a decision best left to the President, based on a military assessment of what is needed to get the mission accomplished.

My point is merely that we have a mission to accomplish in Afghanistan, and IF the deployment of American troops as part of an international force is deemed necessary, we should certainly step up to the plate.

Perhaps we'll be able to continue the status quo—to have U.S. troops currently serving in Operation Enduring Freedom serve as the *de facto* back-up squad for ISAF troops.

Some voices decry using American troops as "policemen," and urge that peace operations be left to other nations. But every big-city police force needs a SWAT team to handle the real bad characters. Perhaps the U.S. can serve as the SWAT team for an expanded U.N.-mandated security force.

But we shouldn't be afraid to have our troops integrated to an international force of peacemakers in Afghanistan. Our experience in the Balkans shows that we can work with our NATO allies, and other countries, to make such forces the instrument of U.S. policy.

And, as a survey of top brass recently released by the "Peace Through Law Education Fund" argues, such operations can be a huge benefit to American military and political objectives.

Not all of the generals quoted in the report will agree with all of its recommendations, and the survey was undertaken prior to the campaign in Afghanistan. The opinions expressed related to peace operations in general, not to ISAF in particular.

But I think the most valuable part of the report is the wide selection of direct quotes from some of our most respected military commanders.

I would like to share a few of these observations—all of them made by American commanders with far more military expertise than I would ever claim to possess.

Taken together, they make what I believe is a convincing case for American leadership on—and, if necessary, participation in—a significantly beefed-up international peacemaking force to be deployed at various sites throughout Afghanistan.

On American involvement in multinational peace operations:

The nation that has the most influence . . . has to play a number of roles. Peacekeeping, peacemaking or peace enforcement is one of those roles. To walk away from those responsibilities, in my judgement, is to invite questioning of your overall leadership character. As a result, people will start to question you and your resolve for the principles for which you stand.

Gen. James Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps.

If the United States doesn't participate, the United States can't lead . . . You can't ask other nations to take risks that you won't take yourself.

Gen Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (1997–2000).

In order for us to have influence, we must be engaged . . . If you're not there on the ground . . . you are not able to really influence what's happening on the ground.

Maj. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, commander of a NATO multinational brigade in Kosovo, 1999–2000.

Whether we like it or not, we're the big dog. If someone calls 911, . . . it's the United States of America that answers.

Air Force Lt. Gen. Robert Fogelsong, Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, 1997–1999.

I do not believe that any major humanitarian or peacekeeping effort can be successful, long-term, without the support of the U.S.

Gen. Peter Pace, USMC, now Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, then CinC of South Com. On unit morale.

The re-enlistment numbers are far higher in units in Bosnia and Kosovo than they are in units of the U.S. army overall.

Air Force Gen. Joseph Ralston, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

The re-enlistment rates in [US Army, Europe], which has been involved to the greatest extent in peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, are the highest in the Army.

Gen. Montgomery Meigs, commander of NATO's force in Bosnia (SFOR), 1998–1999.

Gen. Jones, Lt. Gen. Fogelsong, & Adm. Dennis Blair say the same thing for Marines, Air Force, and Navy.

Forget the baloney about people being upset about being down range . . . morale's higher than in garrison.

Gen. Meigs (Bosnia)

Troops that deploy to Bosnia and Kosovo and other operations like that, have high morale . . . our troops are happiest, morale is highest, when they are out in the world doing what they signed up to do.

Gen. Tommy Franks, CinC of CentCom, now commander of the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan.

On unit readiness and military training.

I feel very strongly that our operation, let's say in Kosovo, is a very positive net effect for the following reasons. The training that the young NCO and younger officer gets is far superior to what he or she would be getting if they were in Germany—because they are dealing with real world problems, 24 hours a day . . . That's what being a troop leader is all about. Their individual, small unit skills, squad level, company, battalion—it's far better training than what they get back in garrison.

Gen. Joseph Ralston

The small unit leader's development in peace operations is phenomenal.

Gen. Meigs—The type of training that isn't available during peace operations is brigade and division level training, but Gen. Ralston notes that this large-scale training is given to troops on a relatively infrequent basis—typically only once every year and a half. He notes that when troops who have served in peace operations are put back in the regular training cycle, they have no troubling picking up where they left off.

The words of these American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines say it far better than I can. The military and strategic objectives of the United States are often best served by American troops participating in multinational peace operations.

I am not saying we should send U.S. soldiers on such missions merely for their training or diplomatic value. I AM saying that we should recognize the pro's as well as the con's of U.S. involvement in peace operations.

Yes, there are dangers—as President Bush has said, the war against terror will be long, and there will be casualties in the months and years ahead. But the dangers of abdication of our responsibilities is far greater than the dangers of leadership.

We must stay the course in Afghanistan—the whole world is watching. Friends and enemies alike want to know whether we'll follow through in Afghanistan, and if we fail to follow through here, how can we ever convince them that we'll follow through in Yemen, the Philippines, or Indonesia—let alone in Iraq.

But that is the topic for another day.

TAKING CARE OF OUR NATION'S VETERANS

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, over the last few weeks, I have had the honor of meeting with a number of veterans, both here in Washington and in South Dakota. Every time I meet with them, I am reminded of the tremendous sacrifices they have made on behalf of our country. We owe each of them a debt of gratitude that can never be fully repaid.

One of the things we must do for our veterans is honor our past promises.

For decades, the men and women who joined the military were promised educational benefits and lifetime health care for themselves and their families. Those commitments have too often not been kept, and I am concerned this is starting to threaten 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 join today's voluntary service.

In my meetings with veterans, the issue of greatest concern is health care. They want assurances that they will be able to access quality care. Unfortunately, years of inadequate funding for veterans health care has pushed the VA health system to the brink of crisis, and the quality of care is starting to suffer. Let me be clear, this has nothing to do with the men and women who work in the VA health system. They are dedicated professionals who care about the veterans they serve, but they are being asked to do too much with too few resources.

Veterans were very optimistic when the President mentioned his commitment to veterans health care in the State of the Union address in January. At first glance, it looked as though the President's budget had made a significant effort to fix the mounting funding problems at the VA. But after budget gimmicks, such as \$800 million that was included for the first time in the VA budget for federal employees' retirements, the amount of funding that the President has recommended for veterans health care falls far short of the promised \$2.2 billion increase. Instead, it is only about \$1.4 billion more than last year.

I am pleased that the Senate Budget Committee, of which I am a member, has recently approved a budget resolution that will provide \$1.2 billion more than was requested by the Bush administration for VA health care and \$2.6 billion more than was approved in fiscal year 2002. I am hopeful that this level of funding will go a long way toward addressing the critical funding needs in VA health care.

While there is good news about the health care budget, I am concerned about a provision in the President's budget that would establish a \$1,500 deductible for Category 7 veterans. Under this new policy, a veteran would be forced to pay for 45 percent of his or her medical care, up to a limit of \$1,500 per year. The VA estimates that 121,000 veterans will choose not to be treated at the VA next year if the proposal becomes law. This would include several thousand in South Dakota. I know this is an attempt to ask veterans who make more money to contribute more to their own health care. However, the way in which the VA determines Category 7 status is unfair, particularly to many veterans in South Dakota. Category 7 veterans are those who lack a disability related to their military